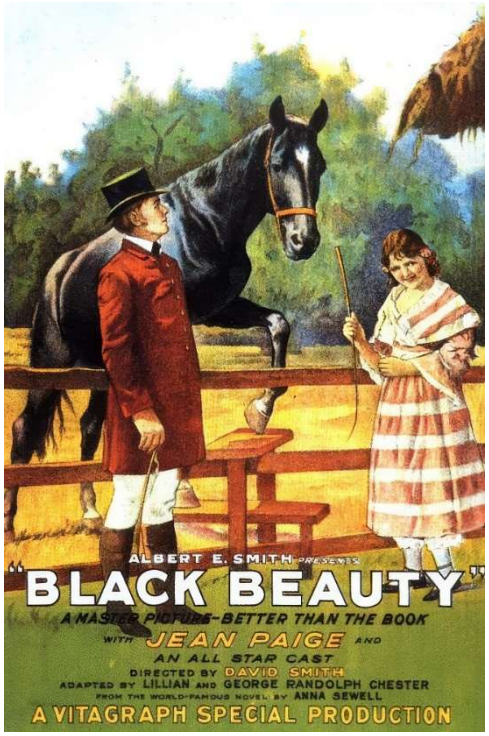
Black Beauty

Like the majority of films released in the silent era, *Black Beauty* today is mostly lost, with only three reels of its original seven believed to still be extant. Before 1950, commercial releases were printed on nitrocellulose filmstock, commonly called nitrate. Nitrate is extremely flammable and grows increasingly unstable as it ages and decomposes. Nitrate fires would frequently destroy entire film vaults. Additional to that, before the mid-century reevaluation of the silent era, silent films were not seen as having any value and many were simply disposed of to make room.



However, while it may be that no complete copies of it exist, a roughly two-reel abridged version of *Black Beauty* retitled *Black Bess* was released to the home movie market in 1929.

Non-commercial releases such as this are entirely another matter as compared to nitrate. Films intended to be shown at home were always printed on safety filmstock—that is, film that is nonflammable or slow-burning.

Recently, Harpodeon—dealers in rare and out-of-the-way silent films—released a reconstruction of *Black Beauty* that combines the original three reels with footage from the home abridgement to restore the film as much as is possible to how audiences may have seen *Black Beauty* in 1921.

This *Black Beauty* reconstruction was a wild success on its theatrical premier at the Maine Silent Film Festival in Bucksport in July of 2026 and we are delighted bring the same show to Waterville.

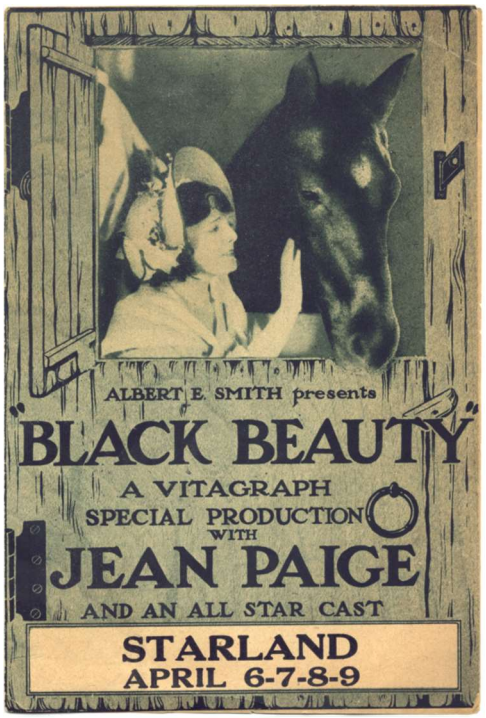


The film is in one part a fairly faithful adaptation of Anna Sewell's "autobiography of a horse" joined with an original tale of an adventurous rogue attempting to blackmail a wealthy girl into marrying him.

Black Beauty was produced by Vitagraph and released in early January, 1921. One of the pioneering American film companies, releasing their first film in 1897. Vitagraph was also the last of the pioneers to still be in business by the 1920s. It would not be until 1925 that they, at last, were bought out by Warner Brothers Pictures.

By that time, of its three founders, only Albert E. Smith remained as the chief executive of the company and its primary film producer (called at Vitagraph "presenters"—

"producer" was Vitagraph's term for "director"). He was growing increasing paranoid that others were trying to usurp him. Consequently, late Vitagraph films were characterized by their extreme degree of nepotism. For example, *Black Beauty* was directed by Albert E. Smith's son David and starred his third and final wife, Jean Paige—and these were not the only close family members found in the cast and crew.



Black Beauty is notable for being the first feature-length film shot entirely on panchromatic film. Only orthochromatic film had been widely used before this time. Sometimes called "blue-sensitive" film, orthochromatic stock primarily recorded blue light, it recorded green light to a lesser degree, and was entirely intensive to red light. Caucasian skin is a shade of light red, so that meant actors had to wear heavy, strangely colored makeup for their skin to render correctly. Panchromatic film changed that and is what allowed films like *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* to be shot entirely without any makeup in 1928.



Our Accompanist, Doug Protsik

Doug learned the art of putting together a score appropriate for silent movies from Danny Patt, who accompanied silent movies in Union, Maine in the 1920s—a time when it was the job of piano players to accompany the films since there was no sound. Since Danny passed away in 1999, Doug has been continuing this tradition performing the "Old Time Piano" style and has scored and performed for countless showings throughout Maine and internationally. This work led to his composing original authentic scores for silent movie restorations for Turner Classic Movies, including titles such as Hitchcock's *The Lodger* and *Easy Virtue*.

Using old sheet music from Danny's collection, as well as researching at the Bagaduce Music Lending Library in Blue Hill, Maine, his scores attempt to capture the unique flavor with the music as it embellishes the action on screen, in an original and authentic way. Doug also has established a fun aspect to the performances by including "musical jokes" in his scores, challenging the audience to recognize them. All the music is memorized, arranged, and improvised by Doug to allow for a seamless flow from scene to scene. Attending a performance allows for a wonderful musical, as well as an historic and entertaining film experience.