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COMMUNITY FILM SERVICES IN CANADA

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Community film services in Canada began during the last war, when the documentary motion picture was enlisted to make some of the issues clear. Price control and rationing, wage control, the fixing of rents, and the freezing of labour all found explanation in films shown on small screens in factories, trade union halls, and the country school houses where farmers gathered.

From the beginning, the National Film Board of Canada offered an exciting new medium to Canadians. Their enthusiasm and the government's interest provided an ample and intelligent introduction to the documentary film. Thus it was that many a layman, exposed to the new medium in his factory, farm meeting or trade union hall, saw in the 16 m.m. information film a new tool to be applied to many tasks of the community.

The school board member asked, "Why should not films shorten the teaching period"? The agricultural representative wondered, "Could not films encourage soil conservation, higher standards of livestock breeding; health and welfare on the farm"? And the man or woman who was just a member of an average community group saw in the film "something to put life into our meetings".

Soon portable 16 m.m. projection equipment was seen on every hand. The people found it in their working places, in meeting halls, in churches, and in the schools.

Today, films bearing the familiar NFB crest are being seen in some 400 Canadian theatres. About 3,000,000 people each month see National Film Board productions. Of this figure 1,000,000 see the films on rural film circuits, at meetings of clubs, service organizations, and in schools, or adult education programs. There are now more than 200 Community Film Councils in urban centres and 157 rural non-theatrical film circuits -- some operated entirely by the Film Board, others jointly or independently run. National Film Board non-theatrical film distribution operates as far north as the Mackenzie River and the Arctic, as far west as Vancouver Island and the Pacific and east to the Magdalen Islands in the lonely reaches of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It is a system unique in the educational film world.

Community groups with too limited interest or funds to justify purchase of films or projectors individually have co-operated to set up local community film libraries and have purchased jointly the equipment for bringing films into their meeting places. Public libraries have found a place for films beside the books, paintings and music records which they now distribute. Summed up nationally, such experience amounts to this: