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MOVIES IN EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY

WE are so accustomed to the motion picture that we seldom give a thought to its newness. This art-industry which now has 80,000 theatres spread over the world, showing to 12,220 million persons in a year, was a vacant lot side-show 40 years ago. Business men who are at the peak of their careers saw the very first movies that were produced.

Pictures came to life at an ideal time. No other medium could have captured the shades which have flitted across the world in these highlight and shadow years. Nothing else could have served so well for mass entertainment of a civilization which was in process of doubling its population and taking its people off the farms to build great industrial centres. It has turned out to be the most plastic medium of conveying exact information, a powerful channel of carrying news and ideas, and a useful tool in education.

The motion picture industry is a major economic enterprise, whether one thinks of the bigness of production operations, costs, distribution and usefulness, or of the universality of movies and the insistent way they have of making themselves necessary in everyday life.

In the Beginning

All this started around 1889. Thomas A. Edison had invented his talking machine in 1877, and ten years later he started research to provide a picture accompaniment to his phonograph. By 1888 he had a film, and the next year he produced the peep-show Kinetoscope. If you wanted to see the little show you dropped a penny into the slot and looked through a small window at a pint-size movie which lasted quarter of a minute. Readers who are interested in such studies may compare the movie taste of those first audiences with what is liked by movie-goers today. Receipts for

the opening day of the peep-show were: U.S. Battleships 25 cents; Joseph Jefferson's *Rip Van Winkle* 43 cents; Ballet Dancer \$1.05; and *Girl Climbing An Apple Tree* \$3.65.

By 1903, when the novelty of peep-show dance acts and prize fights had worn off, the film people introduced one-reel stories. First of these 10-minute thrillers was *The Great Train Robbery*. For the succeeding ten years the principal interest of the movie makers was centred on finding a spectacular place at which to kill the villain, usually a high cliff. An indication of the meteoric progress of the business starting in 1913 is given by the career of Charles Chaplin. He left vaudeville in that year to take a job in Keystone slapstick comedies at \$150 a week. In 1915 he signed a contract for 12 comedies in a year at \$10,000 a week, plus a bonus of \$150,000.

Then Came Sound

Edison started looking for pictures to accompany his phonograph, but by the nineteen twenties it was realized this was tackling the problem the wrong way round. Edison's "talkers", in which a phonograph was synchronized with a screen presentation, were not popular for long. People go to movies primarily to see, not to listen to music or dialogue with screen movement as an incidental.

Many of Shakespeare's great plays, for example, would not make good pictures as he wrote them, because they were written to carry their interest in their words. Kathleen M. Greenwood, of the National Film Board, summed up the needs concisely in an article in *Public Affairs* a year ago when she wrote: "Music in films must be treated as a subordinate and unobtrusive factor dominated by the action and requirements of the visual image." To "music" might well be added dialogue and sound effects.

Canada's Difficulties

Difficult problems have faced the movie industry in Canada. There are many financial hazards, besides pressure by groups of one kind and another. Being an art, the motion picture is subject to all the criticism of artists, moralists and writers . . . and is as neglected in financial support for its production as is the artist.

Canada's entertainment movie making business is a study in red figures. Very few of the more than 20 entertainment films made here with Canadian capital have returned their investment. One made so little money that not even the theatre ushers could be paid, according to an article by Hugh Kemp in *Maclean's*. Another lost about half a million dollars.

If a Canadian-made feature could return its original cost from theatre rentals in Canada there might be some hope for a permanent production industry here, said H. C. Plummer quoting an outstanding film producer in a thoughtful survey in *Canadian Business*. But contrast these two sets of figures: (1) the best Hollywood features are doing top business in Canada when they bring in gross rental revenues of \$200,000. Average features may gross \$25,000 or less. (2) Budgets for making feature movies start in the hundreds of thousands and go on up into the millions. Suppose you do a picture at an outlay of \$250,000, you can't get enough return in Canada, even at top Hollywood experience, to pay its cost. Says the *Canadian Business* article, "Canada must depend on export business entirely to support any feature production undertaking."

Canadian Movie Patronage

Interesting figures about the exhibition business are given in the Dominion Bureau of Statistics publication *Motion Picture Theatres, Exhibitors and Distributors in Canada, 1946*. Box office returns of the 1,477 theatres in Canada amounted to \$75 million, of which governments collected \$15,000,000 in taxes. Paid admissions increased 6 per cent over 1945. Had every theatre played to a full house at every performance, attendance could have numbered 606 million, so that only 37.6 per cent of the capacity of the theatres was used. The per capita expenditure on motion picture entertainment was \$6.15 in 1946, up 38 cents from 1945, \$1.14 higher than in 1942, and double that of 1938. The following table summarizes significant and interesting facts:

	Number of Theatres	Paid Admissions	Receipts (Less Taxes)	Expenditure Per Capita	
				1938	1946
CANADA	1,477	227,538,798	\$59,888,972	\$3.02	\$6.15
Ontario	420	96,996,280	25,684,210	4.07	7.56
Quebec	250	47,133,384	12,732,391	2.17	4.73
British Columbia	149	24,747,416	6,586,898	4.81	8.10
Alberta	156	13,317,734	3,626,140	2.53	5.88
Manitoba	137	14,152,362	3,433,687	3.20	5.88
Nova Scotia	71	12,382,913	2,953,633	2.47	6.44
Saskatchewan	240	10,639,915	2,889,343	1.45	4.39
New Brunswick	44	7,341,407	1,758,866	1.95	4.79
Prince Edward Island	10	827,387	223,804	1.20	3.17

Production Lags

Production of movies in Canada has not kept pace with the demand for movies. This is not strange. We have 12½ million people, a large number to be entertained, but a very small number to support an industry which requires big capital and a big market.

Despite forebodings, full-length feature pictures are being made in Canada. January 21st this year saw the premiere of *Whispering City*, produced in both English and French (*La Forteresse*) by Quebec Productions Corporation in a studio at St. Hyacinthe, Quebec. Two others, *Le Père Chopin*, made by Renaissance Films, Montreal, and *Bush Pilot*, by Dominion Productions, Toronto, have been completed in the past two years.

Canada has one of the world's best settings for creation of a large scale film industry, according to Rev. A. Vachet, head of Renaissance Film Distribution Inc. It is a country where material for genuinely stirring adventure, animal, forest and sea stories abounds, spiked with romance and historical interest.

Care needs to be taken to keep a high calibre of imagination, writing and production, together with some closeness of approach to reality. A certain measure of romance and rugged rough stuff is all right, as long as righteousness triumphs and the plot does not involve Mounties in full dress trailing desperadoes within the Arctic Circle and lumbermen rollicking down St. Catherine Street on snowshoes, singing *Alouette*.

History Is In Vogue

Historical films, which are in vogue at the moment, serve a useful purpose in education. The truth to be found in a carefully sifted past is often stranger and more artistic, and holds more customer attraction than fiction of today.

But historical films, whether for public entertainment or for classroom use, must have appeal. The dead hand of formula needs to be kept off them. There is in a special sense a feeling for reality in history, and the maker of a picture must concentrate first upon being right, and from there go on to being beautiful. Misrepresentations are a serious menace to the public welfare, a kind of treason, in these days when democracy needs above all to be well informed.

Social Uses of Films

This brings up the question of the effect movies have on audiences. The movie exerts an influence of such magnitude on the minds of people that it must be rightly directed if the nation is to be kept morally sound. It may advance or hold back the best efforts of the church, the school, and the home. The people who go to see movies do so in search of emotional experiences, and that very fact makes the movies powerful moulders of character.

There are wide social uses for good films. Newsreels and documentaries can open the narrow windows of a remote district upon all the world.

They can, by showing the essential oneness of mankind, demonstrate the stupidity of racial intolerance. Truthful films, done as records of events and trends and habits, will serve both as entertainment and social educators, enabling us to look at ourselves critically and at others understandingly.

When we can weave interesting tales into the background of Maritime history, as is done so superbly by T. H. Raddall in his book *The Wedding Gift*; or into the basic philosophy of Quebec, as in LeRossignol's *Habitant Merchant*; or into the struggles and defeats and triumphs of life in the Palliser Triangle, as has been done for the United States dust storm area in the first part of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*; or into the sheer adventure and courage of conquest of the Rockies and settlement of our west coast — when we do these things we shall be providing entertainment fare and cultural stimulation of rare value.

Documentaries

And now, after a scant minimum of attention given the broad aspects of movie production and exhibition, we come to the particularity of educational and industrial films. No one can embark upon production of informational movies without understanding the growth and appeal of entertainment pictures, because all films of a powerful educational nature represent a judicious union of fact and fiction.

First of all, consider "documentary" pictures. These are the higher journalism of the screen, with the broad objective of helping people understand one another. The documentary is creative, because it analyses and interprets society. It tells a story, acted by the characters themselves. It has been called "the creative treatment of actuality."

The documentary film is well established in several countries, notably Canada, Great Britain, the United States and Russia. It is a practical way for even small population countries to enter movie production and make an individual contribution to world cinema.

Informational Movies

Newsreels may appear to be of temporary importance only, but there is another viewpoint. What would we not give today for a screen glimpse of Napoleon and Wellington directing the battle of Waterloo from their hilltops? Or of the landing of Maisonneuve at Hochelaga, now Montreal, and his welcome by the Indians? Or of that first view of the Pacific by Mackenzie, and his painting on the rock: "Alexander Mackenzie from Canada by land July 22, 1793"? Newsreels are records of history in the making, even though for today's audience they are merely interludes in an entertainment show.

Out of the newsreels were born informational films. Good examples are productions of the war period which carried information and advice to persons battling for their lives — how to deal with fire bombs, how to save food, how to support the war effort and stave off inflation by buying bonds.

Canada distributes informational films specially made to attract United States tourists. Two now in circulation are *Rocky Mountain Trout* and *You'll Take the High Road*, which has some fine shots along the Banff — Jasper highway.

Those who produce informational films must not forget that the main object of moving pictures is to please an audience. Movie audiences are very mixed in their educational attainments, their interests and their emotional responses. A film on the intellectual level of a scholarly journal will have a short run. Early informational films wearied audiences with lengthy views of engineering achievements, accompanied by pedestrian narrative and soft irrelevant music.

The informational film contemplated by business and industry must be sharpened by human emotional interest: they will find information-giving a dangerous business if the emotion-kindling process is not incorporated. The best informational film will be one in which a competent story-teller who is interested in human beings attempts to make some intelligible arrangement out of the chaos of his subject or out of the muddle of human life. There is not so much difference as some business men think between the everyday and the dramatic; and any everyday subject, if the writer and producer are given proper facilities, can be made interesting enough to hold the most critical movie audience.

While it is informational, the "instructional" film has limitations and differences. Usually the instructional film is shown where groups of persons gather, willingly or not, to be taught something connected with their work. It is a visual textbook. It was found during the war that training in one particular operation or skill was speeded up on the average by 35 per cent, and that retention was 53 per cent greater when movies were used.

Industrial Films

That this new ability to teach speedily should have been carried forward into peacetime operations is not to be wondered at, and industrial film production has become an important part of Canadian business. It has, too, broadened its sphere of interest.

Industrial films can give employees and the public an overall view of company operations, and dramatize the employee's relationship to the firm, thereby building the family pride and team spirit so essential to good industrial relations. Some firms have special films designed to instruct supervisors and foremen in their dealings with workmen, and to show the need for sustaining high man-hour production if the business is to prosper in a prosperous country.

It must be remembered, as so often emphasized in this article, that films intended to appeal to public audiences must be good, *good* in the way meant by the audiences. They must have emotional appeal, action, and general entertainment value. Their production is a job for men and women who are expert in assessing

public wants and reactions, and in making pictures which combine the admittedly difficult factors: supplying people's wants and putting across the sponsor's message.

Movies in Education

Edison, who is generally called the father of the motion picture, believed that the chief contribution of his invention would be in the field of education.

Films used in teaching have a wider force than merely imparting knowledge. They may provide the mental and spiritual stimulation of works of art. They may carry the minds of pupils far beyond lessons, and prepare them for appreciation of things which it is so necessary to understand in an untidy and uncomfortable world.

Viewed simply as awakeners of interest, educational movies have their place. They present, in their best form, text book themes with an impact which is deep and lasting in its effect.

Teachers have always found it necessary to illustrate their lessons, using blackboards, maps, diagrams, models and specimens, because illustration sharpens understanding of a subject. Motion pictures more than any other medium offer mastery of time and space and detail. The student can see and experience events that happened centuries ago, thousands of miles away, or in inaccessible places. By slow and quick motion, telephoto and microphotographic lenses, the movie camera can reveal the processes of life with vividness and in detail. It enables pupils to see a tree grow, or a cell divide: the one infinitely slow and the other infinitely fast. It takes the little ornamental brass Buddha from the realm of toys and places it in a shrine on top of a mountain in Tibet, where the real meaning lies; it shows the relationship between coal miners in the Ruhr valley and in Wales and in Nova Scotia and in Alberta; it traces nylon hose through all its fabrication from the scientist in his laboratory to the machine designer and the intricate producing machine.

There is no question but that movies have a big place in education, and that they deserve the consideration of every educator. But teachers need more and better films from which to select. "Near enough" is not good enough. If a film doesn't fit the lesson, no good teacher will use it as a fill-in.

Community Programmes

It has been demonstrated that the popularity of visual presentation of subject matter can overcome adult sales-resistance to education. People who would never think of sitting down to read biography or history will absorb the same material with pleasure through movies. The movie-equipped school offers excellent opportunities for evening adult education, carrying out the lighted schoolhouse idea.

From this it is just a step to community programmes of educational and informational movies. Service clubs, parent-teacher associations, community centres and all others which seek to draw neighbours together in friendly discussion of important questions are

finding the movie a great help. A community film council, or perhaps a film committee of an established community club, will find many organizations eager to help by providing films free or at a low cost for sale or rental.

There has been an increase in the number and capacity of film libraries. In 1939, when the National Film Board was established, there were only 15 film libraries in Canada; in March 1947, it is reported by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, there were 156 libraries, with an audience of 2,481,000. There were 195 centres in which local organizations formed film councils or committees to sponsor movie service in the community. The National Film Board, which has no rental library of its own, distributes its films through the National Film Society, public libraries, universities, departments of education and community film councils.

The National Film Society

The National Film Society, a non-profit association to promote the study, appreciation and use of the motion picture as an educational and cultural factor in the life of the Dominion, should not be confused with the National Film Board, a government agency. This Society, which has its office in Ottawa, pioneered the use of visual aids in formal and public education. Since its inception in 1935 it has worked closely with provincial departments of education, school boards, universities, public libraries, community groups and industrial organizations.

Through its advisory panels the Society provides valuable counsel for firms contemplating industrial film production. Its library of 3,000 different films makes the Society the natural starting point for any group planning to use movies. It operates a co-operative system for lending 16 mm. films to regional film libraries, provides national distribution for films produced by governments which are members of the United Nations and for industrially sponsored films.

Branches of the Film Society have been established in several cities, with members meeting regularly to screen outstanding documentary and international movies. Membership is made up of industrial or commercial companies and government bodies, non-profit associations seeking assistance in dealing with film matters, and individual members who wish to keep up to date with movie affairs.

The Future of Movies

The future of films depends as much upon the wise use made of them as upon the calibre of persons working on them. Training schools are needed for the technicians; experimental centres are required for student film producers, and there is a place for the study of films by persons who plan to use them. This would be a factor in the gradual elevation of the standards of public taste and appreciation of better production. It would also be a factor in bringing about a cultural, educational and informational film market in Canada large enough to allow expansion and perfection of the film making industry.