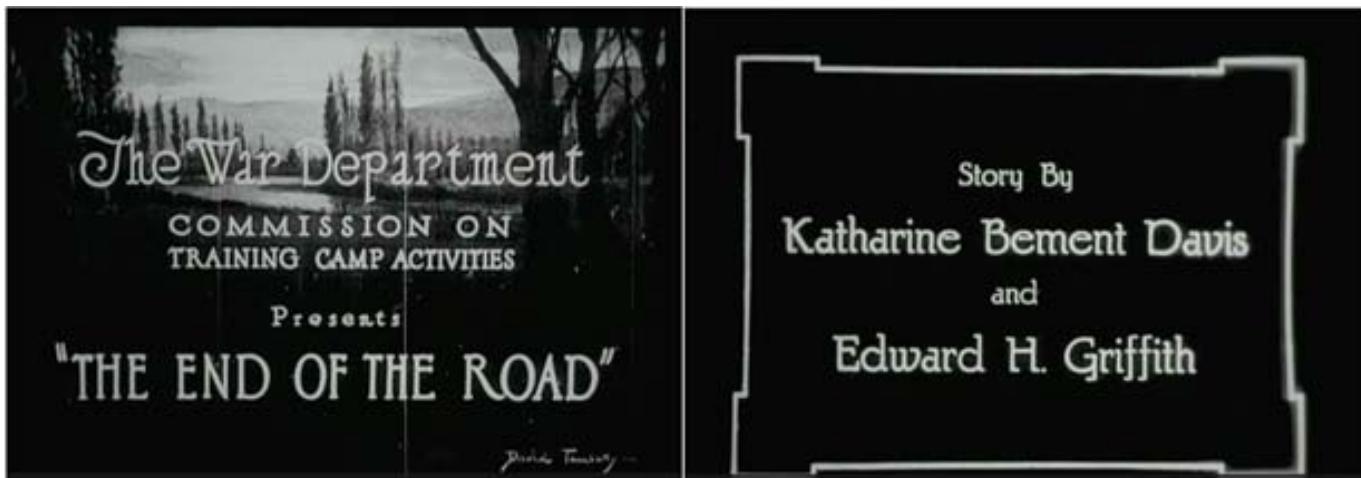


**Which former NYC
Correction Commissioner
wrote the film story for
a 1919 movie
addressing serious
social hygiene/public health
issues (STDs) related
to WWI?**

The above Correction History-linked question contains within it a couple of strong clues pointing to the answer.

The first clue is the date of the movie. The motion picture came out in 1919. Actual warfare ceased Armistice Day, Nov. 11, 1918. We observed its centennial on Veterans Day 2018. Given the film's date, the former Commissioner in question has to have been one of 10 persons whose years of service in that post preceded or included 1919.

The second clue is film's focus: social hygiene/public health issues (STDs). Only 1 of the 10 Commissioners (9 men and 1 woman) was involved with those issues before, after and while serving as Commissioner: Katharine Bement Davis (KBD), the 1st woman DOC Commissioner (1914 through 1915) who later served (1916 and 1917) as the first chairperson of the NYC parole board which she initiated. By becoming DOC's 1st woman commissioner, she also became the 1st woman in NYC history ever to head any major municipal agency.



Websites of leading movie archives, film preservation agencies, and motion picture history associations credit KBD as scriptwriter or story writer for movie "*The End of the Road*." A few sites credit both KBD and the director, Lieutenant Edward H. Griffith. At least one credits both for developing the scenario, but solo credits her for writing the story. Above left is a PC screen capture of the film's title display. Above right is a monitor grab of the story credit screen. As director, Griffith likely had final say on screen credits.

While Dr. Davis (her Ph. D in political economy from the University of Chicago was the first ever awarded to a woman) served as superintendent of Bedford Hills reformatory for women, she and John D. Rockefeller Jr. collaborated in establishing and overseeing a privately-funded and privately-run social hygiene laboratory complex adjacent to the state institution in northern Westchester.

KBD stipulated her continued association with the lab as a condition of accepting appointment to head DOC and later for her heading the municipal parole board (1916 through 1917). After completing four years in municipal government, she headed up full time the Rockefeller-funded Social Hygiene Bureau which had set up the lab researching a wide range of factors relating to criminality among women.

Produced in association with the American Social Hygiene Association by the Social Hygiene Division of the War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities, the sixty-nine minute, seven-reel silent film was part of a national campaign to combat venereal disease in WW1 and its post-war era. Dr. Davis was director of the division's Section on Women's Work.



Publicity for the motion picture, which opened in upstate Syracuse, declared that key incidents depicted in the film were based on actual cases Davis dealt with when NYC Correction Commissioner.

Some scenes were filmed in DOC's clinical wards for women on Blackwell's Island (later called Welfare Island and now Roosevelt Island).

The Surgeon General of the Army, William

Crawford Gorgas, oversaw medical aspects of the movie. Described in posters as "A Picture with a Purpose" (see above), the flick tells a cautionary tale about two young women who grew up as friends:

The heroine's mother explained human sexuality straight-forwardly but within a context of moral standards, whole-person perspectives, prudent modesty and common decency. Not so the mother of the other. The latter girl, named Vera, follows her mother's advice to hook a rich man, but he turns out to be a charming syphilitic cad.

In contrast, her friend from childhood, Mary Lee, took to heart the good counsel of her wise mother, trained for a career as a nurse, met and became friends

with a doctor. Together, the nurse and her doctor friend rescue the fallen Vera and get her proper medical attention. Then the medical couple volunteer to care

for wounded doughboys in France. There, in the midst of warfare, their friendship ripens into love and she accepts his proposal to wed at the war and the moving picture come to an end.



Blind from Birth

A still photo of the “Blind from Birth” scene from the silent film “The End of the Road” written by former DOC Commissioner Katharine Bement Davis. The photo appears in KBD’s report on the women’s role in the work of the Social Hygiene Division of the War Dept. Commission on WWI Training Camp Activities.

It may be tempting to dismiss summarily as antiquated the earnest simplicity of the storyline.

But keep in mind that the script sought to address -- and prevent --the horrific effects of STDs which KDB actually encountered among the

female patients in Bedford Hills reformatory, its attached social hygiene lab and DOC’s medical wards on Blackwell’s Island. Be mindful also that this film, dealing with a highly sensitive subject, had to pass muster with various movie standards review boards of that era. Once that perspective is taken into account, the movie can be regarded as somewhat a trailblazer.

The film featured as the young medical couple, Claire Adams and Richard Bennett, two of the better known actors during the silent movies era. Possessing what was characterized as “patrician beauty,” Adams played leading roles in flicks with Tom Mix, Wallace Berry, John Gilbert and Lon Chaney but contended her “favorite leading male actor” was Rin Tin Tin.

Bennett was stage and screen performer, playwright and director who continued in film even after the arrival of “talkies.” Father of famed actress Constance Bennett, they appeared together in the 1928 stage drama “Jarnegan” and the 1931 sound film “Bought.” His most memorable performance was as Major Amberson in Orson Wells’ 1942 “The Magnificent Ambersons.”



Deserted

A still photo of the "Deserted" scene from the silent film "The End of the Road" written by former DOC Commissioner Katharine Bement Davis. The photo appears in KBD's report on the War Dept. Social Hygiene Division WWI Training Camp Activities.

Joyce Fair, a 17-year-old NYC-born actress who appeared in the "Buster Brown" series of movies, played Vera.

The film was written, produced, distributed and shown around the country as part of the war and post-war campaign to combat the spread to venereal diseases. Less dramatic ways of broadcasting the message were also employed.

Collaborating closely with the War

Department Commission Social Hygiene Division, 16 lecturers of the War Work Council of the national YWCA "gave, between Sept. 15, 1917 and March 18, 1918, six hundred and seventy-five lectures in 70 towns distributed over 22 states," KBD reported in a 36-page booklet published by the American Social Hygiene Association, based in Manhattan.

Additionally, various social hygiene organizations in states as diverse as Oregon, Illinois, Texas, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Connecticut as well as state and city government health agencies' outreach bureaus, such as in NY, delivered hundreds of lectures, many distributing materials produced by the KBD's Training Camp Activities divisions and others.

Among the items were booklets, brochures, posters, pamphlets, and pay envelope slips imparting intimate health cautions. KBD's report contained a page of sample pay envelope slip enclosures (such as the four shown above right).

SYPHILIS is a blood disease and is one of the causes of insanity, paralysis, heart disease, softening of the brain, locomotor atrophy, impotency and defects in children.

Children born with **SYPHILIS** are often crippled for life.

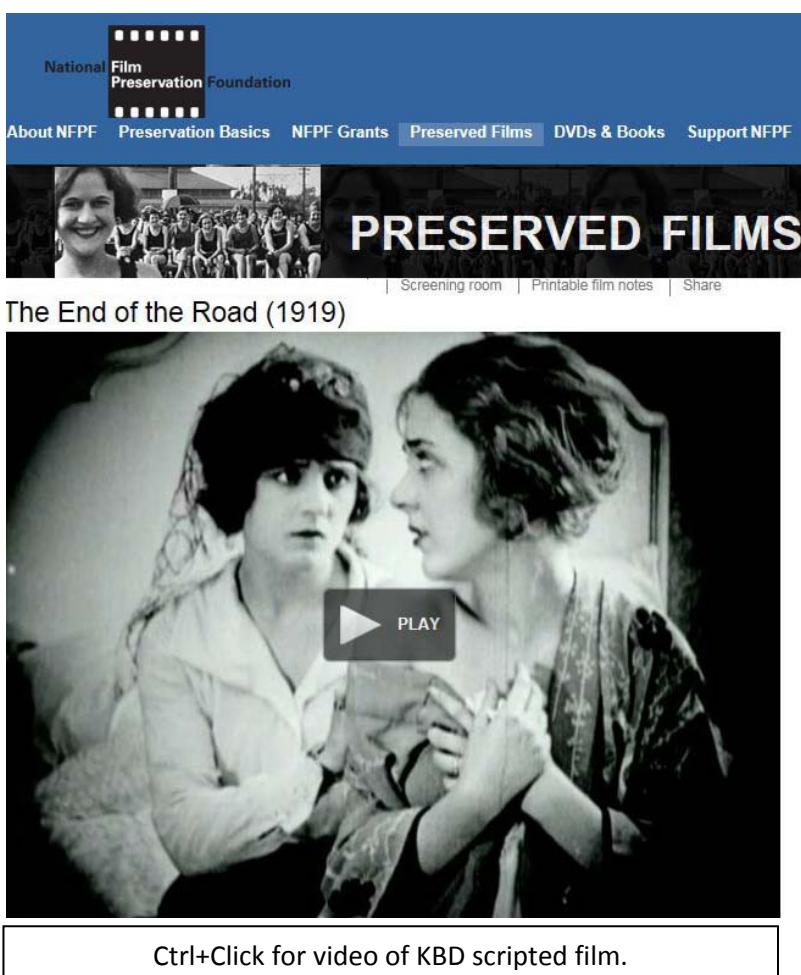
SYPHILIS may be caught if you let a man with a syphilitic sore on his lips kiss you. It often takes years to cure an ordinary case of syphilis—a bad case is often incurable.

GONORRHEA causes chronic sickness and loss of strength, diseases of internal organs, dangerous operations on women, blindness of babies.

The 36-page booklet is essentially a reprint of KBD's report appearing in the October 1918 issue of Social Hygiene, a regular publication of the American Social Hygiene Association. But it also included "stills" from the "The End of the Road" movie which official was released in February, 1919.

A complete on-line copy of the 36-page booklet version of KBD's report – including photos of scenes from the movie as well as various posters, signs and pay envelope slips from the anti-VD campaign – can be accessed at <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/ext/kirtasbse/101274786/PDF/101274786.pdf>

YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdI6Z85Y03s> offers a 14+ - minute clipped version of KBD's play "The End of the Road" brought to the silent screen. The comment accompanying the 2014 posting reads:



"The American Social Hygiene Association produced and distributed this educational video in 1919. The film targeted a female audience and offered warnings about premarital sex and venereal disease. This is an excerpt from the original film, which can be found at the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland."

If you have time now or later to what the complete hour and nine minute silent film, you can Ctrl+click the image left to access a video of the full movie

on the National Film Preservation Foundation's website.

[Correction History Home Page](#) – Ctrl+Click