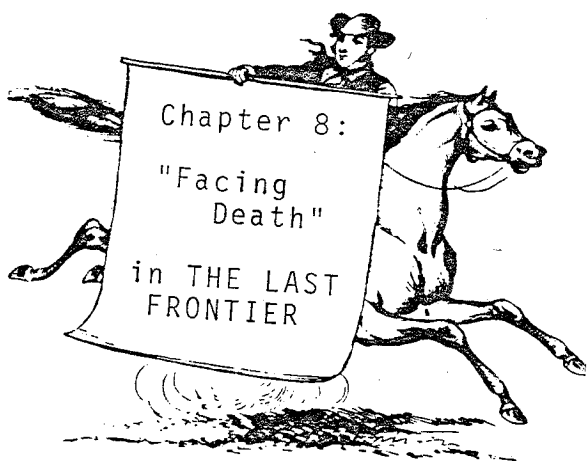
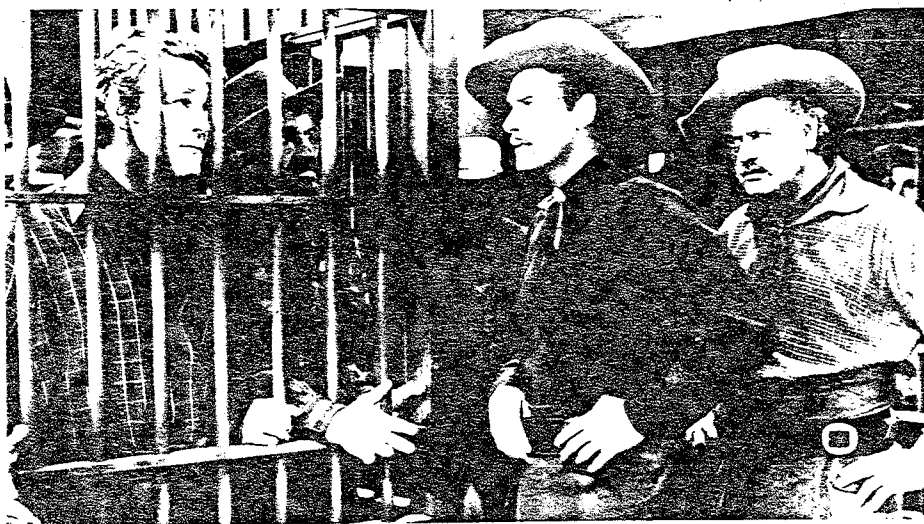


DODGE CITY and





No Kansas film series would be complete without a look at DODGE CITY, the most infamous cowtown of them all, and this 1939 drama comes with all the cliches intact. As the scene opens, the first Santa Fe train is heading for the fledgeling town, outracing the old stage coach from Wichita. Progress is on the march, but before civilization can settle into the "flower of the prairie," someone has to take the lawless frontiersmen in hand. And who could be better for the job than the fearless Wade Hatton (Errol Flynn), with Civil War, buffalo hunting and cattle driving exploits already tucked under his legendary belt?

Flynn's calm hero strides through the film with his comical sidekick Rusty (Alan Hale), challenging the terrorist rule of Jeff Surratt (Bruce Cabot) and his henchmen. Action flourishes at every turn under the direction of Michael Curtiz,

with saloon brawls, shootouts and lynchings occurring at a steady clip. And of course, Flynn has to win the stubborn heart of an independent young lady (Olivia de Havilland).

Though DODGE CITY's architecture boasts all the authenticity of the tourists' "Boot Hill," the California mountains and pine trees which often grace Hollywood's "Kansas" landscapes are conspicuously absent. Instead, more credible prairie vistas are lyrically photographed by cameraman Sol Polito, and the pastoral setting offers a welcome respite from the heavy action on Front Street.

DODGE CITY --and this week's episode in THE LAST FRONTIER--also offer us an unusual look at the rarely portrayed frontier child. If women are often scarce on the Hollywood frontier, children are even more so, demanding a sentimental treatment at odds with the western formula. Both Harry, the Dodge City boy whose father is killed for resisting Surratt, and Aggie of THE LAST FRONTIER achieve this note of pathos by being orphaned at a tender age. (Indians kill Aggie's mother and outlaws Harry's father--apparently parenthood is a particularly vulnerable state on the frontier.)

His father's death immediately impresses on Harry the need to "be a man;" he appears in subsequent scenes mimicking the gun-toting grownups. But a child can't meet the demands of this masculine role, and it is Harry's fate that finally pushes Wade Hatton into taking up the marshal's badge. When single manhood makes a stand, the streets eventually become safe for family life...but the frontier moves on and Wade Hatton follows with a sigh of relief. (continued)

THE PREMIERE OF DODGE CITY in March of 1939 brought a taste of Hollywood glamour to the western Kansas town. Warner Brothers chartered a 14-car Santa Fe special from California and packed it with executives, reporters and 30 stars. One car was even made over into a "Gay Lady" clubcar, after the famous Dodge saloon, complete with bar and sawdust on the floor.

In Dodge City a crowd of 50,000, including the governors of Kansas, New Mexico and Colorado, turned out to greet Flynn, Hale and the other stars and view the continuous premiere showings. One reporter filed the following account of Hollywood's close up look at Kansas:

"Dodge City is a town of 10,000 population in an arid, thinly settled region which hasn't had a crop in seven years. ...But such a colorful crowd never was assembled before, or anywhere else. It was newspapermen from New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, accustomed to dramatic scenes, who did the goggle-eyed staring there. That multitude made the short-grass town as colorful as a California flower field, and as we gazed out the car windows it looked as if every man, woman and child was dressed for the occasion...Most of these people had never seen a picture star and they intended to see a few or die."