

Over a million Canadians see 16 m.m. documentary films each month.

Thousands of Canadians have learned to operate 16 m.m. sound movie equipment as a service to their groups.

Canada has 168 community film libraries, established and operated by borrowers of educational films.

Documentary films are among the baggage of air transports flying to the far north. Arctic Aklavik, population 346, reported 15 screenings of informational films in one month.

Films and sound motion picture equipment may be borrowed by any group in most localities in Canada either without cost or on payment of a small service charge.

The fact that thousands of Canadians have learned to appreciate the documentary film at the "shirt-sleeves level" does not detract from the older influence of the Film Societies. Because people understand films in a work-a-day context they have come that much closer to aesthetic appreciation. It is familiarity, the easy access to films and projectors, that is so largely responsible for Canada's pre-eminence in "the bright new field of national information and civic interest".

Canada's land is wide: her people are few. Of land and water, there are 3,695,189 square miles; of people only 13,000,000. The people have congregated close to water; cities dot the coasts of the lakes. For thousands of miles there is little more than a sprinkling of settlement. Canada has two main population groups - French and English; and a third group composed of other nationalities. It was to be expected that the National Film Board of Canada when it was set up by the federal government in 1939 should turn its cameras and its creative energies to the task of promoting national unity.

One of the first films produced was about the people: an introduction of Canadians to themselves. PEOPLES OF CANADA, a 20 minute exposition of origins, ideals and accomplishments, was unpretentious and sincere. It restated history in terms of the people. For the first time Canadians saw themselves in film; and it was films such as this that aroused the interest of large numbers of ordinary people, identifying the documentary with them and themselves with the film.

When, at the end of the war, the National Film Board ceased to show films in urban centres, the people undertook the task. "If you can organize a method of distributing films in your communities, we will pass them over to you", said the Board's distribution officers. Thus the distribution of 16 m.m. documentary films gained in simplicity and permanency.

The community film council movement expanded quickly. Representatives of groups with an interest in films came together to plan local schemes of distribution. The planning group adopted the name Community Film Council and the local collection of films sponsored by it was called a Community Film Library. Equipment and operators for showing films were called the Community Projection Service.