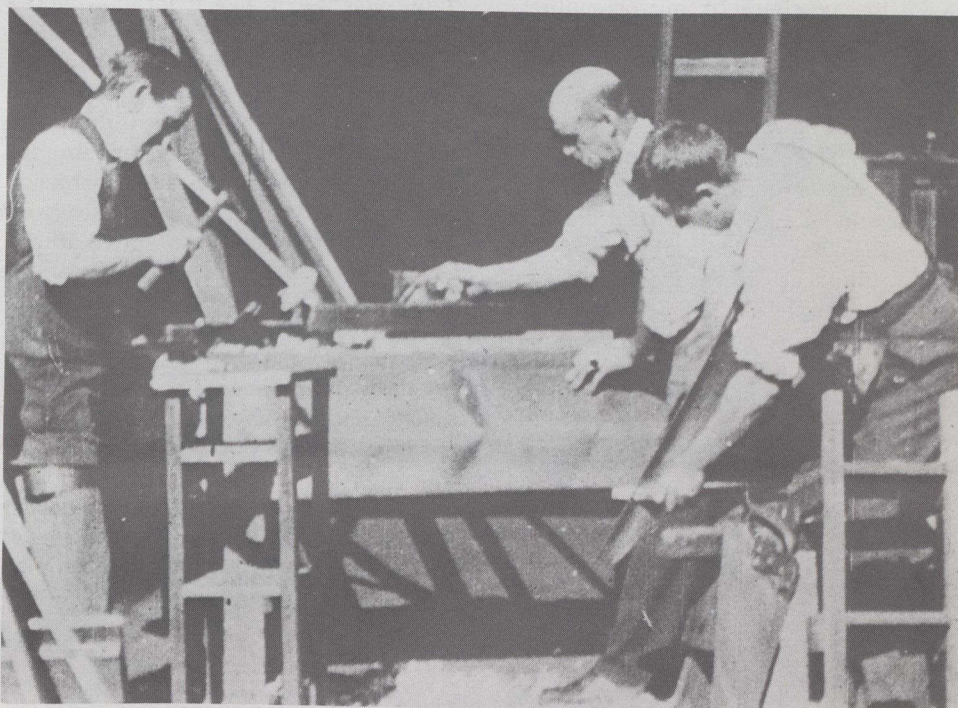


Canada's earliest films restored for posterity



Scene from the 1897 film, *Carpenter Shop*, one of Canada's oldest surviving films.

The Public Archives of Canada has completed restoration work on Canada's oldest surviving collection of motion pictures. The 20 titles that make up the Flaherty Brothers Collection were shot in the United States and distributed by the Thomas Edison Company.

The films were shown in Beaverton, Ontario on April 8, 1897. Many of the titles were among those first shown in Canada in July 1896.

Works from the period are important because of the insights they provide into the earliest successful reproduction of motion on film. The restoration of this collection has produced some of the finest examples of pre-1900 film-making available.

Of particular interest is a colour version of *Butterfly Dance*. At the time, colour films were produced by an extremely painstaking process of hand tinting. This involved colouring each 35-mm frame by hand — difficult enough for a single frame and even more so when considering the 16 to 18 frames per second required for a depiction of motion.

The films represent the earliest complete program presented to audiences and include the actuality documentation of *Black Diamond Express*, *Train on Bridge* and *Police on Parade*.

The films were brought to Canada by William White and G. Warden. After numerous showings in and around Beaver-

ton, the projector and films were kept for over 50 years in a basement. In 1950, the films were given to the Strand Theatre in Beaverton. There they were put into relatively secure storage until 1967.

A research project undertaken at York University led to an agreement between the Public Archives and the depositors. The films were then transferred from their volatile nitrate stock to safety film.

The aging process of nitrocellulose film, which eventually leads to the complete destruction of the photographic image, necessitated the immediate conservation of these films before deterioration could begin. More than half of the films produced prior to 1930 have been lost.

This conservation was made more difficult because the film, after many years of storage, had become shrunken and brittle. In order to safely handle the film it was given an extensive rehumidification treatment. Often this treatment reduces shrinkage but in this case both the transport sprockets and film gate had to be specially modified in order to re-photograph the entire collection frame by frame on an optical step printer.

This work has allowed the projection of these motion pictures some 87 years after their production. The same films that so impressed audiences even before the turn of the century will return to the screen once more.

NFB and French agency sign pact

The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and La Société Française de Production et de Création Audiovisuelles (SFP), a French public production agency which supplies, among others, the three French television networks, have signed a two-year agreement to collaborate on productions for international markets.

Under the terms of the agreement the NFB and SFP will exchange personnel and services and will co-produce and distribute productions initiated and agreed upon by both parties.

Two co-productions are presently in negotiation. Initiated by SFP, *At the Spring of Life* will study the interrelationship of the animal world and water. Co-produced by SFP, NFB and Film Australia, this series of six one-hour documentaries will be directed by François Bel (SFP), Pierre Letarte (NFB), and James Show (Film Australia).

A second project, *Framing the Sea*, is also being negotiated. Initiated by filmmaker Jacques Gagné and producer Jean Dansereau, both of the NFB, this 90-minute docu-drama will investigate sea farming and its potential for solving the world hunger problem.

Award-winning writer dies

Alden Nowlan, an award-winning poet and humorist noted for his compassionate and insightful writing, died recently of complications brought on by a heart seizure. He was 50.

Nowlan, who was inspired to write at age 11 after seeing a film about American novelist Jack London, was still writing when he was admitted to hospital June 11.

In the intervening years, he won a Governor General's award for poetry, a Canada Council special award and a Guggenheim fellowship for poetry.

Arts brief

A major art symposium, International Exposure for Canadian Artists, was held recently at Toronto's Ontario College of Art. Sponsored by Visual Arts Ontario (VAO), Canada's largest non-profit association of visual artists, the conference brought together some 50 internationally-known artists, curators, critics and dealers to meet with delegates.