



Pickled Fish and Salted Provisions *Historical Musings from Salem Maritime NHS*

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

Just a lady photo.

A George Melford Production.
"JAVA HEAD"
with Leatrice Joy, Jacqueline Logan
Raymond Hatton, George Fawcett & Albert Roscoe
By Joseph Hergesheimer
Adapted by Waldemar Young

SEE a great Paramount picture of Hergesheimer's most famous book! See the skipper who brought back a beautiful Chinese wife!

This is just a hint of the plot and the thrill of "Java Head," an immense success in book form, but Paramount Paramountized by George Melford is thing to make you rub your eyes in incredulity that the screen can do so much!

See the flash of knives in the Shanghai tang fight! a beautiful palarsquin struggle in the midst of it! the descent from the balcony of the two Americans and their discovery of the exquisite beauty within the silken curtains!

"Battered for the fingers!" but love defies impertinence!

But, above all, see what happens when "the girl he left behind him but promised true" meets the strange beauty from China!

ONE of 8
of one month's releases of
Paramount's Super-39

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Java Head is Missing

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On the cover: An ad for *Java Head* from the *Saturday Evening Post*, February 1922. The actress on the cover is Leatrice Joy, the leading lady.

Java Head is the southwest promontory on the island of Java, in the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra. For centuries it stood as the gateway to China for ships rounding the Cape of Good Hope.

However, the *Java Head* of this inquiry is a “lost” film based on a romantic tragedy by American novelist Joseph Hergesheimer (1880-1954) published in 1919. More than twenty editions have been published since. It tells the story of an interracial marriage between Salem ship captain Gerrit Ammidon and a Chinese princess, and the disastrous difficulties of her assimilation into his American family and Salem’s society.

Java Head is a black-and-white silent film released February 25, 1923 and distributed by Paramount Pictures, then located on Long Island, New York. Some years ago, this author tried to locate a copy of the film because of its Salem affiliation, and was told that there were no surviving copies. It had become a lost film, most likely through the decomposition of the nitrate film substrate before anyone thought to make a copy onto safety film. To the best of my knowledge, a copy has yet to turn up.

Hollywood Comes to Salem

Java Head was filmed in Salem and directed by George Medford (1877-1961), better known for his 1921 film, *The Sheik*, starring Rudolph Valentino. *Java Head* starred Leatrice Joy (1895-1985) as Princess Taou Yuen, the male lead, Alan Roscoe (1886-1933), Jacqueline Logan (1901-1983), George Fawcett (1860-1939), Raymond Hatton (1887-1971), and other supporting actors.

Numerous mentions are made in Hergesheimer’s story to Salem locations. Captain Ammidon’s family residence in Salem was called *Java Head* in recognition of their involvement in the China trade, and is the focal point of the story line. Hergesheimer intimated it to be on Washington Square and the movie production people followed his vision.¹ Other familiar locations around Salem, including Hardy Street, and Central and Derby Wharves are noted as well.

Derby Wharf featured prominently in waterfront scenes. In the Salem Maritime National Historic Site’s collections, we are fortunate to have a still photograph showing Derby Wharf as it looked when utilized as a set.

A 1922 Salem newspaper article addresses the process of making this possible. According to the article, “Never before has this city been picked as the location for a moving picture by one of the largest cinema producing companies (Famous Players-Paramount).” The art director for the project, Rudolph Bylek (1885-1967), quickly set about arranging locations for filming upon his arrival late in September. At the time, Derby Wharf belonged to the Eastern Massachusetts Street Railway Company, and Mr. Bylek obtained their permission to recreate the wharf as it looked many years earlier.² The wharf set was finished on October 17, 1922.³



Above: The set for *Java Head* on Derby Wharf. The *Charles W. Morgan*, now at Mystic Seaport, was the main vessel used for the film. The *Morgan* was built in 1841, and was retired from active whaling in 1921, only a year before filming started on *Java Head*.

The setting was no small production. Descriptive comments in *The Salem News* for October 18 indicate a great deal of effort and coordination. “The whaling ship *Charles W. Morgan*, now a square-rigger, is tied up at the wharf, and in the offing, to be used as a background, are seven ships of varying size which are rigged as the old timers were. . . There are chests of tea, huge casks and all the “atmosphere” of the old wharf as it looked more than three score years ago. The whole picture is a wonderful bit of camouflage.”⁴

Even more ambitious was a project to hide the Pequot Mills structures opposite: “Two artists on the other side of the river were putting the scene on canvas yesterday. The old square-rigger, itself 80 years old, was in their foreground.”⁵

Using early photographs of the wharf buildings as a guide, a replica was created in image only. “The exterior walls of the old warehouse are two in number, the back being open to the sea and held up by wooden props and guy wires. . . The warehouse and other buildings look tremendously real. . . On close inspection the massive hinges that look like age old iron are found to be of wall board. . . But they are so wonderfully faked that from 25 feet away they cannot be told from the real thing.”⁶

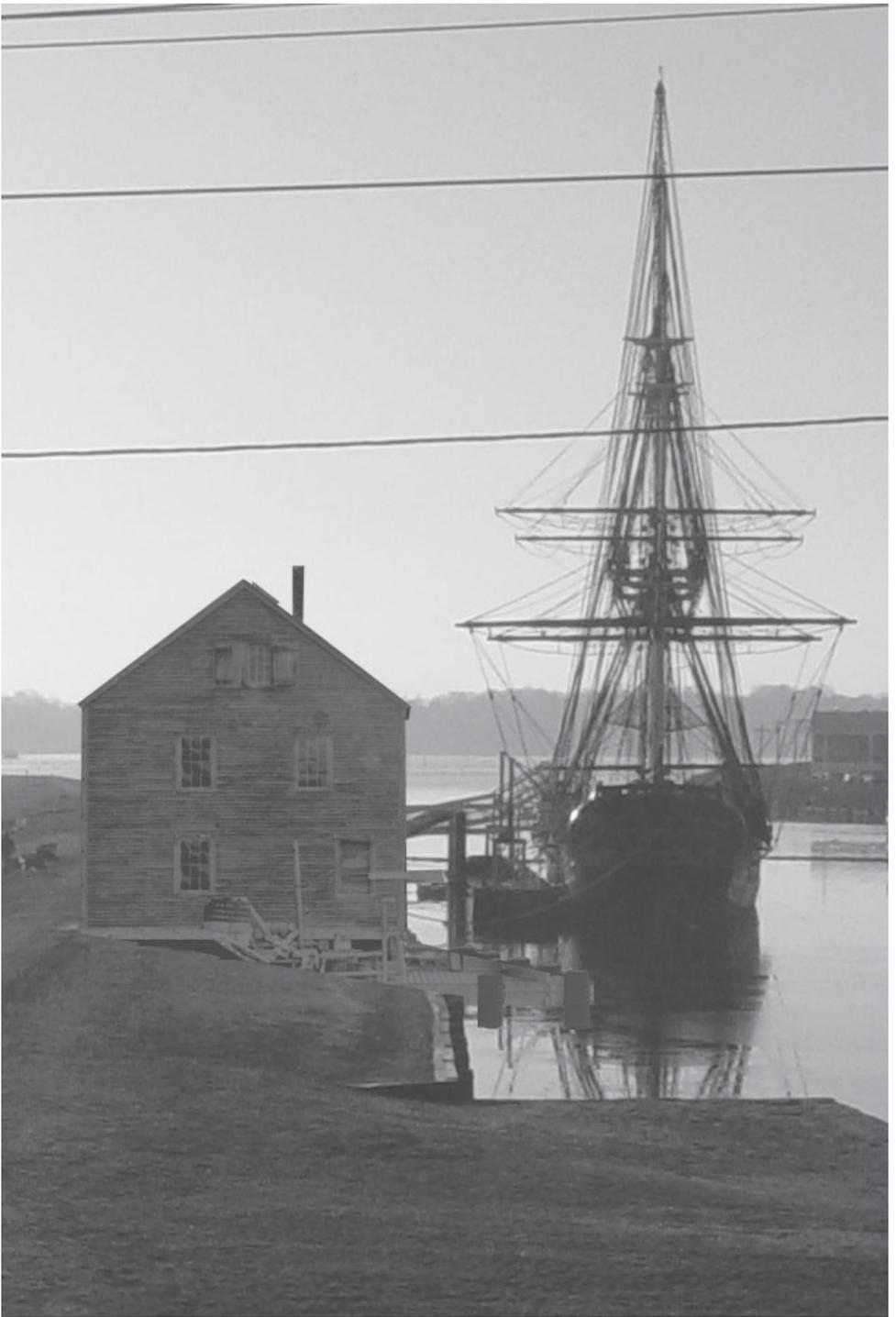
They also took views looking landward. “One of the shots to be taken is looking toward the Custom House.”⁷

As expected in such a large production, not everything went according to plan. On Sunday, September 15 the wharf was crowded with several thousand people looking at the movie set and someone called the police and complained. The police cleared the wharf. Art Director Bylek was clearly upset by this. He said: “I never sent anyone off the wharf. We don’t do things like that.”⁸ Instead, it was his practice to welcome spectators to watch movies being made.

A second version of the movie was released in August, 1934. This British effort, starring Anna May Wong as Princess Taou Yuen, moved the setting to Bristol, England. It made its American debut in New York on August 30, 1935. Some satisfaction may be taken in that this version is still extant for viewing.



Left: Promotional photograph of Leatrice Joy (1893-1985). One of the biggest stars of the silent screen, Leatrice Joy’s signature look of very short hair popularized the bobbed haircut of the 1920s. She worked with some of the most famous directors of the 1920s, including Cecil B. DeMille. This was the same promotional photo used in the Paramount Studios advertisement for the film.



Following the lead of the movie makers more than eighty years ago, the National Park Service is in the process of reviving some of the maritime ambience of Derby Wharf during the Great Age of Sail. Salem Maritime National Historic Site has obtained from the Town of Marblehead the Pedrick Store House. It will be relocated to Derby Wharf, adjacent to the replica *Friendship* of Salem. Built in 1770, this structure is thought to have served as a base for Captain Thomas Pedrick's privateering efforts during the American Revolution, and survived more than two hundred thirty years of use in many different capacities.

By a curious twist of fate, the storehouse was once owned by Captain William Story of the original *Friendship* of Salem after he tried, unsuccessfully, to retire from the sea to become a merchant in Marblehead.

Unlike *Java Head*, Captain Story's warehouse is not lost to posterity, and it will have all four sides.

Left:

Architect's rendering of Pedrick Store House in place on Derby Wharf.

Below:

A scene from *Java Head*, with the young Betty Bronson at the left. This was Betty's first role, and she went on two years later to get the starring role in *Peter Pan*. The location is as yet unidentified, but if it is a set, Paramount Studios did an excellent job recreating a Samuel McIntire interior.





Salem Maritime National Historic Site

174 Derby Street
Salem, MA 01970
<http://www.nps.gov/sama>

Notes

¹ "The façade of the Salem club (the Forrester-Peabody House at 29 Washington Square North) and the beautiful old garden to the rear have hit the fancy of the movie men who have been looking over the city." *The Salem Evening News*, September 28, 1922.

² Joseph Hergesheimer, *Java Head* (New York, Grosset & Dunlap, 1926), p. 200. Reference is made to President James K. Polk's intended visit to Salem. The actual date of this event was July 5, 1847, giving a definitive time frame to the story beyond generic references to the 1840s or 1850s.

³ "Java Head' Artist Tells How He Changed Derby Wharf Scenery," *The Salem Evening News*, Wednesday, October 18, 1922.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

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