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The transition to features

While full-length features of 5-reels and more began to appear in 1912, they were non immediately accepted, and the much shorter films continued to be made at least until 1916. Here, in a brief and non-definitive, but certainly representative survey, are examples of 1, 2 and 3 reel films in that transitional period.

THE LAND BEYOND THE SUNSET (1912) A lovely, lyrical, almost Dickensian one-reeler, one of the best of the Edison films, and sponsored by the Fresh Air Fund.

THE GANGSTERS AND THE GIRL (1913) So much plot for a 2-reeler that it's difficult to cram it all in. A typical crime tale of a detective masquerading as a crook to bring about the gang's downfall. Cunningly shot so that L.A. doubles for New York. Thomas Ince, who produced, also appears as one of the detectives; Charles Ray is the hero, and there's an interesting attempt to translate gangland idiom into colorful subtitles.

AMBITION (Thanhouser, 1914) Films from the New Rochelle-based Thanhouser company are extremely rare, and here is a flawless original print of one of their most interesting subjects. A not wholly sympathetic Western lawman comes East to become a prominent newspaper man, a story probably inspired by the career of Bat Masterson.

PATHWAYS OF LIFE (Triangle-Griffith, 1916) An incredibly naive but wholly delightful morality fable (far more old-fashioned than the three-years earlier "The Mothering Heart", also a Gish/Griffith film) in which Lillian Gish, as Pure-of-Heart, comes up against and triumphs over all sorts of trials and temptations. Many of the Griffith players in support, and direction by Christy Cabanne.