

MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1941-1965

by
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Present-day film production in British Columbia has attracted a lot of attention. Local filmmaking is not a new phenomenon, however, but the continuation of an activity which has gone on in the province since the early part of this century. The west coast has had an eventful filmmaking heritage -- perhaps more so than any other English-speaking region in Canada. This heritage has been largely ignored until recent years, when the revitalization of the Canadian film industry has sparked interest in our new cinema and in its historical precedents.

The early development of filmmaking in British Columbia took place largely in isolation from the rest of Canada. Cameramen first came to film the province for the sake of its novel and photogenic landscapes, and to promote immigration and tourism.¹ The first incursion of Hollywood film crews, in the 1920s, was also drawn primarily by the varied scenery available for outdoor adventure pictures. In the 1930s, they set up a branch plant here and made features of dubious quality, taking advantage of Canada's membership in the British Empire to exploit the British quota restriction on imported films.

Meanwhile, domestic film production developed separately, usually growing from existing photographic or advertising concerns. British Columbia's first locally-based commercial cinematographer was A.D. "Cowboy" Kean, who got his start in movies filming the Vancouver Exhibition and the departure of troops for Europe during

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¹ For a full discussion of these very early films, see Colin Browne, *Motion Picture Production in British Columbia, 1898-1940: A Brief Historical Background and Catalogue*, B.C. Provincial Museum Heritage Record no. 6 (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1979), pp. 1-18.

World War I. Later, he shot wildlife and industrial films, as well as an original feature. Kean's ambitious and indefatigable efforts to sustain himself as an independent producer, even financing feature production through his commercial work, are suggestive of the conditions still faced by today's filmmakers.² †

There was also considerable interest in amateur filmmaking, arising from Kodak's introduction of the 16mm film format for non-professional use in 1923. People embraced home movies as eagerly as they had snapshot photography, recording the special and commonplace events of their domestic and working lives. Where such footage has survived, it often provides a rich and intimate viewpoint on life in British Columbia in the early decades of this century. The advent of the 16mm format also paved the way for the broader promotional use of film; it made the medium cheap enough for companies to commission short movies about their products or services. Government agencies and other public institutions found 16mm film effective for non-theatrical distribution and exhibition.³

During the years 1941 through 1965, films about B.C. were generated by a variety of institutions and producers. Agencies of the British Columbia government made promotional and educational films, largely dealing with the province's scenic and recreational attractions and industrial versatility. The federal government's National Film Board documented the history, economy, rural life and cultural heritage of the province, as well as preparing recreation and travel shorts. Commercial filmmakers such as Leon Shelly and Lew Parry were commissioned by local and national firms to record and promote a wide range of industries, particularly their rapid postwar development. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, through its television film unit at CBUT Vancouver, created an important body of uniquely regional social documentaries and dramatic films. A few theatrical features were shot locally by American companies and by fledgling domestic concerns.

The history of filmmaking in British Columbia revolves almost exclusively around production based on the coast, usually in Vancouver. By 1941 the earlier prominence of Victoria as a film centre had clearly been eclipsed by the larger city. There were exceptions, of course: some Vancouver filmmakers went into other regions of the province for their subjects; National Film Board crews came in from the east; and the provincial government's operations remained based in Victoria. Nevertheless, the clear majority of films were conceived and assembled in Vancouver.

² Browne, pp.12 & 22-23; Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema 1895-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), pp.90-91. Additional information about Kean is compiled in the research subject files of the former Sound & Moving Image Division (SMID) at the BC Archives/Royal BC Museum (previously the Provincial Archives of British Columbia).

† 2016 note: For a later and more detailed examination of Kean's career, see Dennis J. Duffy & David Mattison, "A.D. Kean, Canada's Cowboy Movie-Maker," *The Beaver*, February-March 1989, pp.28-41.

³ Browne, pp.17-19.

The west coast -- particularly Vancouver -- has emerged since World War I as a gathering place for people interested in the arts. Due to its relative isolation, the cultural life that has developed in B.C. has done so separately from, but in parallel to, that of eastern Canada. By the 1940s, the region had made noteworthy contributions to Canadian painting, literature, music, theatre, photography and broadcasting. This is sometimes attributed to a cultured English presence in the form of well-educated British immigrants, or to a cosmopolitan aspect that developed as Vancouver became a crossroads for trade to the Pacific Rim. Whatever brought it about, this cultural milieu engendered many Canadian talents; it was only natural that a film community should develop as well.

The two decades following World War II saw the emergence of such a community, fostered in part by the industrial growth that characterized the period. The proximity of Hollywood was another key factor, for it proved an invaluable source of technical expertise. Filmmakers were inspired by the work of American and British producers. They served their apprenticeships at local studios, gaining valuable experience through work on industrial films. Some would later find a more personal voice through work for the CBC or the NFB. This would lead to a growing stream of independent filmmaking, one of the most important legacies of the period. The best films owed their quality to a small group of talented directors, cinematographers and editors. It was these individuals that made all the difference to filmmaking in Vancouver; yet it was the limitations of Vancouver that ultimately forced many to leave in search of better creative conditions. This was another legacy of the period.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT FILMMAKING

The government of British Columbia has been making use of motion picture film since 1908, when it first contracted the services of a British cameraman to shoot film in the province for promotional purposes. For the following three decades, various government agencies made short-term excursions into the realm of filmmaking. The most important of these was the British Columbia Patriotic and Educational Picture Service (PEPS). Created in 1920 and controlled by the Attorney-General's Department, PEPS acquired films for distribution, commissioned films on specific subjects, and enforced the provisions of the Moving Picture Act requiring the inclusion of these films in the cinema programs of all B.C. theatres. But PEPS was born out of a wave of postwar nationalism, and it foundered in a storm of political intrigue. There were accusations about the use of film for partisan ends, and the director was investigated for the alleged misuse of public funds. In 1921 the work of PEPS was already being cut back, and by 1925 funding was almost completely eliminated.⁴ However, the department's

⁴ Browne, pp. 14-15; Juliet Thelma Pollard, "Government Bureaucracy in Action: A History of Cinema in Canada, 1896-1941," [M.A. Thesis, UBC, 1979], pp. 43-44 and 70-74.

correspondence reveals that PEPS had over 100 titles in circulation, many of which it had commissioned itself. This represents the earliest substantial commitment to film production by any of the provincial governments of Canada.⁵

The misfortunes experienced by PEPS no doubt retarded the growth of film activity within the government. Nevertheless, both the Department of Agriculture and the Forest Branch produced a few films in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and there were isolated instances of film work within other departments. But it was well into the 1930s before a coherent government program for film production emerged.

The BC Government Travel Bureau Photographic Branch. The most obvious application of film to government needs was in the realm of publicity and the promotion of tourism. The Bureau of Provincial Information, which was responsible for this activity in the 1930s, distributed films purchased from the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau. In 1937 the Bureau of Provincial Information was absorbed by the Bureau of Industrial and Tourist Development, part of the newly-created Department of Trade and Industry. In 1938, the office became the British Columbia Government Travel Bureau.⁶

At first, the BCGTB mainly distributed silent black and white shorts obtained from agencies of the provincial and federal governments, or produced by Travel Films or Motion Skreenadz in Vancouver. Before long, however, the bureau had begun to undertake limited production of its own films. These were the work of Clarence Ferris, a longtime civil servant who moved from the post of clerk to that of bureau photographer. While these first films were ill-funded and unsophisticated, they led to the official establishment of the bureau's Photographic Branch, manned by Ferris. *TOURISM: A BRITISH COLUMBIA INDUSTRY* (1940), the earliest extant film produced by the BCGTB, deals with the work of the bureau itself and includes shots of Ferris shooting and splicing film.

At the same time, funds were being channelled into the production of government-sponsored films on a grander scale. Leon Shelly's Motion Skreenadz Limited was contracted to produce a 35mm travelogue in colour for theatrical distribution. Shelly delivered *BEAUTIFUL BRITISH COLUMBIA* (1940), which drew its cameraman, editors and orchestral score from Hollywood. It premiered early in 1941 and was distributed theatrically by Columbia and Warner Brothers.⁷ The success of this film was repeated by *EVERGREEN PLAYLAND*, a second 35mm colour travelogue

⁵ Numerous film lists and other references to PEPS can be found in the microfilmed correspondence of the BC Attorney-General's Department for 1920 through 1925, GR1323, BC Archives. David Mattison of the BC Archives has compiled a master list of the PEPS titles, based on these files.

⁶ David Mattison, "The British Columbia Government Travel Bureau and Motion Picture Production, 1937-1947" [manuscript, SMID research files, BC Archives], pp.5-8.

⁷ Mattison, pp.14-15; Leon C. Shelly interviewed by Douglas S. Wilson, Toronto, 12 December 1981 (BC Archives tape T3920:1-3).

produced by Shelly's firm for the bureau and dealing with sports and recreational attractions in the province.⁸ Although another film, *NORTH OF THE BORDER*, was apparently also produced by Shelly for the bureau around the same time, little is known about it.[†] All three films were also distributed in 16mm by the Photographic Branch.

While Shelly's films were of professional quality and reached a large audience, they were also very expensive. When the three were completed, the bureau's modest budget for motion picture work was directed entirely into in-house production by the Photographic Branch. Originally the branch's films were silent with inter-titles, shot and edited by Ferris alone. Soon he began shooting what would become a series of travelogues on the major regions of the province. The first of these, and the first sound film produced in-house, was *VANCOUVER ISLAND: BRITISH COLUMBIA'S ISLAND PLAYGROUND* (1942), which continued the notion that "play" was a primary local activity.

In 1944, Richard L. (Dick) Colby, who had shot a few films at the Department of Public Works, joined the bureau staff as the second cinematographer/still photographer. A great deal of film was shot during World War II, although much of the post-production work was delayed by wartime priorities. By the end of the war, however, Ferris and Colby had footage for films on the Cariboo, Okanagan and Kootenay regions. Over the next few years this material was shaped into *ROMANTIC CARIBOO: BRITISH COLUMBIA'S HISTORIC HIGHWAY* and *THE OKANAGAN VALLEY: BRITISH COLUMBIA'S ORCHARD PLAYGROUND*. So much footage was shot for the planned film "The Kootenays: British Columbia's Mountain Playground" that two films resulted, entitled (with refreshing simplicity) *KOOTENAY EAST* and *KOOTENAY WEST*. Obviously influenced by its relationship to the Department of Trade and Industry, the branch also shot and released films on manufacturing (*DOLLARS AND SENSE*), mining (*OF MINES AND MEN*), certified seed potatoes (*QUALITY PLUS*) and egg production (*EGGS UNLIMITED*). Other contemporary productions included three silent films shot by the Photographic Branch for the Provincial Museum: *SEA-BIRDS* (1941), *NATURE'S AMPHIBIANS* (1942-1944) and *WILD FLOWERS* (1945-1946).

Ferris and Colby developed an efficient annual routine, travelling and shooting in the spring and summer months and doing editing and "finishing" work in the fall and winter. Their filming excursions were often extended journeys, carefully planned to gather footage for several productions at once. Some of these journeys were described at length in articles for Victoria newspapers that are "reminiscent of interviews with returning explorers."⁹ The considerable achievements of this two-man film unit are lent

⁸ The extant version of this film held by Library and Archives Canada (LAC, formerly the Public Archives of Canada) is entitled *BRITISH COLUMBIA SPORTS*. It was distributed by 20th Century-Fox.

[†] 2016 note: A 16 mm print of *NORTH OF THE BORDER* (1941-1942) has since been added to the BC Archives' collection.

⁹ Mattison, p.22.

further perspective when one considers that Ferris and Colby were simultaneously responsible for most government still photography and darkroom work.

Postwar shooting led to films on the Pacific Great Eastern Railway (RAILS TO ROMANCE) and Manning Park (SKYLINE TRAILS), and two more region films depicting the Fraser Valley and the Skeena. In 1947 a third photographer, Bernard H. Atkins, joined the staff as an assistant; he would remain with the Branch into the 1980s. Ferris and Atkins travelled to the province's northeastern corner to shoot films on the Peace River region and the Alaska Highway.

One particular problem in the bureau's first decade was the length of time it often took to finish a given film. The limitations of staff and budget meant that it was only possible to release two films per year, and all post-production work on films in progress (editing, sound, conforming original footage, printing, etc.) had to be fitted into this framework. As a result, it was sometimes possible for as much as three or four years to elapse between the commencement of work on a film and its release. WEST BY NOR-WEST, a film intended to show a tour of the west coast of Vancouver Island via steamship, was held up so long that it was rendered obsolete; the CPR took the featured vessels off the run before shooting could be completed.¹⁰

Another important factor in the development of BCGTB production was the availability of film processing and sound dubbing facilities. The branch's early productions had to be sent out to labs in eastern Canada or California for processing and printing. Recording of optical sound tracks was done at Associated Screen News in Montreal or Crawley Films in Ottawa. By the end of the forties, however, lab and sound facilities were available in Vancouver (through Trans-Canada Films and Lew Parry Film Productions respectively). Nevertheless, the editing and finishing work on most bureau films continued to delay their release to some degree.

The bureau's film work expanded considerably in the fifties. There were additions to the series on regional tourist attractions, including films on Qualicum Beach, Vancouver, New Westminster, the Penticton Peach Festival and the Kelowna Regatta. Other productions included a new version of BEAUTIFUL BRITISH COLUMBIA (1953) and films describing the province's primary and secondary industries (JOHNNY'S HERITAGE, 1953, and FORWARD, 1956). Another departure from tourist fare was THE ROAD HOME (1956), which showed treatment services for polio victims.

Clarence Ferris retired as chief of the photographic branch in 1955 and was replaced by Dick Colby. Colby points to LEGEND OF THE WEST, a new Cariboo travelogue released the following year, as something new in the way of travel films. It concludes in Barkerville with a service at St. Saviour's Anglican Church and scenes of the unrestored gold town and the miner's graves. To Colby this suggested that

¹⁰ Richard Colby interviewed by David Mattison, Victoria, 7 April 1981 (BC Archives tape T3833:1-2).

travelogues could deal with more sophisticated ideas and need not be "afraid of feeling."¹¹

In April 1957 the Photographic Branch was transferred into the newly-created Department of Recreation and Conservation. A vigorous production program saw the shooting of films about government campsites, sports fishing, highway construction and big game species in the province. One special project took Bernard Atkins to Anthony Island in the Queen Charlottes to document the removal of old Haida totems for preservation. Released in 1961 as *THE SILENT ONES*, this was considered one of the best productions of the Photographic Branch.¹² For the B.C. Centennial, the branch produced a film on the visit of Princess Margaret, as well as one on the carving of a totem pole for presentation to Queen Elizabeth. In ensuing years the Photographic Branch generated travelogues about the Vancouver Island, Kootenay Lake, Spatsizi, Skeena and Yellowhead regions; films about highway construction in Fraser Canyon and Rogers Pass, about local attractions in Mission, Kamloops and Barkerville, and about such diverse topics as the new ferry service, the B.C. International Trade Fair, firearm safety, waterfowl conservation and the importance of the white centre line on the highway. Many prints of these films were distributed through the Canadian Government Travel Bureau film libraries in New York, Chicago and San Francisco, and through B.C. House in London, as well as the National Film Board. Prints were frequently loaned for airing on television, another important outlet. Several productions, including *LEGEND OF THE WEST*, *VALLEY OF THE SWANS* and others, received prizes at various North American film festivals. In some cases, foreign-language versions were produced for French, German, Dutch or Japanese audiences.

In 1964 Bernard Atkins took over the branch, with F.W.E. (Bill) Round as chief photographer. In 1967 both the Photographic Branch and the B.C. Government Travel Bureau were moved to the Department of Travel Industry, reaffirming the branch's primary commitment to tourist promotion. As the Film and Photographic Branch and later the Special Services Branch, the unit was a tourism responsibility until 1984, when the branch's closure ended almost half a century of continuous film production.

The BC Forest Branch/Forest Service. Although the Photographic Branch handled a large part of the government's photographic and film production work, other departments also made films dealing with their individual concerns. The most substantial of these efforts began within the Forest Branch of the Department of Lands. The branch had dabbled in the use of film for public awareness and fire prevention purposes as early as 1920, and in the 1930s photographer George Melrose had produced

¹¹ Colby interview.

¹² The CBC Vancouver film production *TOTEM* (1959) also deals with this project. Footage from both films appears in the recent *NINSTINTS: SHADOW KEEPERS OF THE PAST* (1983), produced by Spreitz-Husband Productions for the BC Heritage Trust.

a few shorts.¹³ This type of activity picked up again in 1943 and 1944 with the release of LAND OF TIMBER, LADYSMITH EXPERIMENT and EXPLORING TWEEDSMUIR PARK.

In 1945 the Forest Branch became the Forest Service of the Department of Lands and Forests, incorporating a new Public Relations and Education Division. The Parks Branch of the Forest Service produced silent movies about Mount Robson and Garibaldi provincial parks. The film library distributed entertainment films and travelogues (including Government Travel Bureau productions), as well as films on forestry.¹⁴ In-house production at the Forest Service stepped up further with the hiring of staff writer-photographer Paul Johnson in 1948. Johnson was responsible for such films as SANTA'S FORESTERS (1948), FLYING SURVEYORS (1951) and FIFTY MILLION HORSES (1952). Barbara Davies, who was hired in 1954, later ran the unit as senior photographer from 1956 until 1983.

Forest Service productions generally focused on aspects of the logging industry, forest management, conservation, reforestation, and forest fire prevention and control. Important titles from this era included FOOD FOR THOUGHT (1958), SILVA SURVEY (1958) and THE MARK OF PROGRESS (1959). Jean André, another addition to the photographic staff, produced a number of animated trailers on the subject of forest protection for theatrical and TV use. Films were created for both instructional use and public information; for example, THE MAN IN THE TOWER (1963), a training film for forest lookouts, was recut for general interest release as MAN ON A MOUNTAIN TOP (1965). In later years, greater emphasis was placed on the production of training films for forest inventory and silviculture crews. The unit also used film to document experiments in silviculture. On several occasions it co-operated with television stations by shooting footage for use in news programs. Several of the unit's productions have been screened and honoured at film festivals.¹⁵

Other Provincial Departments. The Provincial Board of Health also made a foray into production with NINE CENTS PER CAPITA (1940-41), a sound film on the work of the Division of Venereal Disease Control. Shot at a Vancouver VD clinic by freelance cameraman Don Lytle, it emphasized the service's nominal cost to the taxpayer. The film was widely praised by public health authorities in Canada and the USA.¹⁶

¹³ See Browne's index for films produced by Melrose. Melrose and Hugh Weatherby may have collaborated on SPRUCE FOR BRITISH PLANES, an interesting silent short on the logging and milling of spruce for structural use in the DeHavilland Mosquito and other aircraft.

¹⁴ BC Forest Service film catalogues, 1947-1966, BC Archives.

¹⁵ Additional information on film production at the BC Forest Service came from conversations with Peter Robin of BC Government Information Services and with Barbara Davies, October 1985.

¹⁶ Don Lytle, telephone conversation with the author, 14 November 1985; BC Provincial Board of Health, annual report for 1940, pp.E16 and E39.

In the 1940s, George J. Alexander of the Provincial Fisheries Department shot footage of fishing and canning operations which he edited into three films: B.C. SALMON FROM SEA TO CAN, COMMERCIAL SALMON TROLLING OFF THE B.C. COAST and LET'S GO FISHING. These titles crop up in film catalogues from all over Canada, indicating unusually wide distribution for in-house productions.¹⁷

Another vigorous program of cinematography was carried on at the Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology. Early film work done by the Photographic Branch (as mentioned previously) was continued by museum director G. Clifford Carl, an avid amateur filmmaker, who shot extensive zoological footage in the 1940s and 1950s, focusing on the birds and marine life of the province. During the same period anthropology curator Wilson Duff used film to document native cultures, including their totem pole sites, dance rituals and fishing methods, as well as carving and other traditional crafts. Footage by both Carl and Duff was edited into silent films which were used to illustrate public lectures.¹⁸

Among the most obvious signs of British Columbia's postwar economic growth was the impressive amount of highway construction and improvement. The government Photographic Branch produced several films dealing with highway building and related developments such as the ferry service. In addition, the new roads were prominently featured in the branch's travel films, which generally introduced a region as it would be discovered by car. At the height of this period the Department of Highways retained Peter Parsons and Roger Sharland as staff cinematographers to document its many projects. This material was intended for use in films to be completed by the Photographic Branch or by private companies, such as DEAS ISLAND TUNNEL (1957-1959). However, much of the footage never progressed beyond the editing stage.¹⁹

The Department of Agriculture had been using film in public education programs since the 1920s. Between 1941 and 1965 the Apiary Branch made a few movies about honey production and the role of bees in pollination. In 1959 the Horticultural Branch began producing short film items through the regional office in Kelowna. Shot by staffer Bob Wilson in the Okanagan Valley and elsewhere in the province, the items were broadcast on CHBC-TV Kelowna's weekly series *Agriculture Today*. By the time filming for the series ceased in 1973, it was being carried on several TV stations in B.C. and one in Alberta.²⁰

All told, films produced by agencies of the BC government account for a significant proportion of all production in the province from 1941 to 1965. The

¹⁷ "BC Provincial Fisheries Department," SMID research files, BC Archives.

¹⁸ Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology, annual reports, 1940-1960; also documentation acquired with the BC Provincial Museum collection, BC Archives accession F1983:09.

¹⁹ Shot lists and related documentation for the BC Department of Highways collection, BC Archives accession F1982:01.

²⁰ Bob Wilson, telephone conversation with Derek Reimer, November 1985. The series was originally called "Okanagan Farm and Garden."

Photographic Branch, under either the BC Government Travel Bureau or the Department of Recreation and Conservation, produced about 80 titles. The Forest Branch or Forest Service were responsible for about 50 films, and the Provincial Museum generated a similar amount of footage.²¹ The 1960s and 1970s saw considerable expansion and consolidation in the application of film and video by the provincial government. In 1984, all of the government's production units (except that of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food) were merged under the management of Government Information Services. Since that time, almost all government-sponsored film production work has been carried out by the private sector on a contract basis.

THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

In the 1920s and 1930s, British Columbia was generously featured in the films of the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, largely travelogues and depictions of resource industries.²² This tradition would be continued in the era of the CGMPB's successor, the National Film Board. But the creation of the NFB under British documentary producer John Grierson had much more far-reaching significance for the cinematic depiction of B.C. The NFB had outstanding technical and creative resources, and a sweeping mandate -- to interpret Canada to Canadians and to the world.

From the beginning, the NFB's films demonstrated a technical quality and communicative strength that were, by and large, new to Canadian film. At the same time, the Board began to develop domestic and international distribution systems that brought its films an unprecedented audience. It was, in short, a powerful organization for the creation and dissemination of Canadian images -- among them, images of British Columbia.

The NFB came into being at the outbreak of World War II, and war propaganda became Grierson's first priority. This effort was largely channelled through two theatrical film series -- *Canada Carries On* and *The World in Action* -- dealing with domestic and international concerns respectively. The first glimpses of B.C. in NFB films appeared in those dealing with Canada's Pacific defences (*WARCLOUDS ON THE PACIFIC*, 1941; *ROAD TO TOKYO*, 1942), elements of its domestic war effort, and war-related topics such as the importance of the national railways (*TRANS-CANADA EXPRESS*, 1944) and airways (*FLIGHT SIX*, 1944). The Alaska Highway and northern

²¹ It is difficult to draw meaningful statistics from the filmography, particularly in the case of government film production. It would be specious to equate a 100-foot roll of silent uncut camera-original footage to a completely edited film of 30 minutes duration with a full sound track, or to a collection of associated footage and out-takes; yet all three examples appear as entries in the filmography. This caveat aside, it may be interesting to note that about 200 of the entries in the 1941-1965 filmography (or roughly one sixth of the total entries) were produced by or for agencies of the provincial government.

²² Browne (p.14) indicates that between 90 and 100 of the CGMPB's films were shot wholly or partially in British Columbia.

air routes were discussed (LOOK TO THE NORTH, 1943; NORTHWEST BY AIR, 1944), as were such strategic industries as logging (TREES THAT REACH THE SKY, 1945). The first NFB release to deal with B.C. in any depth was GATEWAY TO ASIA (1945), which examined the Pacific region's wartime strategic importance and its role in the postwar world.²³

A good deal of the board's west coast footage came from Vancouver Motion Pictures, a production company run by Leon Shelly. The company was responsible for the B.C. sequences in such films as BANSHEES OVER CANADA (1943), which includes footage on air raid precautions in Vancouver. Other films made by Vancouver Motion Pictures for the NFB were TOMORROW'S TIMBER (1944) and OF JAPANESE DESCENT (1945) -- the latter a disturbing attempt to justify the wartime internment of Japanese-Canadians. In 1945 the company shot SALMON RUN, one of NFB's earliest colour releases, in the Fraser Canyon.

With the war's end and the departure of Grierson, the board's output became more diverse and somewhat more pedestrian. B.C.'s industries, natural resources and geography were featured in a number of conventional documentaries, and in items for the postwar newsreel series *Eye Witness*. More importantly, board films began to explore, with mixed success, some elements of the province's unique character and cultural heritage. Native peoples of the Skeena River and the Queen Charlotte Islands were featured in four films in five years.²⁴ Another interesting B.C. subject from the early postwar period was KLEE WYCK (1946), the first film to examine the work of Emily Carr. Other films used B.C. settings as typical of Canada, to look at topics like the importance of community involvement (LESSONS IN LIVING, 1944) or the local newspaper (THE HOME TOWN PAPER, 1948). In some instances the setting might be more or less incidental -- as in BREAKDOWN (1951), a dramatization of a woman's mental breakdown and treatment, which was shot at a B.C. hospital. Other films showed places or events in the province as part of an overall look at some aspect of Canadian life.

Perhaps the board's most important contribution to B.C.'s filmed image was an appreciation of its rural and wilderness communities. Previously, film content had tended to gravitate toward the cities of Vancouver and Victoria, and to the larger towns of the interior. The NFB's films moved away from the larger centres to explore small town life, isolated communities, and the adaptation to that isolation. The special institutions needed to serve rural areas in B.C. were examined in films such as LIBRARY

²³ For a full analysis of the NFB's war information work, see Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

²⁴ TOTEMS and PEOPLE OF THE POTLATCH (both 1944); PEOPLES OF THE SKEENA and SKEENA RIVER TRAPLINE (both 1949).

ON WHEELS (1945), MISSION SHIP (1953) and COUNTRY MAGISTRATE (1953).²⁵ Today these films are valuable records of a disappearing way of life.

Other ongoing concerns reflected in the board's output are an interest in native culture and in the Chinese-Canadian community. Such subjects are far outnumbered, however, by the mainstream films dealing with B.C.'s recreational and industrial aspects. There was little to distinguish an NFB film about fishing or logging from a B.C. government film on the same subject, except that it was probably seen by more people. The board did, in fact, distribute a number of travelogues produced by the provincial government.

One feature that characterizes some of the board's B.C. films from this period is their tone or style. By and large, they suffer from a remoteness of viewpoint. Perhaps this is because many of them were conceived, scripted and completed at such a distance from the region they attempted to portray, under the control of bureaucrats prone to a centralist view of Canada. It was certainly emphasized by the NFB approach of the 1940s, here described by D.B. Jones:

The Film Board documentary typically did not probe deeply into its subject. It did not explore the reality being filmed. Instead, the Film Board documentary tended to start from certain didactic premises and then collect material useful for illustrating them. . . . The live-action documentaries usually were pre-scripted, and the action rehearsed. The "actuality" in these documentaries thus tended to be superficial and largely contrived. The "creative" side was not highly developed, either. Omniscient commentary was the main organizational device, and it tended to overwhelm the visual aspect of the film rather than draw structure from it or interact with it.²⁶

Admittedly, these failings are common to many documentary films, and both D.B. Jones and Piers Handling indicate that there was a definite shift at the NFB in the early 1950s towards a "more delicate, personalized and experimental style."²⁷ Unfortunately, these changes do not seem to have affected the B.C. films, which continued to demonstrate the qualities ascribed by Jones to "the early Film Board

²⁵ Later examples include *THE WATER DWELLERS*, about a floating community on the southern coast; *JOURNEY FROM ZERO*, which follows a library bookmobile as it visits communities along the Alaska Highway; and *CATTLE RANCH*, about the cowboy's life through the year at Douglas Lake Cattle Ranch. All three films were released in 1961.

²⁶ D.B. Jones, *Movies and Memoranda: An Interpretive History of the National Film Board of Canada*, Canadian Film Series no. 5 (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1981), pp.59-60.

²⁷ Piers Handling, "The National Film Board of Canada: 1939-1959," in *Self Portrait: Essays on the Canadian and Quebec Cinema*, ed. Pierre Veronneau and Piers Handling, Canadian Film Series no. 4 (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980), p.49.

documentary." An example of these problems can be found in *A FRIEND AT THE DOOR* (1950), a film about the range of social problems dealt with by B.C. social workers and the difficulties posed therein by the province's size and terrain. According to C. Rodney James:

There was no live sound, only copious narration. As a result the viewer never got a chance to know any of the characters as persons. The result was that while constantly saying that the [Social Welfare] service was personal the film was highly impersonal; this characterization was best illustrated by the great number of travel scenes -- most of the film time was spent travelling.²⁸

This "impersonal" and distant quality afflicts the majority of the NFB's B.C. films from this period. It must, however, be balanced against the very real value of these films, particularly from a historical standpoint. Many interesting facets of the province and its character are preserved in items from the *Eye Witness* and *Screen Magazine* series, and in the films made for the NFB's TV series *On the Spot*. The early docudrama *HERRING HUNT* (1953), shot in Vancouver and on Howe Sound, was nominated for an Oscar® by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The French-language unit's *A LA RECHERCHE DE L'INNOCENCE* (1963) was the first film to examine the milieu of Vancouver's artists and poets.

After the establishment by Peter Jones of a permanent regional office in Vancouver at the end of 1965, the NFB's films about B.C. began to achieve greater insight and vitality. In later years the Pacific Regional Studio produced or sponsored many important films by local filmmakers.²⁹

INDUSTRIAL AND SPONSORED FILMS

Motion Skreenadz/Vancouver Motion Pictures. By 1940, it was clear that the production of industrial and sponsored films was to be the "bread and butter" of Canadian filmmakers. On the west coast, virtually all such production was in the hands of Motion Skreenadz Limited. Skreenadz was originally incorporated in 1920 to produce one-minute theatrical advertising trailers. During the twenties it was operated

²⁸ C. Rodney James, *Film as a National Art: NFB of Canada and the Film Board Idea*, The Arno Press Cinema Program (New York: Arno Press, 1977), p.397. For a different perspective on the same film, see Rowland Hill, "A Friend at the Door: A Story of Public Welfare Services in Rural Areas," *Canadian Welfare*, 15 October 1950, pp.22-25.

²⁹ By 1966, the National Film Board had released about 70 films shot entirely in British Columbia, as well as another 100 which dealt in part with the province.

by J. Howard Boothe and Harry Rosenbaum.³⁰ Vancouver Motion Pictures Limited, which provided film lab and technical services, was a related company started in 1928 by photographer Roger Bourne and artist Charles Lambly. Both Motion Skreenadz and Vancouver Motion Pictures operated out of the Film Exchange Building on Burrard at Davie in downtown Vancouver. In 1936-1937, Leon C. Shelly assumed control of the two companies.³¹ Among the first industrial films produced by Shelly at Skreenadz were *THE STORY OF CANADIAN SALMON* (ca. 1939, for B.C. Packers) and *COFFEE FOR CANADIANS* (1940, for the Kelly Douglas Company).

Skreenadz introduced professional colour film production to B.C. in the form of the two-negative Cinecolor process. The company's first colour production to receive major attention was *BEAUTIFUL BRITISH COLUMBIA* (1940), produced for the B.C. Government Travel Bureau. This film and its sequel *EVERGREEN PLAYLAND* (1941-1942) were released nationally in Canada and the United States.³² Their success led to further contracts for industrial films in colour, including *APPLE VALLEY* and *LAND OF SKY BLUE WATERS* (1942 and 1946, for B.C. Tree Fruits), and *HERRING HUNTERS* and *SALMON FOR FOOD* (both ca. 1945, for B.C. Packers).

Shelly drew on the expertise of a handful of local filmmakers. The mainstay was Wally Hamilton, a technical wizard who shot film, recorded sound, and built film processing and sound equipment. Oscar Burritt, Ernie Kirkpatrick and Don Lytle were also cameramen. Lew Parry, art director of Neon Products Ltd., wrote and directed a number of "screen ads," and his brother Mel was an occasional cameraman.³³ Production manager Ed Taylor, imported from Hollywood, directed or edited many of Shelly's key industrial films. In 1943, it was reported that Shelly and Hamilton

are working full blast these days on commercial and government work. Manpower in this line is getting scarce and it looks as if they will have to call on women to help out the situation.³⁴

³⁰ BC Registrar of Companies files, BC Archives: "Motion Skreenadz Limited," files no. 5125 [1920-27] and 2208-A [1928-46]. Motion Skreenadz was incorporated as a B.C. company in 1920 to take over a motion-picture advertising business called Motion Pictures Canada Limited from Jacob P. Rosenbaum. Jointly owned and operated by Harry Rosenbaum and J.H. Boothe, the company was incorporated under the Dominion Companies Act in 1926 and registered as an Extra-Provincial Company in 1928.

³¹ BC Registrar of Companies files, BC Archives: "Vancouver Motion Pictures Limited," file no. 10404.

³² Leon C. Shelly interviewed by Douglas S. Wilson, 1981.

³³ Shelly interview. Lew Parry originally worked for Shelly gratis in his spare time, for the sake of experience. The first film he worked on professionally as a Shelly employee was *RIVER OF PAPER* (1944), on which he was production manager. Lew Parry interviewed by the author, West Vancouver, 14 August 1985 (BC Archives tape T4215:4-5).

³⁴ *Canadian Moving Picture Digest (CMPD)*, 20 March 1943 p.8. For a later view of women in the B.C. film industry, see M.E. Francis' profile of Parry Films employees Shelah Reljic and Marguerite Roozeboom (nee Goulding), *Vancouver News-Herald*, 25 May 1956 p.15.

At least four women subsequently assumed film production roles under Shelly. Maureen Balfe and Hellen Semmens were artists and editors; Joan Mathews mainly processed film but also did some editing and artwork; Marguerite Goulding designed and lettered titles and did a few animated sequences.

The two companies made some money providing such service functions as film processing, titling and sound work, as well as preparing "coming attraction" trailers for local theatres. The National Film Board was another key source of revenue. Shelly provided west coast footage for war-related NFB films such as *BANSHEES OVER CANADA* and *THE ROAD TO TOKYO*.³⁵ The company also produced a few NFB releases in their entirety, including *TOMORROW'S TIMBER, OF JAPANESE DESCENT* and *SALMON RUN*, as well as two films sponsored by the Department of Veteran's Affairs through the NFB.³⁶

Shelly's contracts for the BC Government and the NFB were likely the best advertising he could have. In June of 1944 he and a Vancouver crew were summoned across the country to shoot a tourism film for the Nova Scotia government -- an indication of his growing reputation.³⁷ Another film, *VALIANT COMPANY* (1945), was sponsored by General Motors to raise Victory Bond funds for the rehabilitation of disabled veterans. Shot in Technicolor at hospitals in Vancouver and Toronto, with important creative contributions from Hollywood, this picture helped to establish Shelly's name in eastern Canada.³⁸

Inevitably the larger markets in the east beckoned. In August 1945, Shelly opened a "branch plant" in Toronto. In January 1946, he announced plans to move his headquarters to Toronto and maintain a branch plant in Vancouver, but by October the whole operation was slated to re-locate.³⁹ Some of the company's last productions in B.C. bore the name of the new company, Shelly Films. However, Shelly would eventually discontinue production (except for newsreel coverage) to concentrate on lab work, including the release printing of Hollywood films.⁴⁰

Lew Parry. Much of the Vancouver Motion Pictures staff went east with Shelly. The most notable exception was Lew Parry, who had joined the company in May 1944 as production manager. In March 1946 Parry announced the formation in Vancouver of

³⁵ *CMPD*, 13 January 1945 p.5.

³⁶ Lew Parry interviewed by the author, 1985. Parry directed both of the latter films (*LIMBS TO ORDER* and *ROAD TO RECOVERY*), which were shot at hospitals in Vancouver and in eastern Canada.

³⁷ *CMPD*, 24 June 1944 p.8.

³⁸ Shelly interview, 1981. Don Lytle verified the film's title in a phone conversation with the author, 13 November 1985.

³⁹ *CMPD*, 11 August 1945 p.8, 19 January 1946 p.9 and 26 October 1946 p.8.

⁴⁰ *CMPD*, 21 April 1956 p.1 & 3.

Trans-Canada Films Limited "for the production of top-flight motion pictures to promote Canadian business and industry, in Canada and throughout the world."⁴¹

Parry set up shop in a former Japanese temple at 1686 West 1st Avenue in Vancouver. His first contract, to produce two films for the Department of Veteran's Affairs, was completed at a loss. This was partly due to the necessity of going to Hollywood to complete the sound tracks, there being no film sound recording facilities available locally at the time.⁴² 1946 was Vancouver's 60th anniversary as a city, and the Jubilee publicity committee ordered a film from Parry to mark the occasion. When the celebrations were rained out, the committee ran into financial difficulties and production was halted. In Parry's words:

The B.C. Electric [Company], alive to the value of film, bought up the footage and made a deal with me to complete the show. . . . They circulated prints through all the schools and community organizations and on the strength of the response started their own film library.⁴³

VANCOUVER DIAMOND JUBILEE was the first of more than 50 films that Parry produced for B.C. Electric or its government-owned successor, the B.C. Hydro and Power Authority. The next one, DINNER FOR MISS CREEDEN (1947), traced the development of the company through the working life of a longtime employee. This personal "tie-in" was to characterize much of Parry's work. He felt that "an industrial film must contain a human story. . . . If it's not human, nobody wants to look at it."⁴⁴

B.C. Electric was involved in a major expansion and modernization program. Parry was contracted to document its engineering projects, and to make several public relations films aimed at a more general audience. The first few bore the name of Trans-Canada Films, but in 1948 Parry's initial shareholders sold Trans-Canada and its assets to Don Coltman (of Steffens-Colmer Studios Ltd.) and to Wally Hamilton, who had been working for Leon Shelly in Toronto.⁴⁵

Parry, in turn, bought out North American Productions (including its camera and all-important optical sound recorder), and resumed operations under the name of Lew Parry Film Productions.⁴⁶ His work for BC Electric included films detailing the construction of various dams, power plants, and undersea or overland transmission

⁴¹ *CMPD*, 30 March 1946 p.6.

⁴² Lew Parry interviewed by David Mattison, West Vancouver, 14 May and 11 June 1981 (BC Archives tape T3844:1-2 and T3855: 1-4). Also Lew Parry, "Summary" [undated career summary; copy in SMID research files, BC Archives]. One of the Department of Veteran's Affairs films, THE THIRD FREEDOM, was released by the NFB in 1946; the title of the other is not known.

⁴³ Parry, "Summary."

⁴⁴ *Sun*, 2 April 1955 (magazine section), p.7.

⁴⁵ *CMPD*, 4 September 1948 p.8; Parry interviewed by Mattison, 1981.

⁴⁶ Parry interviewed by the author, 1985. North American Productions had been formed in 1945 to produce 16mm dramatic films (see pp.24-25).

lines. Several films dealt with aspects of the Bridge River hydro-electric project, making it one of the most exhaustively documented construction projects in Canadian history.⁴⁷ The first of these films, showing the construction of the La Joie dam, was instrumental in raising \$19 million in funding for the project from eastern investors; this eventually led to a nine-year contract for Parry's services.⁴⁸ Other productions showed B.C. Electric's urban transit services and natural gas operations, or promoted electrical power in general. The company also sponsored a few films on non-corporate topics, such as gardening (*GARDEN RENDEZVOUS*, 1950) and travel (*VACATION TIME*, 1950). The company's interest in film, and Parry's involvement with it, went on after the British Columbia government took it over in 1961 (to form BC Hydro) and continued well into the 1970s. Other prominent Parry clients included the Aluminum Company of Canada, MacMillan and Bloedel, Marwell Construction, Trans-Canada Airlines and the National Film Board, plus other companies based in Alberta and Quebec. By 1966, Parry had shot well over 100 films, most of them filmed in B.C.

In general, these films were consistent, well-crafted and effective in promoting their sponsors. Noteworthy productions include *WHO, ME?* (1950), a dramatic film on traffic safety and traffic problems in Vancouver; *BREAKTHROUGH* (1952), on the driving of a 10-mile tunnel to turn the generators at Kemano, and *NO BARRIERS* (1953), a historical film shot all across the country for Trans-Canada Airlines. During this period, Parry's studio was on Broadway Avenue and his staff was the nucleus of the Vancouver film community. Staff members in the late 1940s and early 1950s included cameramen Harry Hooper, Art Hundert, Roy Luckow, Jack McCallum and Bob Reid, and editors Homer Powell and Shelah Reljic. Powell had worked for "the majors" in Hollywood, and he passed along his invaluable experience in editing and sound recording to Reljic and other employees. Directors Spence Crilly and Jack Kitchin worked on a "per-film" contract basis, as did writers Dorwin Baird and Dick Diespecker (local radio broadcasters). Many of Parry's staff migrated to CBC television with the advent of film production there.⁴⁹

Around 1952, Parry, Homer Powell and CKWX sound engineer Dave Pomeroy started Telesound as a subsidiary to provide sync-sound recording, dubbing and editing facilities for film -- the first such facility on the west coast. Pomeroy and Lloyd Stump later bought out the company, which still operates today as Telesound Film Recordings Limited. In 1956 Parry Films Limited was incorporated and undertook the construction of a studio on Capilano Road in North Vancouver. Sufficient land was purchased to allow for the expansion of studio space for feature film production. Production

⁴⁷ See the index for entries under "Bridge River."

⁴⁸ Parry interviewed by Mattison, 1981.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Earlier production people (of Parry's Trans-Canada Films period) included director William Dix, cameramen John "Scotty" Young and Lew Weekes, and editor Maureen Balfe. Editor Shelah Reljic (as Shelah Norman-Martin) had acted in Parry's early BC Electric film, *DINNER FOR MISS CREEDEN*. Homer Powell's more recent credits include editorial supervision on the popular TV series *Barney Miller*.

personnel included director Bill Round; cameramen Bill Roozeboom, Denny Brearley, Jack McCallum and Bert Pullinger; editors Homer Powell and Werner Franz, and art director Marguerite Roozeboom (nee Goulding).⁵⁰ Another group of filmmakers worked for Parry in the late 1950s and the 1960s; among them were director David Bennett, cameraman Ray Kellgren, editor Norma Jackson and art director L.C. Hanson.

Television drew away some of Parry's best people but offered little in return. Corporate clients with money to spend on the production of TV commercials tended to spend that money in Hollywood or Toronto. Unable to get any substantial business filming TV spots, Parry gambled on the prospect of program production. North of 53 Television was formed, and in 1959 the company invested \$100,000 on a pilot episode for a half-hour TV series. Although *North of '53* was made with the participation of American investors, everyone but the director, lead actor and production manager would be Canadian, in order to qualify under the British television quota system. The bush pilot adventure series would be shot at Parry's studios with exterior locations in the Yukon and Alberta. 39 episodes were planned. As Parry recalled: "It nearly made it. But the odds for any pilot picture, no matter who produces it were and still are no better than fifteen to one. Ours was not the one."⁵¹ Parry spent more than seven weeks in New York trying to sell the pilot to a sponsor. He attributed its failure to sell to the technical and attitudinal changes that were taking place in television at the time.⁵²

Another major project of the 1950s had Parry filming the preparations for the demolition of Ripple Rock, a longtime hazard to navigation in Seymour Narrows. The company documented two and a half years of preparations and produced five films for Dupont of Canada and other sponsors. On 5 April 1958, Parry's crew covered the enormous blast with a total of 14 cameras, including high-speed and 35mm equipment. The added presence of NFB cameramen and CBC film and TV crews made the destruction of Ripple Rock perhaps the most thoroughly-filmed event in Canadian history.

Although the company's mainstay continued to be industrial and documentary films, Parry was also involved in the production of another TV series. Several episodes of *The Littlest Hobo* were shot at his studio in 1963. The same year, however, he sold Parry Films and the studio to a group led by cinematographer Jack McCallum, who renamed it Capilano Motion Picture Centre Limited.⁵³ Once again operating as Lew

⁵⁰ Parry interviewed by Mattison, 1981.

⁵¹ Parry, "Summary."

⁵² Other details on *North of '53* are from the 1981 and 1985 Parry interviews, and from a Jim Gilmore column in the *Sun*, 23 January 1959 p.33.

⁵³ *Canadian Cinematography*, January/February 1964 p.4; Parry interviewed by Duffy, 1985.

Parry Film Productions, Parry continued to make industrial films for B.C. Hydro and other clients into the 1970s.⁵⁴

Other Local Companies. Steffens-Colmer Studio Limited, a Vancouver photographic studio, added a motion picture division to its operation in 1948. Wally Hamilton was hired to run the division, whose initial product was theatrical trailers.⁵⁵ Later that year Hamilton and Steffens-Colmer manager Don Coltman bought out Parry's Trans-Canada Films, with the intention of producing advertising, educational, training and feature films.⁵⁶ Under the new owners, Trans-Canada produced films for the Pacific National Exhibition (PACIFIC PARADE, 1948) and for B.C. Packers (SILVER HARVEST, 1951). Hamilton also shot footage in the Fraser Valley for an NFB production on the Flood Rehabilitation and Re-Dyking Program. An army training film shot at Chilliwack was another project.⁵⁷ A 1950 reference claimed that "TCF is the only film production company with studios in Western Canada."⁵⁸ Despite all this, Trans-Canada actually produced very few films, and fewer still are known to have survived. From the early 1950s onward, Trans-Canada functioned primarily as a film processing lab, later adding a film sound studio. In 1971, it was absorbed by Bellevue-Pathé, which was in turn bought out by a rival lab, Alpha Cine Service. Alpha Cine is today Vancouver's main film service facility.

Several other film companies sprang up in Vancouver between the 1940s to the 1960s. A few small or one-man operations, like Jack Long Film Services and Bob Elliott's Telefilm Services, were able to pick up a fair amount of freelance business shooting for CBC Vancouver, the NFB and various local concerns.

Artray Limited, originally a photographic studio, evolved in 1957 into Artray Film Productions. With Art Jones, Vic Spooner and Keith Cutler, Artray filmed TV commercials and a few industrial shorts, as well as shooting footage of football games and other events for various clients, notably TV stations in Washington State. Art Jones was involved in the application for Vancouver's first privately-owned TV station, and Artray produced a film to support the application. When the licence was granted for CHAN-TV, Artray was absorbed by the television company, whose commercial production arm still uses the name today.⁵⁹ British Columbia Television, which operates

⁵⁴ Other useful references about Lew Parry include Marjorie Brodie, "Movies: Sight, Sound and Salesmanship," *Western Business and Industry*, March 1953 pp.28-31; and R.A. Francis, "A West Coast Movie Maker Hits His Stride," *Canadian Business*, August 1955 pp.26-30.

⁵⁵ *CMPD*, 26 June 1948 p.2 and 3 July 1948 p.11.

⁵⁶ *CMPD*, 4 September 1948 p.8. Further details on Trans-Canada Films under Wally Hamilton can be found in the *Western Business and Industry* article cited above.

⁵⁷ *CMPD*, 18 September 1948 p.8, 2 April 1949 p.12, and 23 December 1950 p.26; Frank Fleming interviewed by the author, Surrey, 13 August 1985 (BC Archives tape T4215:1-3). Neither the NFB film (discussed in the April 1949 *CMPD* reference) nor the army training film (recalled by Fleming) is known by title.

⁵⁸ *CMPD*, 2 December 1950 p.2.

⁵⁹ Vic Spooner interviewed by the author, Surrey, 16 August 1985 (BC Archives tape T4215:9-10).

CHAN-TV, later made *The Incredible Forest* (1965-1966), a noteworthy series of 11 half-hour colour films produced for MacMillan and Bloedel. The films documented almost every facet of the forest industry in B.C., as well as the nature of the forest itself. This series rivals Parry's work on the Bridge River project as a body of films produced at one time for one sponsor.

Bill and Marguerite Roozeboom left Parry Films in 1958 and started Pageant Productions. In a relatively short span of time, they produced several industrial films for regional and national clients, including the BC Telephone Company, the Pacific Great Eastern Railway and the BC Department of Highways. Although Pageant was sold in 1965, the Roozebooms continued to operate as Bill Roozeboom Productions. Yet another company was Fortune Films, started in the early 1960s by CBUT-TV announcer and host Bob Fortune.

The most significant of the newer film companies emerged from the field of television. In 1960 KVO5-TV Bellingham, a Washington-based television station, established a film unit in Vancouver to produce TV commercials for its Canadian clients. Sales manager Jack Gettles and cameraman Vic Spooner set up the unit. In 1963 it became Canawest Film Productions, a KVO5 subsidiary. Studio, sound and animation facilities were added, and the staff expanded to deal with the growing number of commercial accounts. Around 1965, the Hanna-Barbera studio in Hollywood contracted Canawest to produce episodes of various television cartoon series. The series produced included *Abbott and Costello* and *The Beatles* and ultimately required a staff of 90 animators and artists. The animation work continued into the 1970s. In the latter half of the 1960s, Canawest also branched out into extensive production of industrial films and live-action television series, an expansion made possible in part by its acquisition of Master Films Ltd. in Calgary and the Roozeboom's Pageant Productions. Canawest was closed down in 1977 when the Canadian government's Bill C-58 removed the tax exemption formerly allowed on advertising purchased through American companies.⁶⁰

Non-British Columbia Companies. Film companies based outside the province frequently shot in B.C. and included it in films about national interests. Associated Screen News, controlled by Canadian Pacific Railways, was until the mid-1950s Canada's largest commercial film company. In the 1940s, the company continued to produce its travelogues emphasizing the CPR's rail, steamship and hotel operations, as well as the scenery of the Rockies and the west coast. Canadian Pacific Airways, the CPR's new airline service, was featured in a wartime film about its service to the Yukon and northern B.C. One production of particular interest is *NO MAN IS AN ISLAND* (ca. 1946-1949), which documented the various operations of the Consolidated Mining and

⁶⁰ Spooner interview. The acquisition of Master Films and Pageant Productions were announced in *Canadian Cinematography*, March/April 1964 p.20 and May/June 1965 p.21, respectively.

Smelting Company in the East Kootenays.⁶¹ In addition, Associated Screen News was for many years the primary source of B.C. newsreel footage, supplied by Vancouver-based ASN cameramen or stringers. Much of the extant footage of Canada's west coast gearing up for World War II was shot for ASN by Lucien Roy. Roy was killed in a 1942 plane crash while shooting material for the company.⁶² Ross Beesley, another ASN cameraman, pursued BC subjects vigorously. In just over a year, for instance, he shot 51 B.C. items for international distribution. Distributed to major newsreel producers through a pool system, ASN items were seen regularly in as many as 53 countries.⁶³

In the 1950s ASN was eclipsed as a Canadian commercial film operation by Crawley Films of Toronto. Crawley shot several films in B.C., including industrial shorts about the Kitimat development for the Aluminum Company of Canada. By 1965, the Canadian commercial film production market was being shared by many companies; there were five operating in Vancouver alone.⁶⁴

FILM PRODUCTION FOR TELEVISION

CBC Television and the CBUT Film Unit. The advent of television after World War II definitely cut into the audience for theatrical films. In other areas of film production, however, television's constant demand for new material would prove highly beneficial. In British Columbia, CBC Television brought about a renaissance of regional filmmaking at new levels of artistic and technical competence.

CBUT Vancouver, the fourth television station of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, went on the air in December 1953. Initially its facilities were very limited, as was its programming, largely made up of films supplied through the CBC's National Film Service. Local programs were meant to originate from mobile television units or from the one studio -- a converted garage with severe space limitations. At first, film production was restricted to news clips and "location" footage for insertion into studio programs.⁶⁵

Film was also used to make kinescope recordings (or "kines") of live television images, with a movie camera shooting the image on the screen of a TV monitor. Prior to videotape recording, this was the only way of preserving live television programs for later broadcast.⁶⁶ Since there was no direct network connection between Vancouver and

⁶¹ These travelogues and industrial films bear the name of Associated Screen Studios, ASN's production department; Associated Screen News was the newsreel operation.

⁶² *CMPD*, 5 December 1942 p.4.

⁶³ *CMPD*, 10 May 1947 p.10.

⁶⁴ *Canadian Film-TV Bi-Weekly Year Book*, 1965-66, pp.91-100.

⁶⁵ Stanley Fox, "We Are Where We Come From: The Founding of a Film Community in British Columbia," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 16, no.1 (Spring 1981), pp.26-27; Stephen Vizinczey, "Regionalism," *Canadian Art* 19, no.5 (1962), p.351.

⁶⁶ Kinescoped studio programs have been excluded from the filmography because they are not actually film productions.

the east, kinescopes were also the only form in which early CBUT productions could be shown in eastern Canada. The poor technical quality of these kines did little to promote the potential of CBUT or its production staff. Eastern viewers supposedly had a slogan: "If you can't see it, hear it, or understand it, it's from Vancouver."⁶⁷ In consequence, early CBUT productions received little exposure on the national network.

Film production was seen by CBUT's staff producers as a way of making network-quality programs and bypassing the limitations of the studio. The first CBUT program produced entirely on film was A PROFILE OF ETHEL WILSON, an interview with the Vancouver novelist, telecast in 1955.⁶⁸ The truly seminal production, however, was the internationally acclaimed SKIDROW. In discussing the state of Canadian filmmaking in 1958, Guy Glover wrote:

The CBC television staff in Vancouver has shown more than usual talent in its film activities, and in *Skid Row*, a short item on alcoholic derelicts . . . produced by Allan King and photographed by Jack Long in 1956, it produced a little masterpiece of documentary observation which struck a fresh and welcome note in Canadian film and television. This group has produced other items which have attempted a poetic film style, involving word and image in a more controlled relationship than that generally met with in the Canadian film, and, although the verbal material has tended to be over-literary and the visuals are often too slackly edited, these experiments are to be admired and encouraged.⁶⁹

SKIDROW is distinguished by a sense of willing involvement with its human subjects, by the directness of its presentation, and by its subjective, "personal" tone. True, the narration may be self-consciously poetic and the interviews seem staged; nonetheless, SKIDROW reveals a remarkable awareness of the capabilities of film, epitomizing the quality achieved in the best efforts of the Vancouver film unit.

Films from CBUT soon appeared on such national series as *Explorations* and *Here and There*. These were anthology programs which aired documentaries from the regional production centres. A broad range of social, cultural and economic concerns were reflected in CBUT's contributions -- films like THE JAPANESE CANADIANS (1960), HAIDA (1961) and THE DOUKHOBORS (1963), all for *Explorations*, and CATTLE DRIVE (1956), GYPPO LOGGERS (1957) and MICHEL (1957) for *Here and There*. Two

⁶⁷ Quoted in Pat Pearce, "A Salute to Vancouver's CBC Film Unit," *Montreal Star*, 15 August 1964 (entertainment section), p.15.

⁶⁸ Fox, "We Are Where Come From," p.27.

⁶⁹ Guy Glover, "Film," in *The Arts in Canada: A Stock-Taking at Mid-Century*, ed. Malcolm Ross (Toronto: MacMillan, 1958), p.108.

1960 productions for *Explorations* -- THE FOREST PATH and TO THE VOLCANO -- provided the first filmed study of the life of one-time Vancouver writer Malcolm Lowry.

Another network anthology series, *20/20*, was launched in the sixties and covered a similarly varied range of subjects; CBUT provided films about whaling, beachcombing, the curator of Stanley Park zoo, and journalist Jack Webster, among others. The religious documentary series *Heritage* drew some interesting programs from the Vancouver unit, including NO MORE STRANGERS (1958), about the United Church mission boats serving the B.C. coast.

CBUT also generated a number of its own series, including *Pacific 8*, *Pacific 13*, *Pacific Northwest Adventures*, *Discovery* and *Camera West*. Some of these were broadcast nationally as summer replacement programming. Flexible in content, they provided a "catch-all" for the eclectic interests of the Vancouver staff. Camera teams roamed from the Gulf Islands (THE ISLANDERS, 1965) to the slopes of Mount Fairweather on the Alaska/B.C. border (STEPS IN ICE, 1958), into the Yukon and the northwestern U.S., and as far afield as Tokyo. Among the more unusual subjects shot locally were films showing open-heart surgery on a three-year-old child (CARDIAC TEAM, 1963) and the use of LSD in psychiatric treatment (THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, 1964). Often, too, the Vancouver unit drew poetry from more prosaic subjects. WORD GAME (1961) attempted to portray the world-view of a five-year-old boy, and CITY SONG (1961) was an imaginative exploration of city life through folk songs, poetic narration and dramatized episodes. For the first time, British Columbia subjects were receiving vibrant and interesting treatment from filmmakers based in the region.

Aside from its various anthology film offerings, CBC Vancouver was also responsible for a few ongoing topical film series. The children's program *Follow Me* (1958-1960) was a series of 15-minute filmed visits to various places and institutions in the Vancouver area. *Web of Life* (1959-1961) was an ambitious and successful nature series which used footage shot in B.C., the U.S., Africa and elsewhere; it was also broadcast on British television. The agricultural programs *Country Calendar* and *Countrytime* made extensive use of filmed location segments, as did *Klahanie*, a long-running outdoors series which went on the air in 1965. In addition, *The 7 O'Clock Show*, a nightly regional magazine program, broadcast several of the short film essays produced by the unit, such as RODEO (1960) and JAPANESE GYMNASTS (1961).

CBC radio's durable reputation for high-quality drama also influenced the television operation. Vancouver had nurtured important elements of the Canadian radio drama tradition,⁷⁰ and there was considerable interest in television drama there. All the early productions were presented live (or "live to kinescope") from the studio, limiting what could reasonably be attempted. A few of the studio dramas used location

⁷⁰ For a discussion of radio drama in Vancouver before 1945, see Dennis J. Duffy, *Imagine Please: Early Radio Broadcasting in British Columbia*, Sound Heritage Series no. 38 (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1983), pp.73-82.

film segments to expand their scope. January 1959 saw the broadcast of Vancouver's first true film drama -- A BIT OF BARK, a philosophical drama directed by Ron Kelly and filmed on a beach near Sechelt. That same year Kelly wrote and directed two more dramatic films for CBC Vancouver: OBJECT MATRIMONY, a moving look at the loneliness of an elderly bachelor, and THE SEEDS, a visually stylish examination of gang violence which was never broadcast. Other filmed dramas included GUNS AND AMMO (1959, directed by Gene Lawrence), FIELD TRIP (1960, directed by Frank Goodship) and MY ENEMY (1962, directed by Michael Rothery). The importance of these films should be stressed, for like the radio plays and studio dramas, they gave exposure to west coast writers and actors, and provided a precedent for regional drama production.

The most distinctly British Columbian product of the CBC Vancouver film unit was the series *Cariboo Country* (1963-1966). These dryly humorous and quietly dramatic tales, set in and around the mythical community of Namko in the Chilcotin, grew from two studio teleplays written by Paul St. Pierre for the *Spectrum* anthology series in 1958. The first *Cariboo Country* series was broadcast in 1960, once again from the television studio. In 1963, producer/director Philip Keatley began to produce the series on film, with exteriors shot on location in the Chilcotin. A total of 16 filmed episodes were produced and telecast nationally on the drama anthology program *The Serial*. The two-episode EDUCATION OF PHYLLISTINE reappeared on *Festival* (in a one-hour version) and won a Canadian Film Award. *Festival* also aired, early in 1966, the apotheosis of *Cariboo Country*. HOW TO BREAK A QUARTERHORSE summarized the key values of the series: the unique character of the region and its people; the tenacity and grit of the small rancher and his family; the cautious antipathy of whites and Indians, and the wily sagacity of the native people, exemplified by the character of Ol' Antoine (played by Chief Dan George). Paul St. Pierre drew on his personal experience of the region to capture these qualities in his scripts, and Keatley's approach was sympathetic:

We are not trying to make a Hollywood style western. Hollywood can do that kind of story much better. But we do know something about documentary film and Paul knows the people of the Cariboo. . . . So we have blended these together to achieve what might be called a fictional documentary. I would be quite happy if after watching each half hour the viewers were not sure whether what they had seen was a play or a documentary.⁷¹

Cariboo Country was CBUT's first major effort at a filmed drama series. Its successor, *The Beachcombers*, which went on the air in 1972, today reaches a larger

⁷¹ *CBC Times* 14, no.36 (1964), p.2.

national and international audience and has achieved much greater commercial success. However, it is not nearly so sharp a mirror of its region as was *Cariboo Country*. According to film and television scholar Mary Jane Miller, the series

was completely consistent in its documentary flavour; its highly individualized characters; its topicality; its idiomatic, richly varied and adult dialogue; and its refusal to treat complex issues simply or to resolve them according to the recognized formula of the genre. Nearly a generation later it stands up very well to a second look.⁷²

With the *Cariboo Country* series and other projects, the CBC Vancouver film unit had reached a creative pinnacle. Even earlier, however, the quality of its work had become a "given" in Canadian film circles. In a 1962 article for *Canadian Art*, Stephen Vizinczey wrote that

some of the best work of the CBC is coming out of Vancouver. For *Camera Canada*, in the spring, CBUT produced a brilliant short film on the city (with commentary by a major poet, Earle Birney) which was far superior to the two accompanying shorts on Toronto and Montreal.⁷³

The filmmakers themselves were the key to the character and quality of these celebrated films, as Stanley Fox points out.

In the fifties, in CBC Vancouver, there was no ratings service. The CBC did not know, at that time, how many people were watching, and had no idea what their demographic makeup was. . . . And this gave rise to a situation where the producers and the creative people became stand-ins for the audience. I mean, what else could they do? They made the films that they *thought* would be of value, because the films were of value to them. . . . The ideology of the creators became terribly important.⁷⁴

According to Fox, the group's inspiration came from a number of sources: the traditions of CBC radio and the National Film Board; the "romantic spirit" of the west coast; the

⁷² Mary Jane Miller, "*Cariboo Country*: A Canadian Response to American Television Westerns," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1984), p.331. Miller sees *Cariboo Country* as a uniquely Canadian response to the ideals, mythologies and conventions of the western adventure series which figured prominently in North American TV programming during the period.

⁷³ Vizinczey, "Regionalism," p.351; the program referred to is A TALE OF THREE CITIES (1962).

⁷⁴ "The CBC Vancouver Film Unit: Reminiscence and Analysis" [panel discussion with Stanley Fox, Phil Keatley and Don Lytle], Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Canadian Radio and Television(ASCRT), Vancouver, 3 June 1983. [Sound recording] LAC (ASCRT Collection).

influential work of the earlier British documentarists and the "Free Cinema" group of the 1950s, who believed in film as an instrument for social change; and the international films screened by the Vancouver Film Society.

During the heyday of the unit, an impressive array of film talent passed through CBC Vancouver. There were the producer/directors -- the original group, including Daryl Duke, Allan King, Ron Kelly and Gene Lawrence, and later additions like Philip Keatley, Doug Gillingham, George Robertson (originally a writer), Gordon Babineau and Michael Rothery, as well as Tom Connochie, a prolific writer-director of public affairs, nature and outdoors programs. At various points in the unit's history, supervisory roles were held by Don Lytle, Daryl Duke and Stan Fox. The cameramen included Kelly Duncan, Roy Luckow, Bob Reid and John Seale, as well as freelancers Jack Long and Bob Elliott. Film editors included Arla Saare, John Fuller, Hajo Haderler, Ray Hall, and Shelah Reljic. Many of those involved would become respected names in Canadian filmmaking and broadcasting. The important creative contributions made by these people, particularly Arla Saare, Bob Reid and Jack Long, cannot be overstressed.

Another important factor in the unit's success was the atmosphere of creative freedom fostered by CBUT's original administration. It was abetted by the distance from the CBC's Toronto headquarters, by the newness of television as a medium, and by the willingness of the administration to give new film projects a chance.⁷⁵ By the mid-1960s, however, the CBC Vancouver film unit was feeling the negative effects of network control. Budgets were reduced, programs were scheduled into unproductive time slots, and films were forced to conform in content and style to network ideas about regional programming. Commercial style, audience demographics and national network appeal became the order of the day. Production of significant regional films at CBC Vancouver went on, at a reduced level, through into the 1970s.⁷⁶ Today film production there is almost entirely limited to the long-running *Beachcombers* series, and to the occasional regional drama or documentary special.

Other TV Film Production. Television also made extensive use of film for location news footage. It is difficult to assess the amount of film material shot at British Columbia television stations before the eventual switchover to electronic news-gathering with portable videotape equipment. By the end of 1965, eight television stations were operating in B.C., most making at least limited use of film. They were: CBUT Vancouver (which went on-air in 1953); CHEK Victoria (1956); CFJC Kamloops (1957); CHBC Kelowna (1957); CJDC Dawson Creek (1959); CHAN Vancouver (1960); CKPG

⁷⁵ Fox, "We Are Where We Come From," pp.26-32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* By 1966, CBC Vancouver had shot at least 150 separate films in B.C., in addition to the filmed series of *Cariboo Country* (16 episodes), *Follow Me* (40 episodes) and *Golf with Stan Leonard* (26 episodes). Several of the 39 episodes in the CBUT series *Web of Life* were filmed here. (A number of films which were shot by the unit outside B.C. have not been included in the filmography or in these figures). CBC crews from outside the province shot at least another 15 films in B.C.

Prince George (1961); and CFTK Terrace (1962). Television news film, where it has been preserved, provides valuable documentation of both major news stories and everyday local events.⁷⁷ CBUT had separate camera crews for news and eventually established a network of freelance stringers who supplied news items from other areas of the province.

Most commercial filmmakers saw television as an important potential market which could supplement their general production work. Several Canadian companies made proposals to produce weekly series, which were then seen as the lucrative and glamorous side of television work. However, the only non-CBC dramatic series to be produced in British Columbia during this period was *The Littlest Hobo*, about the adventures of a wandering German Shepherd named London. Financed and distributed by Storer Programs Inc. of New York, the series was shown on the CTV network and sold in syndication. The series was produced in 1963 and 1964 by Canamac Pictures Limited. Lew Parry was an associate producer, and about 34 episodes were shot at his North Vancouver studio, largely by his personnel. Another 30 episodes were shot at the Hollyburn Film Studios in West Vancouver with Parry's participation. Each episode had a different cast, often featuring well-known actors from American and Canadian actors. Location shooting took production crews into downtown Vancouver and all over the Lower Mainland. The greatest contribution of *The Littlest Hobo* was the work and experience it afforded local technicians and actors. The Sun claimed that the series "provided more local acting jobs in one season than CBC-TV has provided since it opened."⁷⁸ Whether or not this is true, *Hobo* was certainly the most substantial ongoing production effort in the province before the CBC's *Beachcombers* series started in 1972.

THEATRICAL FEATURE FILMS

Between 1940 and 1965 there was a general slump in feature film production in British Columbia. Although there were brief periods of promising activity in the 1940s and a few isolated productions in the 1960s, there was only a lot of talk in the intervening years. This was especially disappointing in light of the number of features that had been shot in B.C. previously. Between 1921 and 1926, for example, American

⁷⁷ Television news film has not been listed in the filmography due to the volume of material and the general paucity of documentation. The most important collection of B.C.-related material from before 1966 is that of CBUT News, presently stored at the Public Archives of Canada Record Centre in Burnaby, which comprises an estimated three million feet of film. Another large collection of later material is the CHEK-TV News Film collection at BC Archives, comprising selected material from the period 1974-1981.

⁷⁸ *Sun*, 2 June 1964 p.25 (column by Jack Wasserman). Other information on the series is from Lew Parry interviewed by David Mattison, 1981; the *Province*, 9 September 1963 p.8 and 14 January 1964 p.7; and Jack Ammon, "50 Years of Filmmaking in Vancouver Environs," *Variety*, 17 November 1971 p.28. The b&w filmed series of *The Littlest Hobo* shot in B.C. in 1963-1964 was later revived by its creators as a new syndicated series videotaped in colour in eastern Canada.

studios shot four features in the East Kootenay region,⁷⁹ and a similar number were shot in the Vancouver area in the 1920s. Victoria-based producer Kenneth Bishop, mainly under the control of Columbia Pictures, churned out 14 features for the British market between 1932 and 1937. Bishop's films were low-budget "quota quickies," made to exploit the British quota requiring exhibitors in that country to show a certain proportion of films made within the British Empire.⁸⁰ Taken all together, the Kootenay pictures, the quota quickies and the other features produced in B.C. before 1940 could not be said to comprise anything like a "feature film industry." Nevertheless, these films were remarkable in quantity (if not quality) given the time period.

Feature production in B.C. didn't even approach this scale in the years 1941-1965. The British quota system, its intent subverted by the quota quickies and by the indifference of the Canadian government, was revised in 1938 to exclude films made in the Dominions. The immediate result was that there was no longer any advantage to shooting in Canada, except for the scenery -- and the Hollywood studios generally found it simpler to shoot in the USA anyway.

Hollywood Backlot. The event that brought international features back to B.C. was the Second World War. In 1940 a British crew and cast under producer/director Michael Powell shot *49TH PARALLEL*, an anti-Nazi propaganda piece, at locations across western Canada. The film depicts the efforts of a German submarine crew, stranded when their U-boat is sunk in Hudson's Bay, to escape to Japan or into then-neutral U.S. territory. A number of scenes, including the original denouement of the film, were shot in Vancouver in early August. However, a change in the film's female leads necessitated plot alterations and as a result the Vancouver scenes were cut. In the released film, the submariners get only as far west as Banff.⁸¹

British Columbia's next appearance in a feature was a much more prominent one. In *COMMANDOS STRIKE AT DAWN*, shot entirely on southern Vancouver Island for Columbia Pictures, B.C. scenery posed as that of Nazi-occupied Norway. Saanich Inlet became a fjord, and a "Norwegian village" was built as the setting for this drama of anti-Nazi resistance. The production was based in Victoria; interior scenes were shot at Kenneth Bishop's old "quota quickie" studio, the exhibition building at Willows Exhibition Ground. In the commando raid of the title, the RCN's armed merchant cruiser *Prince David* played a Royal Navy vessel, and Canadian troops

⁷⁹ *HEARTS AFLAME* (1922) and *UNSEEING EYES* (1923) are described in the filmography supplement; *CONFLICT* (1921) and *THE FLAMING FOREST* (1926) are listed in Browne.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the quota quickies, see Browne, pp.25-28, and Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, pp.175-95.

⁸¹ For details about the Vancouver filming of *49TH PARALLEL*, see the *Province*, 31 July 1940 p.8, 2 August 1940 p.19, 5 August 1940 p.2, 8 August 1940 p.9, and 10 August 1940 pp.5 & 10. The cutting of the Vancouver scenes is reported in the *Province*, 22 November 1941 (magazine section) p.2 and *CPMD*, 14 February 1942 p.9. See also *New York Times*, 6 March 1942 p.17 (review by Bosley Crowther). The film was released in the USA as *THE INVADERS*.

stationed nearby appeared as both the German garrison and the British commandos. Paul Muni and Lillian Gish starred. The B.C. Government Travel Bureau, ever alert to publicity opportunities, rushed out a booklet entitled "Why British Columbia Was The Chosen Locale for 'Commandos Come at Dawn'." *COMMANDOS* was released in 1942, earlier than planned, to capitalize on public interest in the Dieppe Raid.⁸²

Vancouver Island portrayed Norway for a second time when background and battle footage was shot there for another war film, *FIRST COMES COURAGE* (Columbia, 1943).⁸³ In 1944, Patricia Bay airfield became an RAF aerodrome for *SON OF LASSIE* (MGM, 1945). In that film, RAF flier Peter Lawford and his dog Laddie bailed out over an occupied Norway composed of the Rocky Mountains and, once again, the shores of Saanich Inlet. The main action of the picture is best described by a New York reviewer.

A great canine for traveling long distances, Laddie braves snipers, bombings, hand grenades, a ferocious police dog, glaciers and raging rapids to seek out his adoring owner.⁸⁴

As "B-grade" as these war films sound, they are a part of B.C.'s thin heritage of feature film production.

There was little production of consequence in the late 1940s or the 1950s. In 1946 there was talk of "full-length moving pictures" to be shot in the Victoria area by Dominion Productions, which also had plans to construct a studio in Vancouver by the end of 1948. The pictures and the studio scheme both came to nought.⁸⁵ In February 1947, director Sidney Salkow of Columbia Pictures visited B.C. to investigate locations for a film version of *Smoke Bellew*, Jack London's novel of the Klondike Gold Rush. Stars were announced and three possible sites were selected -- Forbidden Plateau, the Revelstoke area and Lake Atlin. But *Smoke Bellew* never went before the cameras in B.C.⁸⁶ These are but two examples of the many abortive projects which characterized this period.

⁸² See J.M.S. Careless, "Submarines, Princes and Hollywood Commandos, or At Sea in B.C.," *B.C. Studies*, no. 45 (Spring 1980), pp.11-15. Numerous references to the filming of *COMMANDOS* can be found in the *Victoria Times* and *Daily Colonist*, 3 July - 11 September 1942.

⁸³ *Times*, 18 March 1943 p.2; *Colonist*, 19 March 1943 p.11. A column by John Cass in the *Nanaimo Daily Free Press*, 23 November 1973 p.2W, indicates that footage for "Attack At Night" [the working title of *FIRST COMES COURAGE*] was shot at Camp Nanaimo and at an amphibious training school near Courtenay.

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, 11 June 1945 p.12 (review by A.H. Weiler). For details on the filming of the picture, see the numerous references in the *Victoria Times* and *Daily Colonist*, 25 July - 28 August 1944.

⁸⁵ *Colonist*, 30 October 1946 p.17 and 8 November 1946 p.5; *CMPD*, 16 November 1946 p.9. Dominion Productions Ltd., headed by Geoffrey Wood, did produce *BUSH PILOT* (1946), the first postwar Canadian feature film; see *Canadian Feature Films 1913-1969: Part 2, 1941-1963*, p.1.

⁸⁶ *Colonist*, 14 February 1947 p.1 and 18 February 1947 p.3; *Victoria Times*, 30 July 1947 p.15.

After the war, Canadian filmmakers and businessmen had approached Ottawa for financial assistance to establish studios for domestic feature film production. They were concerned about the Canadian box office dollars that were being siphoned off by Hollywood through the American-owned theatre chains. Instead of supporting domestic production, Ottawa chose to back the Canadian Co-Operation Project, a plan hatched in Hollywood to mollify Canadian interests and maintain Canada as an extension of the American film market. In simple terms, Ottawa traded the ideal of a Canadian feature film industry for minimal location shooting in Canada by Hollywood, some tourist shorts about Canada, and myriad token references to Canada inserted in American scripts. Promoted as a boost to Canadian production, the project in fact ensured the continuing domination of Hollywood.⁸⁷

One of the films spawned by this deal was CANADIAN PACIFIC (Nat Holt Productions, 1948). This wildly distorted account of the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway was shot in western Canada in the summer of 1948, with a two-week stint in the Rockies that included scenes at Kicking Horse Pass and Yoho Valley. Randolph Scott played a gun-slinging American surveyor brought in to oversee the construction of the railway through the mountains.⁸⁸ At year's end producer Nat Holt announced his plans to shoot a second film from Canadian history. The next summer, director Edwin L. Marin scouted locations in the Cariboo. But CARIBOO TRAIL (1949), which twisted the history of the Cariboo much as CANADIAN PACIFIC had rewritten the story of the CPR, was ultimately filmed in Colorado. The reason given was that it was more costly to shoot in Canada. In fact, the film's depiction of a lawless cattle country is so fictional that one wonders why the director even bothered to visit the Cariboo.⁸⁹

The popularity of B.C. as a feature location was waning. In 1949, a few scenes and backgrounds were shot in Vancouver for a drug-running drama released as JOHNNY STOOL PIGEON (Universal, 1949). Wally Hamilton's Trans-Canada Films provided local production assistance.⁹⁰ A long lull followed until the summer of 1954, when a Republic Pictures crew arrived in Victoria to shoot TIMBERJACK. Considerable footage was shot at Cowichan Lake before the company decided that another location would be "more suitable." The publicity for the film on its release bore the legend

⁸⁷ For details on the Canadian Co-Operation Project, see Pierre Berton, *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of Our National Image* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), pp.169-91.

⁸⁸ *CMPD*, 25 September 1948 p.8; Berton, pp.208-11. According to Berton, CANADIAN PACIFIC was a rehash of John Ford's *THE IRON HORSE* (1924) and Cecil B. DeMille's *UNION PACIFIC* (1939), both of which dealt with the building of the American transcontinental railway. CANADIAN PACIFIC premised a lawless Canadian frontier and the interference of warlike Indian tribes while completely omitting the presence of the Northwest Mounted Police.

⁸⁹ *Province*, 20 July 1949 p.5, 1 August 1949 p.6 and 12 August 1949 p.5; *CMPD*, 25 December 1948 p.51 and 27 August 1949 p.8. For a discussion of this film's version of the Cariboo, see Berton, pp.207-8.

⁹⁰ *CMPD*, 19 March 1949 p.12; *Province*, 9 March 1949 p.6. Dan Duryea and Tony Curtis visited Vancouver for the local premiere of *JOHNNY STOOL PIGEON*; see the *Province*, 27 July 1949 pp.1 & 2. The working title of the film was "Contraband."

"filmed in Rugged Montana"; whether British Columbia had proved insufficiently rugged is not known.⁹¹ For whatever reason, the province did not play host to another American or British feature for a full decade.

North American Productions. On the domestic front, one local production company thought that they had found a potential market for dramatic films. North American Productions was formed in 1945 by Vancouver stage and radio actor Jack Ammon, who had a long-time interest in filmmaking. Ammon's plan was to produce 16mm entertainment films for circulation through various North American film exhibition circuits such as those operated by the National Film Board during World War II. At least four films went into production. Two were skiing comedies (DOPE ON THE SLOPES and CO-EDS ON SKIS). A children's fantasy, THE CHANGELING PRINCESS, was shot in Stanley Park; RENEGADE GOLD, a western bandit adventure, was filmed in the Fraser Canyon area. Ammon drew actors and production staff from the ranks of Vancouver's active Little Theatre and broadcasting community. Three films were in production by the end of 1947, a distributor was found in New York and further filming on Vancouver Island was planned. However, the 16mm exhibition circuits that the company had been depending on were largely meant to serve wartime ends; most were disbanded, and North American Productions no longer had a market.⁹²

Panorama/Commonwealth/Hollyburn. The next bid for locally-based feature film production had a longer and much more convoluted history. Panorama Productions Limited was founded in Vancouver in 1956, with Czech immigrant Oldrich Vaclavek as president and executive producer. The company announced plans for "My Lord Cowboy," a western to be shot in the Kamloops area, and another film based on the life of World War I flying ace Billy Bishop. Nothing came of either project, although Panorama did do some shooting in the Skeena in 1956 for a film on the Indians of the region.⁹³

The company was reorganized in 1959, and in 1960 Vaclavek revealed plans for a \$4 million development on Hollyburn Ridge in West Vancouver: a television and feature film studio with a film processing laboratory and a recording studio, complemented by luxurious residential facilities and a nine-hole golf course. Vaclavek's

⁹¹ The advertisement referred to is in *CMPD*, 26 February 1955 pp.8-9. For details on the abortive Vancouver Island filming of *TIMBERJACK*, see the *Colonist*, 8 June 1954 p.1, 11 June 1954 p.13, 14 July 1954 p.11, 5 August 1954 p.6 and 1 September 1954 p.20; *Times*, 23 August 1954 p.20 and 31 August 1954 p.9; and *CMPD*, 14 June 1954 p.4.

⁹² *CMPD*, 29 December 1945 p.6, 31 August 1946 p.13, 7 December 1946 p.12, 9 March 1947 p.11 and 11 October 1947 p.8; *Canadian Film Weekly*, 7 May 1947 p.8; *Sun*, 15 May 1947 p.3; Jack Ammon, "50 Years of Filmmaking in Vancouver Environs," *Variety*, 17 November 1971 p.28. The Vancouver Island plans are referred to in the *Colonist*, 9 March 1947 p.1.

⁹³ *CMPD*, 26 May 1956 pp.1 & 4; *Sun*, 30 May 1956 p.2 and 5 February 1960 p.8. The Skeena filming is discussed briefly in the *Nechako Chronicle*, 6 October 1956.

plan was "to lease modern studio facilities for the making of outdoor action adventure films for [the] International TV market by American and British Companies."⁹⁴ The developer for the project was Panorama Estates Limited, backed by British capital. In November 1961 Panorama won municipal approval to begin construction of its sound stages. Plans were announced for two films to be made in the spring of 1962 by a sister company, Commonwealth Film Productions Limited. James Clavell was brought in to act as producer, director and screenwriter.⁹⁵ Before long a fistful of new companies were involved, including Hollyburn Film Productions Ltd. (a British-controlled production company) and separate organizations to handle western and eastern hemisphere distribution of the studio's output. Vaclavik told *Sun* columnist Les Wedman that "with a pipeline now laid to the world's movie screens, Commonwealth will make four to eight features here per year to fill that pipeline."⁹⁶

The premiere production, *THE SWEET AND THE BITTER*, went before the camera in June 1962 and was shot in 23 days at locations throughout West Vancouver and Vancouver; the Panorama studios were not ready for use.⁹⁷ Based on a story by Vancouver's E.G. Perrault, *THE SWEET AND THE BITTER* was suggested by the internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War II. But the film was mainly a melodrama, with an improbable story line centring on a Japanese girl who comes to Canada seeking revenge for the wartime treatment of her father. As *Movie Marketing* magazine put it,

Clavell has updated the story 20 years, downgraded the evacuation injustice and upgraded love interest into another whore story. The heart of this Japanese Suzie Wong, although perhaps not 24-carat, is golden enough to melt as usual before the final fadeout.⁹⁸

Commonwealth's hopes for the film were high enough that they talked of budgeting their next project at \$2 million and shooting it in colour. "At the Break of the Waves There is Madness Beyond" (originally entitled "No Hands on the Clock") was rescheduled for the spring of 1963. This was ostensibly done in anticipation of a larger following for Clavell after the release of the film *THE GREAT ESCAPE* (which he scripted) and the publication of his novel *King Rat*. Meanwhile *THE SWEET AND THE*

⁹⁴ *Sun*, 5 February 1960 p.8.

⁹⁵ *Province*, 29 November 1961 p.15; *Sun*, 30 December 1961 p.25. James Clavell is probably best-known for his novel *Shogun*, published in 1980 and made into a television mini-series.

⁹⁶ *Sun*, 20 March 1962 p.7. Panorama Estates would lease its studio facilities to Hollyburn and Commonwealth, the two production companies. Commonwealth controlled Intercontinental Pictures Inc. (the western hemisphere distribution company) and held interest in Anglo-Canadian Film Corporation (the eastern hemisphere distributor). See also Laurence Nowry, "Introducing Commonwealth Film," *Movie Marketing*, August 1962, pp.5 & 7.

⁹⁷ *Sun*, 9 July 1962 p.9. For a description of one of the film's location shoots, see the *Sun*, 8 June 1962 p.31.

⁹⁸ Nowry, "Introducing Commonwealth Film," cited above. See also *Canadian Feature Films, Part 2*, p.14.

BITTER was set to premiere in London in January 1963. But January brought the eviction of Commonwealth Productions from the Panorama studios; in England, post-production work on the film was halted. Commonwealth cited financial problems caused by delays in the studio construction.⁹⁹ Hollyburn Film Studios Ltd., a new company run by Alan Houghton and Art Jones, then moved into the studio. Production at the facility was finally inaugurated when the *Littlest Hobo* TV series moved there from the Parry Films studio. In 1964, Houghton announced further construction to facilitate upcoming productions -- three feature films and three television series, none of which materialized.¹⁰⁰

The studio at last hosted its first feature film in the autumn of 1965. Production of *THE TRAP* (Parallel Productions/J. Arthur Rank, 1966) was touted as the first joint English and Canadian film venture. Exteriors were shot at Bowen Island and Birkenhead Lake, and the government's *Beautiful British Columbia* magazine published a photo story on the production. With stars Oliver Reed and Rita Tushingham in a rugged pioneer adventure story set amid spectacular scenery, *THE TRAP* (it was hoped) might turn around the luck of the local film industry. There were disturbing asides, however. Much of the film's technical and creative staff was imported from Britain or the U.S; the producers complained that the studio management was un-cooperative; and a few shots needed to complete the film had to be done in Scotland.¹⁰¹

At the end of 1965, Hollyburn's lease on the studios was cancelled. Oldrich Vaclavek returned to manage the facility for Panorama, although no productions were planned. The *Sun*'s Les Wedman wrote: "The proverbial snowball, it would seem, has more chance of resisting hellfire than a motion picture industry has a chance of getting going here."¹⁰² In 1967 *THE SWEET AND THE BITTER*, mired for five years in a legal and financial morass, was finally released. Columbia distributed it in Canada, with the idea that a successful B.C. run would open the door to a U.S. release. The film played for one week at Vancouver's Orpheum Theatre and sank back into oblivion. A few days before the premiere, Himie Koshevoy of the *Province* described the Panorama studio as "the empty cradle of B.C.'s film industry," whose "buildings drowse in the sun as useless as the weather-silvered shacks of a ghost town."¹⁰³

By the late 1960s, however, the studio was again seeing occasional use. The recent increase in feature production in Vancouver has meant more frequent shooting at

⁹⁹ *Sun*, 26 July 1962 p.18 and 12 October 1962 p.15; *Province*, 19 January 1963 p.1.

¹⁰⁰ *Province*, 19 January 1963 p.1 and 14 January 1964 p.17; *Sun*, 2 May 1964 p.56 and 2 June 1964 p.25.

¹⁰¹ *Sun*, 14 February 1966 p.12 (column by Les Wedman). For coverage of the filming of *THE TRAP* (working title "Deep is the Forest"), see the *Sun*, 23 September 1965 p.18, 24 September 1965 p.31, 2 October 1965 p.13 and 16 October 1965 p.10, and *Canadian Cinematography*, November/December 1965 p.7. See also *Beautiful British Columbia*, Spring 1967, pp.12-16.

¹⁰² *Sun*, 14 February 1966 p.12.

¹⁰³ *Province*, 19 June 1967 p.25.

Hollyburn, but it has never become the fully-appointed studio complex that was once envisioned.

Larry Kent. While Vaclavek, Houghton and others were struggling to generate international film business on Hollyburn Ridge, a UBC student was toiling away in Vancouver on a group of shoestring-budget but all-Canadian features. Larry Kent had little money and less experience, but he did have the ambition and nerve necessary to attempt a film career in Canada in the early 1960s. This desire animated his first feature, *THE BITTER ASH* (1963), produced for a paltry \$5,000 while Kent was in his fourth year at UBC. Kent recovered his costs in two weeks of UBC screenings and went on to show the film at universities across the country. Audiences may have been drawn in part by the film's celebrated semi-nude sex scene, but they were bemused by its apparent pretentiousness and crude production values. Several screenings were banned or stopped midway, and the film was panned by audiences and critics alike -- but for Kent, it was a qualified success.¹⁰⁴

Kent's second feature, *SWEET SUBSTITUTE* (1964), dealt with the sexual yearnings of a teenage boy. Again a miniscule budget precluded payment of the cast and crew (although veteran editor Shelah Reljic cut the film). With a script partly based on improvised dialogue and a "troubled-youth" theme, *SWEET SUBSTITUTE* was praised by some critics when it was released in the USA as *CARESED*. After the New York Film Festival screening, a *New York Times* reviewer called the film "an admirably wrought but insular drama," and Kent "a man to watch." Canadian critics were not as well-disposed toward the film, although it did receive favourable attention at the Montreal Film Festival.¹⁰⁵

WHEN TOMORROW DIES (1965) was financed through the sale of shares, and for the first time Kent was able to pay his cast and crew. A more professional-looking film resulted. However, the film was hampered by an inadequate script about a frustrated housewife searching for herself in the face of her family's indifference. Critical response was divided. *Take One* found the film "too embarrassingly bad to be funny," but in winning the 1966 B.C. Centennial Film Competition, it was cited for "skill in the reproduction of the ordinary fabric of ordinary lives." Kent himself felt that

¹⁰⁴ *Canadian Feature Films, Part 2*, p.16. For details of the controversy surrounding the premiere screenings of *THE BITTER ASH* at UBC, see *The Ubyyssey*, 8 October 1963 p.3, 11 October 1963 pp.1-3 & 7, 16 October 1963 p.1 and 22 October 1963 p.3.

¹⁰⁵ *New York Times*, 16 September 1965 p.54 (review by Howard Smith); *Canadian Feature Films 1913-1969: Part 3, 1964-1969*, p.5; *The Ubyyssey*, 22 September 1964 p.3, 2 October 1964 p.7 and 9 October 1964 p.7. *CARESED*, the USA release of *SWEET SUBSTITUTE*, integrated a number of changes apparently made by the American distributor without Kent's approval. These included a gratuitous "erotic dream sequence" which was added much to the chagrin of the Vancouver leads; in an interview, Kent called the sequence "atrocious and stupid." See *Objectif*, no.37 (November/December 1966), p.21, and the *Sun*, 6 November 1965 p.33 (column by Jack Wasserman).

WHEN TOMORROW DIES was a total failure. The film was blown up to 35mm for a theatrical release that never took place.¹⁰⁶

Kent moved to Montreal to shoot his fourth feature, HIGH (1967), which achieved a familiar notoriety. Peter Morris groups HIGH with FACADE (1968) and FLEURE BLEUE/THE APPRENTICE (1970) as Kent's best films.¹⁰⁷ In 1984, the three Vancouver features and HIGH were screened within the "Northern Lights" retrospective of Canadian film at Toronto's Festival of Festivals. According to Dot Tuer, the screenings were "a bitter-sweet requiem for what should be widely distributed films by one of the major and currently eclipsed talents of Canadian cinema." Tuer described THE BITTER ASH as "perhaps the most remarkable of [Kent's] cinematic achievements" and "an inspirational example for any filmmaker struggling to make independent films in Canada."¹⁰⁸ Another eloquent tribute to Kent's audacity comes from Jack Darcus, a contemporary who continues to make feature films on the west coast.

The guy was a madman to think he could do what he did, but none of us would be making films in Vancouver if Larry hadn't gotten off his arse and made the first one. He just stood up one day, declared himself a genius, and did it. You can do that in Vancouver.¹⁰⁹

Viewed today, THE BITTER ASH has a kind of rude power that transcends its obvious technical and dramaturgical limitations. If one criticizes it for these latter qualities, one must also acknowledge the merit the film deserves for being created at all.

INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS

Larry Kent was only one of the people who made films outside the established institutional, governmental or commercial channels. The advent of 16mm film (and later 8mm) had placed movie equipment within the reach of many interested individuals. Some were content to shoot home movies of their families, friends, travels and surroundings; others were interested in making fuller use of film for its documentary or expressive potential. Ultimately, of course, both kinds of film can be of considerable interest. There is a good deal of fascinating amateur footage of B.C. from the 1920s and

¹⁰⁶ *Canadian Feature Films, Part 3*, p.12; *Take One*, September/October 1966 p.24 (review by Joe Medjuck); *Canadian Cinematography*, September/October 1966 p.5; *Objectif*, no.37 (November/December 1966), p.23. To be fair, one should add that WHEN TOMORROW DIES has more recently been described as a "ground-breaking film [which] is uncommonly perceptive concerning the contradictory condition facing the independent woman in a sexist society." Piers Handling, "Front and Centre" [program notes], *Festival of Festivals: Toronto's 9th Annual International Film Festival, September 6-15, 1984* (Toronto: World Film Festival of Toronto Inc., 1984), p.134.

¹⁰⁷ Morris, *The Film Companion*, p.163.

¹⁰⁸ Dot Tuer, "The Resurrection of Larry Kent," *Cinema Canada*, no.112 (November 1984), p.15.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in A. Ibranyi-Kiss, "Filmmaking West Coast Style," *Cinema Canada*, no.13 (April/May 1974), p.42.

1930s,¹¹⁰ and the tradition was carried on by many individuals in the 1940s and 1950s. In recent years some interesting films have been created using archival amateur footage.¹¹¹

The Victoria Amateur Movie Club, founded in 1934, sponsored such ambitious projects as *A CITY AT WORK* (1953), *MUNGO MARTIN MAKES A MASK* (1953), and a planned series on juvenile delinquency. Photographer Douglas Flintoff, who was involved in most of the club's projects, undertook small commissions such as filming Hatley Park for a real estate company and producing *LITTLE RAYS OF SUNSHINE* (ca.1937) to raise funds for a children's hospital.¹¹²

The Vancouver Film Society was founded in 1936 as the Vancouver Branch of the National Film Society of Canada. Although it was primarily involved in the exhibition of films, it also fostered an interest in filmmaking activity. Founding members Oscar and Dorothy Burritt were the best-known filmmakers within the group. Oscar, freelance cameraman Don Lytle and some other society members had plans to start a company called Coast Films, but World War II intervened and *STANLEY PARK* (1939) was their sole joint production.¹¹³ In the 1940s, both Burritt and Lytle worked for Leon Shelly at Vancouver Motion Pictures. Dorothy Burritt (nee Fowler) collaborated with Margaret Roberts on *AND* (194-), perhaps the first "experimental" film made in B.C.¹¹⁴ Dorothy's *SUITE TWO* (1947) received honourable mention at the first Canadian Film Awards ceremony. In 1949-50, Peter Varley and Stan Fox made *IN THE DAYTIME*, an impressionistic portrait of life in Vancouver on a summer day. Fox, like fellow film society members Phil Keatley, Allan King and Don Lytle, went on to work at the CBC Vancouver Film Unit. Yet another amateur film recognized at the Canadian Film Awards was Anthony Collins' documentary on bell-ringing at Holy Rosary Cathedral, *RINGERS REQUIRED* (1960).

A few other amateurs were able to cross over into professional or semi-professional filmmaking. Ken West and Roth Gordon made *RESERVOIRS IN THE SKY*

¹¹⁰ Some particularly interesting collections of amateur film from before 1941 have been rediscovered since the publication of the Browne catalogue. They include footage of Britannia Beach and Britannia Mine shot by C.P. Browning, 1926-1941; the A.H. DeWolf collection, showing logging and related activity in the East Kootenays; and some fascinating film of riverboats and placer mining on the Stikine River, ca. 1933-35. [2016 note: The latter footage was shot by Joseph J. Jackson.] All three collections now reside at the BC Archives. For further details see the 1898-1940 supplement.

¹¹¹ Two excellent examples from B.C. are Sandy Wilson's *GROWING UP AT PARADISE* (1977), a charming portrait of the filmmaker's family through her father's home movies, and Sheila Whincup's *THE FISH TRAPS OF SOOKE* (Sooke Region Museum, 1983), which skillfully combines archival film, modern-day footage, still photographs and oral history material.

¹¹² Margaret Sharcott, "Pioneer Movie Maker Douglas Flintoff saw birth of Victoria Amateur Movie Club," *Colonist*, 9 July 1967 pp.5 & 7; *Times*, 21 November 1968 p.33. In 1929 Flintoff had set up British Picture Producers Ltd. to produce educational films; only one film, *FOREST ADVENTURES IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST* (1930), is known to have been completed.

¹¹³ Don Lytle, telephone conversation with the author, 13 November 1985.

¹¹⁴ John Porter, "Artists Discovering Film: Post-War Toronto," *Vanguard*, Summer 1984, p.24. The Burritts later moved to Toronto, where they helped to found the Toronto Film Society; Oscar Burritt organized the CBC Toronto film department.

for the Greater Vancouver Water Board and INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE (1945-1946), a film on the opportunities offered at B.C. schools. Gordon had also made INVESTMENT IN TOMORROW (ca. 1944) for the Community Chest of Greater Vancouver, and West later produced BURNABY, THE NEW HEART (1953-1954) for the Burnaby Junior Chamber of Commerce.¹¹⁵

The general increase in local and national film activity fostered a growing interest in film as an art form. The Vancouver International Film Festival frequently included the work of amateur filmmakers in its programs. The most original local talent to emerge was cartoonist Al Sens, whose animated film THE PUPPET'S DREAM (1959) won the amateur category at the 1960 Festival. Sens established an animation studio where he undertook commercial work and commissions, as well as his own anarchic and witty films, notably THE SORCERER (1960), THE PLAYGROUND (1964) and THE SEE HEAR TALK THINK DREAM AND ACT FILM (1965). The world of Sens' films has been described as

a world peopled by wizards, psychopathic killers, fools, soothsayers, nebbishes, idlers, sex maniacs and many other strangely recognizable characters. Lust, greed, brutality, apathy, and any number of elaborately silly pastimes preoccupy the vast majority of these inhabitants, who thereby render themselves completely oblivious to the odd miracle when it does occur. From time to time, philosophically minded dogs deliver themselves of pointed aphorisms, to little avail.¹¹⁶

Sens continues to make films today for the NFB and commercial sponsors. His studio, Al Sens Animated Films, remains a focus for animation production on the west coast.

Another entrepreneur of quite a different sort was Frank Fleming, a radio broadcaster who had worked briefly for Wally Hamilton's Trans-Canada Films. Fleming saw a potential market for moving background footage in television commercials and started the Teleflex Library of TV film backgrounds, a collection of 250 film clips which he created and leased to TV stations. He also produced three short films, including THE LAND BEHIND (1965), in which an original system of lenses and prisms created shifting abstract patterns of coloured light. In later years Fleming designed and marketed an improved reflex front projection system that he sold to TV stations in Canada and the United States.¹¹⁷

By the late 1950s, short workshop courses in filmmaking were being taught at UBC by Stan Fox. Although no actual films came out of the workshop itself, enthusiastic students banded together occasionally to produce films on their own. These student

¹¹⁵ Lew Parry interviewed by the author, 1985; *Sun*, 21 May 1954 p.12.

¹¹⁶ "Al Sens: Cartoons from Magic Kingdoms," [Pacific Cinematheque information sheet, n.d.]

¹¹⁷ Frank Fleming interviewed by the author, 1985.

productions included Werner Aellen's *PAPER CHASE* (1959), which received a Canadian Film Award, and *LIVING ROOM LEARNING* (1960). Richard Leiterman, a cameraman on the latter film, became one of Canada's foremost cinematographers, shooting numerous major documentaries and some recent features.

The most unorthodox filmmaker to come out of the Vancouver art milieu of the early 1960s was Sam Perry. Perry was influenced by Oriental mysticism, by the ideas of the American experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage, and by his own experiments with hallucinogenic drugs. Collaborating with musician Al Neil, Perry staged "light shows" which incorporated film loops and complex imagery. Perry committed suicide in 1966. While none of his work is known to have survived, he is considered to be a pivotal figure in the development of Vancouver's avant-garde cinema.¹¹⁸

While there is apparently little in common among such diverse filmmakers as Douglas Flintoff, Dorothy Burritt, Al Sens, Frank Fleming and Sam Perry, they did share an abiding interest in film and a desire to express themselves personally through the medium, working outside of the existing institutions for film production. The uniqueness of Vancouver's films in later years is a result of the freedom enjoyed by independent filmmakers.¹¹⁹ These people represent an early manifestation of a film tradition that has emerged progressively since 1965. Through the arid years of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the independent and experimental filmmakers of Vancouver kept alive the idea of a vital film community on the west coast.

BRITISH COLUMBIA ON FILM

The tree was heavily featured in early Canadian documentaries, and the Canadian cameraman became the world's leading expert on the photographing of wood and wood products.

-- Donald Brittain¹²⁰

Now it may be that the subject dearest to some filmmaker's heart, the burning light at the centre of his soul, is the expression of an abstract concept which he calls "Canada". It seems to me that he will make a film about this or that person in this or that place. (At worst he might try to make a film about a river, God save him!)

-- Allan King¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Al Razutis, "Recovering Lost History: Vancouver Avant-Garde Cinema 1960-1969," *Vancouver: Art and Artists* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery), pp.162-63; Tony Reif, "West Coast Filmmaking, 1: History," in *Self Portrait*, ed. Pierre Veronneau and Piers Handling (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1980), p.124.

¹¹⁹ Kirk Tougas, "West Coast Filmmaking, 2: Perspectives," *Self Portrait*, p.140.

¹²⁰ Donald Brittain (writer/director), *DREAMLAND: A HISTORY OF EARLY CANADIAN MOVIES, 1895-1939*, produced by the Great Canadian Moving Picture Company with the assistance of the NFB, 1974.

There are a good many Canadian films which feature trees or rivers (in some cases both); and for better or worse, a lot of them have been made in British Columbia.¹²² The filmed image of the province has always been mediated primarily by the twin concerns of industry and tourism. This was particularly true in the years 1941 through 1965, a period of great industrial expansion and economic growth. The films of this period focus on the scope of industrial activities, setting forth the idea of British Columbia as a budding industrial giant. As in earlier efforts, the viewer's attention is drawn to the height of the trees, the size of the catch, the gross output of the mill or the mine. But with the increase in local manufacturing activity, brought on partly by World War II, there appeared in the films a corresponding emphasis on the processing of raw materials. B.C. was no longer presented just as a source of lumber and ore, but as a place where things were produced and constructed. This marked a definite departure from the old idea of British Columbia as an undeveloped hinterland where only Vancouver and Victoria enjoyed the benefits of modern civilization. These changing notions are reflected in the opening narration of the NFB's *GATEWAY TO ASIA* (1945):

To many eastern Canadians, the Pacific was long a little-known world. Some even imagined Vancouver as a sort of back door to a country that faced the Atlantic. Now Canada is a Pacific power as well.¹²³

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the travelogues of the 1940s and 1950s is their dependence on stereotyped perceptions of the province, often reinforcing notions which had been promulgated since the turn of the century. The Pacific coast seemed to lend itself to such clichés, with Vancouver and Victoria bearing the unfortunate brunt. One striking example is a short on Victoria shot in 1940 for Universal's *Going Places* newsreel series. Charles W. Herbert, the freelance cameraman, chose as his hook the now-familiar idea of "A Little Bit of Old England," and proceeded to shoot only those aspects of Victoria that fit into this approach. The film depicted boys' and girls' private schools, retired gentlemen reading English newspapers, a dinner served at the mock-Tudor Royal Oak Inn, and examples of the English style in homes and gardens. Even the out-takes from Herbert's film reveal a remarkably narrow selection of subject matter. The scenes of Cowichan Indian carvers and weavers at the Koksila trading post seem nothing more than token bits of Canadiana. It is worth noting that the *Going Places*

¹²¹ Allan King, "Canadian-Cinema-Vancouver," in *How to Make or Not to Make a Canadian Film*, ed. Andre Paquet (Montreal: La Cinematheque Canadienne, 1967).

¹²² Many of the ideas discussed in this section developed from recent conversations with Colin Browne, who at the time of this writing was doing research for a film about Vancouver's depiction in early newsreels and travelogues. [2016 note: This film was released as *THE IMAGE BEFORE US* (NFB, 1986).]

¹²³ Quoted in Colin Browne, "Film Proposal: Silver Screen Vancouver," 5 August 1985 [unpublished typescript], p.5.

footage was shot with the full co-operation of the National Film Board and the BC Government Travel Bureau.¹²⁴

Vancouver was also burdened by clichés when it appeared on film -- sometimes to a laughable degree. *CANADIAN PATTERN* (ASN, 1953), for example, devotes only 1-1/2 of its 32 minutes to Vancouver, but in that time delivers a fusillade of trite labels: "Doorway to the Orient and Australia," "Evergreen Playground," "Gateway to the Pacific," "Home of the Princess Ships," "Metropolis of the West," "Rail's End" and "Westcoast Rampart."¹²⁵ These could just as easily be the titles of films about B.C., whose cinematic geography included a "Mountain Playground," an "Orchard Playground" and an "Island Playground" (on which was situated, of course, "The City of Sunshine and Flowers"). These films embraced the unabashed boosterism of pre-World War I land promotion literature, and they required a similar state of innocence or naiveté on the part of the viewer.

Even the content and structure of travel films were codified by stereotypes. Two films on the same subject made 20 years apart would predictably highlight the same features, photographed from almost identical angles.¹²⁶ The narration in such films is usually redundant to the visuals, and tends towards the cute or the bombastic; apparently it was simpler to traffic in banalities than to interpret the image or let it speak for itself. One pungent example is *VANCOUVER ISLAND: BRITISH COLUMBIA'S ISLAND PLAYGROUND* (1942), the first sound film made by the BC Government Travel Bureau. The narration of the film is so laden with bromides that it is difficult, from a modern perspective, to imagine anyone taking it seriously.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, this was a simple and probably effective way to make promotional films. As Colin Browne suggests,

the Vancouver tourism film made by eastern Canadians or Americans became such an unconscious cliché that, when the B.C. Government got into the movies, it ended up making virtually the same film over and over again.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Carroll, "How Hollywood helped shape Victoria," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, 7 April 1985 p.M1. Library and Archives Canada has about 20 minutes of original b&w outs from Herbert's footage; BC Archives has a video copy.

¹²⁵ Noted by Colin Browne.

¹²⁶ An example is *ACROSS CANADA* (ASN, ca.1946), which presents B.C. in a sequence virtually identical to that in ASN's earlier b&w silent *ACROSS CANADA BY THE CPR*. In both films there are worshipful views of the Rocky Mountains, with shots of and from a train passing through the mountains; the entire interior of the province is skipped over; and there are similar sequences on Vancouver, highlighting downtown, the harbour and English Bay.

¹²⁷ Among the film's excesses is its description of Forbidden Plateau: "Yesterday, Indian land of taboo; today, a matchless paleface playground." An earlier glimpse of commercial fishermen at work describes them as "stout-hearted men in their sturdy craft, working early and late, harvesting the wealth of the sea."

¹²⁸ Browne, "Film Proposal," pp. [i-ii].

Similarly, Browne finds in early films about Vancouver a tendency to view the city as a place through which people and materials pass on their way to someplace else. While this image of Vancouver as a "crossroads" may have lent it a certain cosmopolitan air, it is also suggestive of a kind of inferiority complex -- that the only reason someone would come to Vancouver would be circumstantial to their arriving at another, more worthwhile destination. This concept is reinforced by the point of view adopted in most travel films.

If there's one thing that distinguishes tourism films it's their insistence on the long shot. A city is something the tourist camera looks at but does not penetrate, for the promotional film is selling a dream, a wish for a simple, sunny, charmed world free of worries. . . . This is called the view from outside. Films from this point of view regard patterns in the landscape rather than faces close up. They're uptempo, cheerful, and as free of the realities of life as possible.¹²⁹

It is difficult to ascertain just how much the image of British Columbia presented in these films affected the world's perception of "Canada's Pacific Province." Many travel films produced within the province by native British Columbians also adopt "the view from outside," suggesting a willingness to adapt our image to the expectations of the foreign eye. Even a film like VANCOUVER HONEYMOON (Parry Films, 1961), one of the better travelogues, seems to dwell less on Vancouver's uniqueness than on its similarity to other modern cities. It would be interesting to examine the degree to which these stereotypes reflect the way we see ourselves.

Another issue that arises is the question of "regionality." The early work of the NFB and the later work of the CBC Vancouver Film Unit have been similarly affected by eastern bureaucratic notions of what comprises a "B.C. film." John Taylor, who succeeded Peter Jones as executive producer of the NFB's Pacific Regional Studio, stated the case this way in 1976:

There is an assumption that regional filmmaking has to look like the region -- rocks, seascapes, falling trees, films that look like B.C. You get tired of that. It seems that regional filmmakers are denied a chance to work on universal subjects.¹³⁰

The best NFB films about British Columbia made in the 1940s and 1950s are those which attempted to come to grips with the particular character and problems of its isolated communities. From a purely cinematic standpoint, this was an appealing subject, for it

¹²⁹ Browne, "Film Proposal," pp.4-5.

¹³⁰ Quoted in the *Sun*, 7 May 1976 p.9A.

integrated the attractive ideas of pioneering, of virgin territory and of travel.¹³¹ As a body of work, however, these films tend to suggest that the province was universally isolated, and somewhat backward as well.

Admittedly, the shortcomings apparent in many films about B.C. are often due to the circumstances of their creation. As travelogues, industrial films or institutional documentaries, they were made possible by some form of sponsorship which inevitably imposed a degree of creative restraint. As Guy Glover pointed out in 1958,

Canadian film production [before 1953] was, to a greater or lesser extent, sponsored; that is to say, Canadian films in general served some extra-cinematic function (publicity, public relations, education) and seldom represented the free expression of the film-maker. . . . [F]ew Canadian film producers have been able to transcend the demands of their production schedule in order to express themselves in film on subjects of personal or public importance unrelated to sponsor requirements. It is not generally understood in the Canadian film world . . . that these are important kinds of film-making, and important kinds of subject, for which no known sponsors, or, for that matter, no known audiences, exist. The audiences, certainly, and possibly the sponsors, could be created for these films only *after* they had been produced. As long as Canadian film-making tags along behind the sponsor and the audience, it will, to a degree, be an art in servitude.¹³²

The strongest movement away from the popular representation of the province is found in the earlier work of the CBC Vancouver Film Unit.¹³³ While the unit certainly filmed its share of rocks, seascapes and falling trees, it tended to focus on the people who lived within the landscapes, their relationship with their environment, and the issues that affected them. Films like Gene Lawrence's *CATTLE DRIVE* (1956) and *MICHEL* (1958) dealt not with ranching and mining, but with the lives of working people and their reactions to change. Other films moved beyond their settings to explore universal issues and pose philosophical questions about society. Two excellent examples are Allan King's *SKIDROW* (1957) and Jim Carney's *CITY SONG* (1961), both shot in Vancouver and both examining aspects of urban life in a very subjective, even critical manner. It is perhaps a measure of Canadian small-mindedness about such things that when *SKIDROW* was submitted as the CBC entry for the Prix d'Italia competition, the *Sun* wondered editorially whether "Canadian cultural interests require

¹³¹ Peter Jones interviewed by the author, Vancouver, 15 August 1985 (BC Archives tape T4125:6-8).

¹³² Guy Glover, "Film," in *The Arts in Canada*, pp.106-7.

¹³³ This was noted at the time by Peter Morris in his "Lettre de Vancouver," *Objectif 1*, no.9/10 (October 1961), 52-54.

CBC to show this city to Europe as a collection of drunks sleeping in doorways."¹³⁴ The best answer to such criticism is in a Malcolm Lowry poem (unpublished at that time) which also describes Vancouver's skid row. It concludes: "Yet this is also Canada, my friend, / Yours to absolve of ruin, or make an end."¹³⁵

Regardless of how they were received, films like these made a clear break with the sunny, superficial and Pollyanna-ish approach of most previous work. They were the first local productions to probe societal problems and pose difficult questions about modern life -- to offer the view from inside. As such, they reflected a new maturity in regional filmmaking, and a gradual movement away from the confines of the institutional film into the realm of the personal documentary. The fact that such films were produced in Vancouver is heartening; that they were greeted locally with general indifference is perhaps no surprise. They were set apart by the circumstances of their creation, for they served no commercial end, generated no tourist dollars. They were made because someone thought they ought to be made, and because they said something worth saying about the way we live. It was from their example that a vital regional cinema -- one concerned more with people than with scenery -- continued to grow.

EPILOGUE

By 1966 filmmaking in British Columbia had reached a plateau. Attempts by private producers from B.C. to break into the television series market had proven largely unsuccessful, as had attempts at locally-based feature film production. Hollywood studios were still not interested in returning to the province. At the CBC, the creative freedom that had enabled the film unit to produce such remarkable films was on the wane. It was hoped that the establishment of the NFB's regional office in Vancouver might have a positive effect, but at that point the office had neither the budget nor the mandate to have any real impact on the local scene. The industrial film boom enjoyed by Lew Parry and other producers had declined sharply. Only Canawest was expanding, and that was largely due to its contracts with Hanna-Barbera to produce cartoon programs for television.

One common response to this situation was to leave the province, following the lead of earlier artists (including many from the CBC Vancouver film unit). Meanwhile, a new generation of filmmakers searched for an alternative. Over the ensuing ten years, an avant-garde cinema indigenous to Vancouver emerged in the work of Tom Braidwood, Gary Lee-Nova, Al Razutis, David Rimmer and Kirk Tougas, among others. Some of the early work found an audience through CBUT's late-night series *The*

¹³⁴ *Sun*, 9 August 1957 p.4.

¹³⁵ Malcolm Lowry, "Christ Walks in This Infernal District Too," in *Selected Poems of Malcolm Lowry*, ed. Earle Birney, Pocket Poets no. 17 (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1962), p.64.

Enterprise, a short-lived experimental showcase produced in 1968 by Gene Lawrence and Stan Fox. Another outlet was Intermedia, a group of artists, writers and filmmakers interested in exploring the audio-visual media. Others braved the independent route, somehow scraping together enough money to produce dramatic features. These included Jack Darcus' GREAT COUPS OF HISTORY (1969) and PROXYHAWKS (1971), Morris Ruvinsky's THE PLASTIC MILE (1969), Sylvia Spring's MADELEINE IS... (1970) and Tom Shandel's ANOTHER SMITH FOR PARADISE (1972). Made outside the accepted network for feature production, these films consequently received limited distribution. However, their existence reinforced the idea of Vancouver as a centre for independent filmmaking.¹³⁶

At the end of the 1960s, Hollywood producers began to make cautious forays into B.C. for the first time in many years. Most conspicuous of these was Robert Altman, who shot THAT COLD DAY IN THE PARK (1969) and McCABE AND MRS. MILLER (1970) in the Vancouver area, and convinced Mike Nichols to follow his lead with CARNAL KNOWLEDGE (1971). Other American features of this period included the science-fiction film THE GROUNDSTAR CONSPIRACY (1971) and the thriller RUSSIAN ROULETTE (1975), as well as I HEARD THE OWL CALL MY NAME (1973), directed for television by Daryl Duke.

In the early-to-mid-1970s, the NFB's Pacific Regional Studio began to generate a substantial number of films, utilizing the talents of local film people. Notably, the studio provided scope for women directors and the treatment of women's issues, as well an ongoing animation program; it also assisted in the production of shorts by neophyte filmmakers, often with Vancouver film veterans Jack Long or Shelah Reljic as supervising producers. The studio's releases included Tom Shandel's WE CALL THEM KILLERS (1972), Sandy Wilson's HE'S NOT THE WALKING KIND (1972), Al Sens' THE TWITCH (1973), Hugh Foulds' THE BEAR'S CHRISTMAS (1974), Shelah Reljic's SOCCER and Sandy Wilson's PEN-HI GRAD (both for the CBC's *Pacificanada* series, 1974), Tony Westman's SAUK-AI (1977) and BELUGA BABY (1978), Eugene Boyko's CANARIES TO CLYDESDALES (1977) and Jan-Marie Martell's PRETEND YOU'RE WEARING A BARREL (1978). Independent production in the documentary field included Dennis Wheeler's POTLATCH: A STRICT LAW BIDS US DANCE (1975), Philip Borsos' COOPERAGE (1976) and SPARTREE (1977), and Michael Chechik's GREENPEACE: VOYAGES TO SAVE THE WHALES (1977). In addition, both the University of British Columbia Theatre Department and the Simon Fraser University Film Workshop were offering courses in 16mm production, which provided many talented filmmakers with their first exposure to the medium.

¹³⁶ Fox, "We Are Where We Come From," p.33; Razutis, "Recovering Lost History," pp.160-73; Reif, "West Coast Filmmaking, 1: History" and Tougas, "2: Perspectives," in *Self Portrait*, pp.122-39 and 139-45 respectively.

All this activity was clearly encouraging, but it could not be said to constitute a "boom." While there was obvious satisfaction in directing or shooting a film for the NFB, there was much more money in working as a camera assistant or sound recordist on a visiting feature -- and there was simply not enough feature work to go around. The steadiest employer was *The Beachcombers*, which provided (and continues to provide) a great deal of work to Vancouver film trades.

Recent years have seen a resurgence in British Columbia's popularity as a location for theatrical and made-for-TV features. Although these films provide employment and experience for local crews, they are usually controlled from the south or the east, with imported talent in the key creative and technical roles. They also have little if anything to do with British Columbia. The appearance of Vancouver on the screen is thus being rendered more and more anonymous through its use as Anycity, USA. Notable exceptions to this general trend have been Zale Dalen's *SKIP TRACER* (1977), Philip Borsos' *THE GREY FOX* (1981) and Sandy Wilson's *MY AMERICAN COUSIN* (1985), written and directed by Vancouver filmmakers drawing on Canadian material. Between feature work and occasional CBC productions, there is often enough activity to keep many local film professionals busy year-round. Once again there are plans in the works to establish permanent, world-class local studios to ensure that this trend continues.

What is becoming clearer today is the existence of two separate streams of filmmaking in the province: one that might be called the "film industry" stream, as described above, and a second, burgeoning "independent" stream. In Vancouver the Cineworks Independent Filmmakers Society has emerged as a focal point for a large group of filmmakers, many of whom have their roots in the film programs of UBC, SFU or the Emily Carr College of Art and Design. Canadian Filmmakers Distribution West (CFDW), a now-autonomous offshoot of the Toronto-based Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, provides an avenue for the wider viewing of work by independent producers. The Pacific Cinematheque Pacifique is a centre for the exhibition and study of independent, alternative and world cinema. Both the Video Inn and the Western Front are actively involved in experimental video work. The exodus to eastern Canada is still an ongoing aspect of the local scene, but more and more filmmakers maintain a resolve to make films and to stay here.

The most important development has been the joint establishment of the Pacific Cine Centre by Cineworks, the CFDW and Pacific Cinematheque. The first institution of its kind in Canada, the Pacific Cine Centre will be an integrated facility for the production, distribution and exhibition of Canadian independent films. Its existence will re-affirm Vancouver's prominence as a Canadian filmmaking centre.

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