

Take 15 on Atlantic film focus

by Christina Frei

It was with some trepidation that I went to the National Film Board Theatre on Argyle St. last Friday night to see a sample of the work done by Atlantic Canadian filmmakers over the past fifteen years. Running from September 9

to October 28, *Take 15* is a series which showcases a variety of films done by the Board's regional studio, the Atlantic Centre, over its fifteen year history.

The sense of foreboding I felt upon going into the Theatre was due to the idea I have had about documentary films dating back to

my elementary school years — that they are little more than monotonous educational experiences.

Happily though, I found myself being not only enlightened, but even agreeably entertained. The films I saw focussed on some historical aspects of the

maritime provinces. *Empty Harbours*, *Empty Dreams*, the 'signature film' of the NFB Atlantic Centre, uses contemporary cartoons, photographs, and film footage interspersed with interviews and folk songs to evoke a realistic picture of 19th century Canada. The film details the history of the Maritimes, as a part of Canada which was betrayed by Confederation.

"It is difficult to do films on economic history which are also visually strong", says Harold Rennie, NFB's information officer for the Atlantic region. Not only does *Empty Harbours*, *Empty Dreams* succeed in that, but, adds Rennie, it has also "made its mark nationally." The film has been screened on T.V. and in theatres across Canada.

The second film shown was called *Fixed in Time*. Wittily narrated by John Neville and starring Sherman Hines, it is a vivacious little portrait of Halifax in the 19th century, as seen through the eyes of photographer Oliver Massey Hill.

The films in the *Take 15* series range in length from 2 minutes to almost an hour. They are grouped according to a common theme such as history, community, or social action. Together they comprise either the best or the most controversial works ever done by the regional studio.

Harold Rennie describes how the focus of the predominantly Atlantic Canadian filmmakers has changed since 1973.

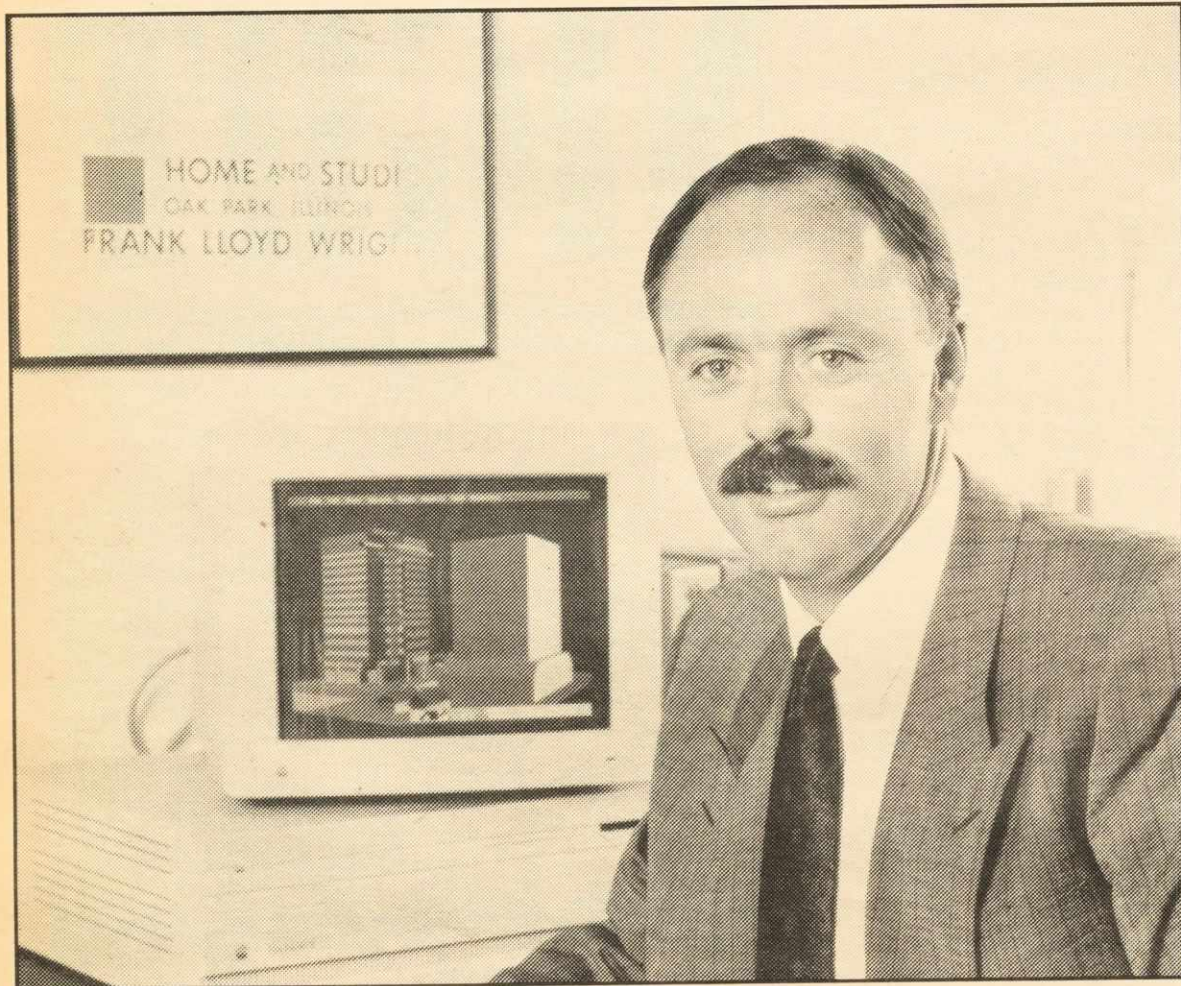
"In the first years of the Atlan-

tic Centre, there was a tendency to do a lot of historical films due to the rich history of the region and because little of it had been recorded on film. History is not the only aspect anymore. There are more attempts now to deal with more social activist issues. The interest is still there, but we are looking at other things."

These 'other things' include the radical documentary *Herbicide Trials*. Describing Cape Breton environmentalists' fight against pesticide spraying, it is a film which has elicited both positive and negative response across Canada. It will be shown together with *Offshore Oil: Are We Ready?* tomorrow night. Both films have had a "good deal of attention and impact on many other parts of the country," and, as Rennie points out, "have really struck a chord in other audiences."

There can be no doubt that Atlantic Canadian filmmakers are proving themselves both creatively and technically. And it is to the NFB's credit that its initiative in founding a regionally-based studio in the Maritimes has allowed such fine films to be made.

The *Take 15* retrospective will coincide next month with the annual Atlantic Film and Video Festival during which new NFB films will be presented. Award winners from both the past and the present can be seen on October 21 thus effectively highlighting the development of the studio's work.



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