Who's Who in the National Film Board

JOHN GRIERSON

Reports from Italy state that after battle-weary Canadian troops had seen "West Wind"—a film on the life of Tom Thomson—there was scarcely a dry eye in the audience. Perhaps not many of these men had heard of Thomson—and few of them cared about art. That did not matter. This moving and beautiful film spoke to them eloquently of the land they knew, and longed to see once more. It was Canada they saw on the screen that night.

There are other stories on audience reaction to the pictures of the National Film Board.

Some tell of film showings in crowded country schoolhouses, with housewives and farmers and wide-eyed children attending the first motion pictures they have seen in many months, and learning about the new nutrition rulings, and price control; about Canadian war production and global air routes and many other things. Most important of all, they see films dealing with agricultural problems.

Other reports tell of makeshift theatres in war plant cafeterias or union halls, where industrial films serve as a prelude and a stimulus to keen debate on such matters as veteran rehabilitation, labor management councils, and kindred problems.

All these reports emphasize the presence of a new dynamic factor in Canadian society. Thanks to John Grierson and the National Film Board, Canada has found in motion pictures a powerful instrument for maintaining an informed democracy. The Dominion now leads the world in the use of documentary film.

Dozens of articles have been written on the National Film Board, but it would require a monumental work to encompass the scope of this unique organization, and to do justice to its achievements. There has never been anything like it in Canada before.

The New York Times declared that "with the exception of Russia and Sweden, no nation has been so sensitive to the incalculable importance of films in readying the public, first, for the crucial demands of all-out war, and secondly, for the changed world of the peace to come. The framework for government sponsored films in Canada stands in direct contrast to footloose U.S. agencies.

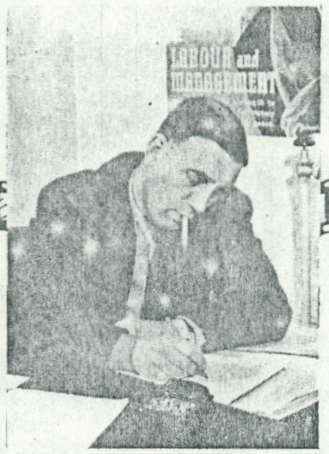
The Dominion Government has dabbled mildly in motion-picture production for the past 28 years. However, it was not until John Grierson appeared on the scene that Canadian film-making blossomed into a major public service.

Grierson came to Canada in 1938 on the invitation of the Government, to make a survey of film possibilities in the Dominion. The following year the National Film Board was established.

The work of the Board may be divided roughly into three main sections—production, distribution, photo-service and display. The production staff consists of 12 units. In addition to two monthly 35 mm. features for distribution through ordinary theatrical channels, this department produces agricultural, consumer and industrial relations films for 16 mm. non-theatrical outlets. There is also a French language unit and an art and animation department.

Although over two hundred films are produced in an average year, only 24 of these are distributed through ordinary commercial outlets. Well over half the Board's production is in the 16 mm. realm. These pictures reach a vast audience. A wide non-theatrical distribution network has been organized by the Board in cooperation with various national groups. In addition, there are rural and industrial as well as trades-union circuits. Canadian

GRAHAM McINNES



STANLEY HAWES

DR. MALCOLM ROSS

films are augmented by 16 mm. productions from other lands. After six months commercial distribution, many of the Board's 35 mm. features are also sent out to the non-theatrical runs.

Six years ago the National Film Board was only an idea. Today it is an organization of more than 600 members. Its producers, technicians, cameramen and projectionists have travelled the length and breadth of the Dominion. They have recorded in film every phase of the Canadian war effort, and they have shown motion pictures in districts without theatre facilities of any kind.

Some of the personnel have gone to Newfoundland, others to Australia, to assist in the formation of government film boards modelled on the NFB. Many others are in Britain.

Within three short years, National Film Board pictures have become international film news, showing throughout the British Commonwealth, the U.S.A., Europe, and South America.

Over three and a quarter million Canadians each month see their country's war effort depicted in the popular "Canada Carries On" series. Another monthly feature, "World in Action" is released to theatres all over the world. Shown regularly in 600 theatres in Canada, 1,000 in Britain, and in 5,000 in the U.S.A., it reaches a vast audience. One of these features "Churchill's Island" was awarded an Oscar by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science. Others have obtained honorable mention.

It would not be unreasonable to expect that an organization which has served its country as well as the NFB would be found in marble halls. It deserves no less. After all, it has put Canada on the map.

But visitors will look in vain among impressive Government edifices for the offices of the NFB. Seven ramshackle buildings in Ottawa house this House of Ideas, this film factory wherein the image of a nation assumes palpable form. No government department is more cramped for room. A reconverted lumber mill at John and Sussex Streets serves as the main centre. This building throbs with activity. Every available inch of space has been put to some use; and so frequently have partitions been shifted, doorways inserted, and passageways altered that the building plan displayed on the front bulletin board is no longer an accurate guide to the maze.

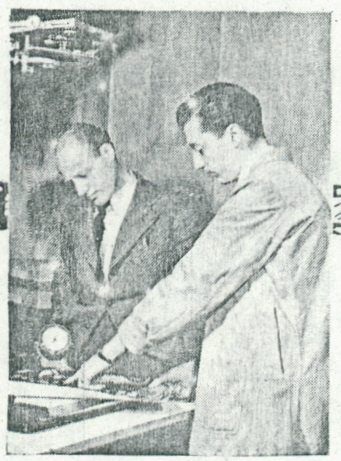
Here are the laboratories, the cutting rooms and film libraries, the sound department, theatres, and storage vaults. Distribution and display centres are located in other parts of the city.

Today, the National Film Board, like Canada, stands at the crossroads. During the past six years of war, Canada has advanced, not only industrially, but also as a film-producing country.

With returning peace, provincial governments may desire to set up film boards of their own. At present, the NFB cooperates with the provinces. Whether or not the future will see a widespread decentralization of its activities, only time will tell.

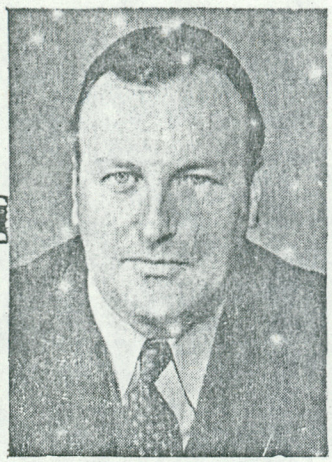
One thing is certain—with many young Canadians now familiar with the technique of motion picture production, and government and industry aware of the power of film propaganda, motion picture production in Canada

STUART LEGG



HARRY ROWED (left)

DONALD W. BUCHANAN (left)



J. ALAN FIELD *ROSS McLEAN*

is bound to expand.

Regarding the future of the NFB, Elmore Philpott, noted Canadian commentator, has said, "The return to peace will make it necessary to decide what is to be done with this flourishing war baby. Under no circumstances should the Canadian people dispense with the National Film Board—the job which it has done in war is no less valuable than could be done in peacetime."

Thoughtful citizens throughout the Dominion will echo this view. Already the majority instinctively recognize that the NFB is the expression of a rising sense of national pride and of a new consciousness of identity among the Canadian people. For in the words of Hye Bossin, editor of The Canadian Film Weekly, "The National Film Board is hitched to Canada's rising star."

Some sketches of National Film Board personalities follow.

JOHN GRIERSON was already well-known as a pioneer in the documentary film field when he became the Canadian Government Film Commissioner.

His first visit to this continent was during the twenties. Son of the headmaster of a village school, he had four years of mine-sweeping during the last war, and went through Glasgow University on scholarships. Then after lecturing at Durham University, he went to the United States on a three-year Rockefeller Fellowship. A student of mass psychology, he did post-graduate studies on propaganda media —an investigation that led him inevitably to the motion picture field. Returning to Britain in 1927, he studied the development of educational and informational films in Europe on behalf of his government, and became Film Officer of the Empire Marketing Board. His first picture, "Drifters" was an outstanding success. This was followed by other documentaries which have left their mark in film history. Most of these were produced under the EMB and the General Post Office units.

Throughout 1943 he was general manager of the Wartime Information Board, and is still a special advisor on information to the Government. For a time it also was rumored that he might be the next CBC governor.

A brilliant, many-sided personality, he is the subject of conflicting comment. Some say he is a martinet; others criticize him because he is not. Some claim he is reckless and over-generous; others, that he is cold, ruthless and calculating. But when all is said, these things remain without question—his genius, as manifest in his work, his service to the country, and his ability to inspire implicit loyalty among his associates.

A man of slightly less than medium build, he has a memorable and rather handsome face. He has regular features, a humorous mouth under a moustache inclining to be scraggy, and brilliant eyes.

A former diplomat, a westerner and a Rhodes Scholar, **ROSS McLEAN** is deputy film commissioner and executive assistant to John Grierson. Save for a certain solidity, he looks younger than his 40 years. As steadfast and self-possessed as his chief is dynamic and incalculable, Ross McLean has been with the Board since 1939. Previously he was private secretary to the Honorable Vincent Massey, High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom.

He brings a wide background of experience to his post. Graduating in 1927 from the University of Manitoba with an M.A., he entered Balliol College, Oxford, the same year on a Rhodes Scholarship. After winning another scholarship at Oxford and his B. Litt. in 1931, he went to the United States, to serve with the Unemployment Relief Commission of Northern Illinois. The following year he was appointed national secretary to the Association of Canadian Clubs, and was for a time Ottawa correspondent for such publications as Saturday Night and The Canadian Forum. In April, 1935, he became editor of Publications for the National Liberal Federation. Soon afterwards, he was appointed private secretary to the Honorable Vincent Massey, High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom—a post which he retained until his return to Canada in 1938.

STUART LEGG, producer in charge of the NFB, is a lean, diffident Cambridge graduate who looks a bit like Noel Coward. A virtuoso—in the sense of being an experimental philosopher—he has developed masterly techniques in the balancing and contrasting of ideas. A veteran producer at 35, he is responsible for the "World in Action" series.

Stuart Legg's first documentary films were made while he was still at Cambridge. Then in 1932 he joined Grierson at the Empire Marketing Board film unit, and has been with him ever since—accompanying him to the General Post Office unit, and later to the Film Centre, where he edited "World Film News".

Later, he became producer for the Strand Film Company. Here he remained until 1939, when he came to Canada to make two films for the Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Plan. When the NFB was established in the same year, he was one of the five members of the original staff.

STANLEY HAWES is the straight-spoken head of Production Unit 2. Another veteran film maker, he himself first learned about pictures by doing odd jobs around a film studio. He has been associated with the docu-

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WHO'S WHO IN THE N.F.B.

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mentary film movement for over 15 years, first with the Birmingham Film Society and later as a director and producer at Strand Films, where he first came in contact with Grierson. In 1940 he came to Canada where he worked on "Canada Carries On"—his next assignment being the production of army training films. Since then he has been in charge of all films dealing with labor relations. In 1943 he went to England to produce "Partners in Production"—a stirring record of labor-management cooperation in Britain that has had a wide distribution throughout English-speaking countries.

Stanley Hawes also has been responsible for the development of the "discussion trailer"—a highly effective technique in promoting debate among film audiences. These have been notably successful with industrial audiences.

GRAHAM McINNES, head of the Information Section since last autumn, was well-known in radio and literary circles throughout Canada before he joined the Board. Born in England and educated in Australia, he has been exceedingly active throughout the major part of his 33 years. After graduating from the University of Melbourne, he returned to the land of his birth, where he did various odd jobs—served as a movie extra, entertained in night clubs, and did a bit of writing. In 1935 he came to Canada, where he soon gained distinction as a radio commentator and also as art critic for Saturday Night.

Since the early days of the NFB he has been associated with Grierson first as a script writer, later as director, and finally as producer. Two films on Canadian Art—the memorable "West Wind" and "Canadian Landscape" were produced under his direction. He is articulate, decisive, and versatile.

Chief of the Photo Service Division since January, 1945, **HARRY ROWED** was an experienced still cameraman before he joined the Board, Rowed has won awards in many salons.

Few citizens know their country as well as this 38-year-old westerner. He has climbed many mountain peaks, and as special photographer for Canadian National Railways and for Trans-Canada Airlines, he has covered by air more Dominion territory than most citizens hope to see in a lifetime.

Born in Waseca, Saskatchewan, this fair-haired, blue-eyed cameraman began his career with the Prince Albert Daily Herald, and later worked with various other papers, including the Winnipeg Tribune. He came to the Film Board from WIB, where he served seven or eight months as staff photographer.

DR. MALCOLM ROSS has his hands full as coordinator of distribution. His job is to supervise the distribution of all NFB productions, both theatrical and nontheatrical. This includes rural, industrial, and trade union circuits, the preview library, and relations with volunteer projection services —to say nothing of foreign distribution, and the translating of Canadian films into the leading European languages.

Before joining the Board in 1942, this 34-year-old Maritimer lectured in the English Departments at the University of Indiana and also at Cornell.

J. ALAN FIELD, producer of Canada Carries On", is a wavy-haired Torontonian who worked as a free lance writer for Canadian and American newspapers and magazines before he joined the Board. The "Canada Carries On" feature, started in April, 1940, under the sponsorship of the Department of Public Information, is the oldest of the NFB's film ventures. Distributed by Columbia Pictures of Canada, it is now in its fifth consecutive year and plays to over 800 theatres throughout the Dominion.

Until December, 1944, Alan Field was supervisor of the NFB newsreel division. He has directed picture-making on every phase of the war effort from one end of the country to the other, and has contributed substantially to the vast fund of film material in the NFB files.

DONALD W. BUCHANAN has been chief of the Display Section since last September. An outgrowth of the NFB Photographic Division, this section is responsible for the excellent displays, photographic exhibits and posters scattered across Canada within the past few months. An indefatigable worker, Buchanan also was responsible for establishing the rural circuits, which he supervised until the end of 1943.