

Gordon Griffith

Titles: 48 Sources: 2 Stills: 10

Born: Chicago; July 4th 1907

Died: Hollywood; December 12th 1958



In the first of approximately one million Tarzan films (most of them rubbish), the Earl of Greystoke ponders his existence. I itch, therefore I am. Source: Moving Picture Boy

The Moving Picture Boy entry:

“This athletic fellow entered the movies around 1913. With Paul Jacobs, he became one of the leading "Keystone Kids", and was in several of Chaplin's 1914 comedies. Like Wesley Barry (whose "**PENROD**" he would later appear in) he had kid parts in the "**Ham and Bud**" series.

Gordon was no tender flower. Under the headline "A Little Too Much Realism", a 1914 reporter penned a vivid account of the rough-and-tumble in "**LITTLE SUNSET**". In this baseball story, the eponymous hero "licks the Apache's former bat-boy in a fair fight, and becomes bat-boy himself. Unfortunately, the boy chosen for the defeat didn't want to be licked, and furthermore he didn't propose to be

licked as long as his two fists held out. Gordon Griffith, who plays "Little Sunset", had no intention of being downed either, especially as the play demanded that he win out. The fight did not go according to schedule... Holding the boys apart by main strength, Mr Bosworth explained that it was only make-believe. "But I kin lick him easy!" howled the other boy. "Can't either!" yelled Sunset, and they were at it again..."

Griffith could claim to have been the screen's first Tarzan – several minutes ahead of Elmo Lincoln – in "**TARZAN OF THE APES**" in 1918. "Gordon Griffith," wrote a critic, "a youthful actor of uncommon gifts, impersonates Tarzan as a boy. He is a fit subject for a sculptor, as he climbs through the trees in the company of the apes, his naked body showing its grace of line in every move. The same could hardly be said of the grotesquely barrel-chested Lincoln. Gordon swung again two years later in the serial "**SON OF TARZAN**".

He would soon be seen as Tom Sawyer in the 1920 "**HUCKLEBERRY FINN**", but meanwhile must have swallowed hard before signing up for a moral propaganda film of 1919, which did not belie its title: "**THE SOLITARY SIN**". This was "a study of sexual abuses on the part of young men, through neglect on the part of their parents. It follows the careers of three boys. One was taken in hand by his father, while still very young, and profited by learning the secrets of nature and sex. The other boys were allowed to grow up in ignorance; one contracts syphilis and is not allowed to marry, the other goes insane from self-abuse."

It is a relief to hear that Gordon was the one "taken in hand by his father" in the nick of time. (The other, less fortunate principals were tactfully left uncredited.) One imagines that masturbation had a lean year or two following this hair-raising sermon.

"**JUNGLE TRAIL OF THE SON OF TARZAN**", released in 1923, was simply a cut-down version of the 1920 "**SON OF TARZAN**". Griffith had another lead in "**THE STREET OF TEARS**" (24), and went on acting till the mid-Thirties. Then he moved into assistant directing and producing with various companies."



Two more stills from "**TARZAN THE APE MAN**". It predated Hollywood's adoption of the Hays Code, which expressly forbade "display of the organs of minors" (along with a great many other matters).

Source: indeterminate websites

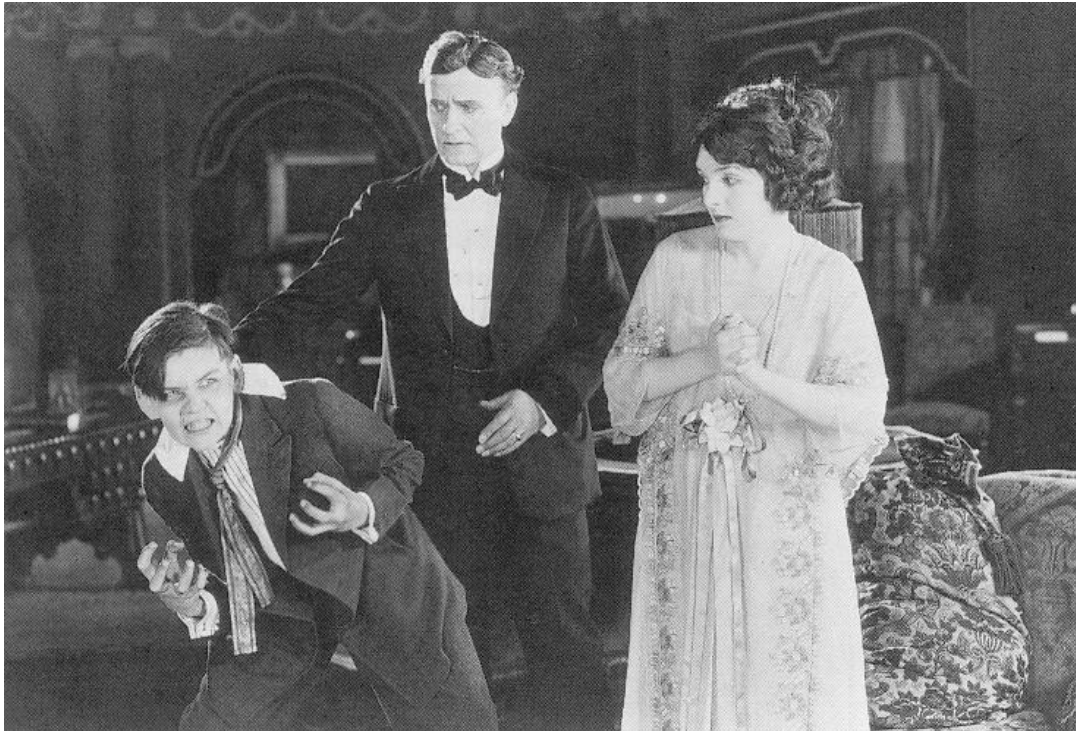
Excerpt from **NAMBLA Bulletin** – vol. 5/4 – survey of TARZAN films:

"In the original "**TARZAN OF THE APES**", a 1917 silent, Gordon Griffith, 10, played Tarzan as a boy. He was virtually nude and had long black hair. Griffith also played in "**SON OF TARZAN**" (1920) as the boy. By then he was wearing a furry loincloth..."

NAMBLA Bulletin – vol. 8/8 – media note:

"..Many of the early boy stars are still involved in the industry, though not Gordon Griffith, who played "**TARZAN OF THE APES**" in 1918. Handsome, energetic, lithe and athletic, he also pioneered Huck Finn and Penrod.¹"

¹ No he didn't



Top and centre – in **"SON OF TARZAN"** two years later, Gordon played his own offspring, a paradox which clearly unhinged his tender mind. No subsequent **TARZAN** film was to portray the jungle man's childhood until **"GREYSTOKE: THE LEGEND OF TARZAN, LORD OF THE APES"** in 1984.

Sources (top): The Moving Picture Boy,
(centre) indeterminate website

Right – playing Sam (bottom) in the 1920 **"PENROD"**, with Wesley Barry (top) in the title role, "Sunshine Sammy" Morrison and sister Florence
Source: A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen



Three scenes from the 1919 **"HUCKLE-BERRY FINN"**, with Lewis Sargent in the title role and Thelma Salter (below) as Becky Thatcher. Gordon was Tom Sawyer, absent from all sound versions of the Huck story. Note the costume differences from later Huck Finns – both boys are wearing good shoes, to start with, and the hallmark straw hat is absent. The river scenes were probably shot, if not on Paramount's backlot, then within a short drive of the studio. Moving cast and crew to far flung locations was not feasible for most silent productions.

Sources: (above & below) A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen
(right) The Moving Picture Boy



FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Age	Title	Role
13	6	HIS SISTER'S KIDS with <i>Paul Jacobs</i>	
13		OUR CHILDREN with <i>Paul Jacobs</i>	
14	7	A BACKYARD THEATER with <i>Paul Jacobs</i>	
14		BOWERY BOYS with <i>Paul Jacobs</i>	
14		CAUGHT IN A CABARET †	
14		CHICKEN CHASER	
14		KID AUTO RACES AT VENICE	
14		LITTLE BILLY'S CITY COUSIN	
14		LITTLE BILLY'S STRATEGY	
14		LITTLE BILLY'S TRIUMPHS	
14		LITTLE SUNSET	in title role
14		THE STAR BOARDER	
14		THOSE COUNTRY KIDS	
14		TILLIE'S PUNCTURED ROMANCE	
14		TWENTY MINUTES OF LOVE	
15	8	HER FILMLAND HERO	
15		KILMENY	
16	9	BEN BLAIR	
16		THE CALL OF THE CUMBERLANDS	
16		GLORIANA	
16		IF MY COUNTRY SHOULD CALL	
16		IT CAN'T BE TRUE	
16		MAYBE MOONSHINE	
16		NAKED HEARTS	
16		THE OTHER WOMAN	
16		A SON OF NEPTUNE	
16		STORMING THE TRENCHES	
16		TWO MOTHERS	
17	10	LIKE BABES IN THE WOOD	
17		THE PRICE OF SILENCE	
18	11	HITTING THE HIGH SPOTS	
18		THE ROMANCE OF TARZAN	the title character as a boy
18		TARZAN OF THE APES	the title character as a boy
18		THE YELLOW DOG	
19	12	CUPID FORECLOSES	
19		HUCKLEBERRY FINN with <i>Lewis Sargent, Thelma Salter</i>	as Tom Sawyer
19		THE SOLITARY SIN	
19		UNDER THE TOP	
20	13	THE KENTUCKY COLONEL	
20		PENROD ‡ with <i>Wesley Barry, Clara Horton, Sunshine Sammy Morrison, Florence Morrison</i>	as Sam
20		SON OF TARZAN <i>f</i>	serial – the title character as a boy
20		TO PLEASE ONE WOMAN	
21	14	PECK'S BAD BOY with <i>Jackie Coogan</i>	
21		THAT SOMETHING	
21		THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH	
22	15	CATCH MY SMOKE	
22		MORE TO BE PITIED THAN SCORNE	
23	16	MAIN STREET	
24	17	THE STREET OF TEARS	

† later reissued as "THE JAZZ WAITER"

‡ but released in 1922

f re-edited and released in 1923 as the feature "JUNGLE TRAIL OF THE SON OF TARZAN"