

E A S T E R N W A V E

by Chris Majka

Film, like painting, literature and music owes much of its present form to the past. Although a newcomer to the arts (let me see, was there a Greek muse of film, much has transpired in the world of film since that Saturday afternoon, on December 28, 1895, when Auguste and Louis Lumière's father, Antoine, erected a wooden sign saying "cinématographe" pointing to the basement of Paris's Grand Café on 14, Boulevard des Capucines. Those of us involved in film are conscious, to greater or lesser degrees, of that history and it guides and influences us in conscious and subconscious ways in our choices of the forms, styles, and subject-matters of our productions. The problem is that we can make use of that history only to the extent that it is available and existent and, as we also all well know, that heritage is rapidly vanishing. The early nitrate stocks, on which much early film was shot, are decompos-

ing and much of what has not crumbled into dust has been lost through time. In Australia "The Last Great Film Search" has been launched with a team of archivists travelling the length and breadth of the country in a special van searching for material hidden in basements and attics. They calculate that whatever is not found within the next decade or so will simply no longer be in a preservable condition and will be lost to us forever.

In Nova Scotia, a new filmography project has been put into place to try and find and catalogue the province's past film productions and to point the way to collecting and preserving this precious resource. A groundbreaking effort of this kind was undertaken in British Columbia and resulted in a very considerable amount of material being unearthed. In its wake, the Nova Scotia archives approached the Public Archives of Canada with a request to fund a similar project

here and, in the spring of 1984, work began. The intent has been to approach all the major producers of film in the region, such as the NFB, CBC, ATV, and independent producers, to collect as much information as possible on their production history and to try and track down existing footage, stills, scripts, etc. which pertained to this material. As well, a research effort has been undertaken to track down historical material from the turn of the century onwards.

As Gordon Parsons, the person at the Nova Scotia Archives in charge of the filmography project explained to me, much of this early material appears to be lost, or, in the jargon of the archivist, although not found, there is no evidence of it not existing. The earliest footage shot in the province may have been of the departure of troops for the Boer War in 1899. Then, in the early part of this century, from about 1913 to 1925, there was a flurry of dramatic feature film production in Nova Scotia. It was led by the Halifax-based Canadian Bioscope Company (which produced such gems as **The Mexican Sniper's Revenge** and the Sydney-based Maritime Motion Picture Company (which shot dramatic films such as **The Seariders**, **Clansmen of the North** and **Big Timber**. Perhaps the best known film was **Evangeline** shot by Canadian Bioscope in 1913 in the province (despite high production values, a classical story and good reviews the film nevertheless had a difficult time finding distribution in the U.S. — sound familiar?)

There was also a stringer by the name of W.G. McLaughlin who shot footage for various Canadian and American newsreel companies. After 1925 this surge of narrative fiction film died down and various documentaries were made on picking apples of catching tuna. The first film produced by the province had the memorable title of **Cream Grading, Why?** and may have been shown in Halifax's Buzz Cinema. Only after the war when the Nova Scotia government created a film bureau and the National Film Board became active, did film work begin again in earnest and it is only from this period on that there is an abundance of existing film material.

The scope of the current project is to produce a published filmography of production done in Nova Scotia from the turn of the century to 1973. The next phase of work will bring this filmography up to date to the early 1980's and will look for areas of further research to be undertaken. Although there has been some

collection of film and video, this current phase of the project is principally geared to acquire knowledge of film and where it is located. A large-scale program of collection and preservation of film in the province requires considerable funds and with this in mind a unique initiative has been launched. This is the Nova Scotia Motion Picture Heritage Foundation which was established in the fall of 1984. This committee consists of representatives from the CBC, the NFB, the Public Archives, private-sector companies, and professional associations and its aim is to raise funds for the acquisition and preservation of historical film and tape material.

The project had originally hoped to employ the NFB's FORMAT software computer system for its information storage and retrieval; however, an implementation of this program for the microcomputer is not available and the Board, beset by a shortage of funds, was not able to commit itself to this development. As a result they have chosen to use a program called Marcom II, an archival information system developed in the U.S. Despite early efforts of the NFB to develop FORMAT as a national format for film data, it now ap-

pears that this has less and less likelihood of occurring as various concerns choose systems suitable to their own requirements.

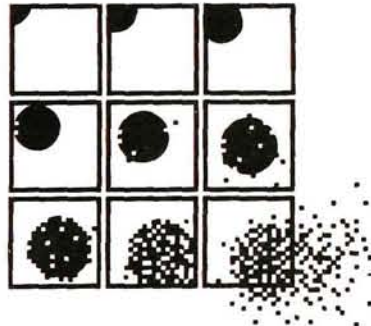
The filmography project has already unearthed a considerable body of information previously scattered and unknown. With its publication we shall be a major step ahead in our understanding of the film history of the area. With the further work of collection and preservation which the Public Archives and the Motion Picture Heritage Foundation plan to undertake, some of that precious history will be secured for future generations of people to see, understand and appreciate.

Errata

ERRATA — Last month's short film and videos from the '85 Grierson Seminar were written by Michael Zryd whose byline accidentally got lost in the production wringer.

Also, astute readers of last month's report on Cinémama '85 may have wondered where the event took place. Cinémama was held in Montreal over six consecutive weekends from Nov. 8 to Dec. 14.

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