

The Crawley Era

by James A. Forrester

Crawley Films began as a hobby for Frank Radford Crawley, the athletic son of a straightlaced Ottawa accountant, Arthur A. Crawley. For some long lost reason Frank Radford was known to family and friends alike as "Budge," and it stuck with him for the rest of his career.

Arthur A. gave his son a movie camera for his birthday to study his swimming style: "That was the Stuart-Warner. I remember it well. It cost \$75 and was crackle black. It had no diaphragm so you would change the f-stop by rotating a metal disc in front of the fixed focus lens. It would be a 25mm lens, with this rotating disc in front, but the big attraction was the 64 frames-per-second speed."

One wonders if Arthur A. would have given such a present to his eldest son if he could have foreseen in what direction it would lead over the next 40 years. Pandora's Box had been opened in this strict Methodist household.

Crawley became an accountant and joined his father's firm, while he continued to experiment with filmmaking on the side during the 1930s. In 1933, he purchased a Kodak Cine-Special which had recently come on the market: "It had a big attraction; you could run 33 feet on a wind, but it wasn't a reflex camera. You could view and focus, but as soon as you started to shoot, it would drop down and you couldn't see. So you had to allow for parallax, and it was diagonal parallax, which is a little tricky."

With his camera Crawley would make a number of black and white industrial films with intertitles, as well as amateur films with titles like *Glimpses of a Canoe Trip*, which won honourable mention at a N.Y. competition in 1937.

The following year Budge married Judith Sparks, who was literally 'the girl next door' and the scion of another old Ottawa family. At the suggestion of ethnologist Marius Barbeau of the National Museum, they went on their honeymoon to Ile d'Orleans and of course they made a film about the island.

The same year (1938) John Grierson arrived in Ottawa at the invitation of the Canadian Government to study government film production. This "Presbyterian public relations man," as Rachel Low described him, hit bureaucratic Ottawa like a proverbial bomb shell. Things began to happen in sleepy old Ottawa

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● Crawley holds the slate during the shooting of *The Retail Management Series*

and the opportunities for an ambitious young filmmaker looked brighter.

The arrival of Grierson and the fact that the Crawley's film *Ile d'Orleans* won the Hiram Percy Maxim Award for Best Amateur Film of 1939, ensured that Budge would not have to remain an accountant much longer.

"The money was put up by Hiram Percy Maxim who invented the Maxim gun; that's where he made all his money - on the machine gun business. He funded the competition," Crawley recalls.

With the coming of World War II there was an urgent need for training films, and Crawley Films was pressed into service:

"You see we were founded before the Film Board. I did a lot of work for the Film Board. In the early war years we did a lot of stuff for the Army, Navy and Air Force. I'd go to Bagotville and shoot on the deck, low-level flying in old Ansons. I remember photographing the first Lancaster that Clyde Pangborn flew to London. That flight was the morning of Dieppe and we were in a PBY and he passed us in the Lancaster."

In 1939, the NFB consisted of John Grierson, Ross McLean and a secretary, so anyone with an interest in film was

conscripted immediately. The Crawleys in turn took over the top floor of the family home at 540 The Driveway, turning a billiard room into a film studio.

Grierson and the British technicians he brought with him were comfortable with 35mm equipment, which was the professional standard and they sneered at 16mm film, calling it "shoe string". The Crawleys continued using 16mm, in spite of the fact that they had to edge number the film by hand with white ink and a fine pen.

Budge recalls, "The Film Board was down on John Street and we had a Bell Tele land line from 540 The Driveway to the Film Board. We did a lot of narration and shot interviews there in the early days... things called discussion trailers. We had a Mauer recorder and it was done with a galvanometer, and the recording was optical. You would process the sound track and we used Kodak positive film which was very slow. It was a double expanding sound track."

A little known aspect of Canadian film history is that Crawley Films introduced 16mm synchronized sound to filmmaking in Canada. Grant Crabtree, one of Crawley Films' first employees, stated that the NFB borrowed the camera set-up perfected by himself and Rod

Sparks. The NFB crew shot a film in Western Canada and then claimed years later that they had invented the system.

Like many young enterprises which evolve spontaneously, Crawley Films was founded in 1939, but did not become a limited company until the end of the war. Crawley Films grew to a staff of six during the war, working mainly on films for the "war effort", but also completing sponsored films for industry as well as cultural groups like the Canadian Geographical Society.

By 1946, Crawley Films had evolved from a tight-knit group of family and friends into a small business; comprising Budge, Judy, Cecily Sparks, Rod Sparks as well as Grant Crabtree and Dorothy Munro. The company had outgrown the cramped quarters at 540 The Driveway and an old church hall at 19 Fairmont Avenue was purchased.

At the end of the war, government contracts began to taper off and Crawley Films found it necessary to return to sponsored filmmaking in order to survive in the private sector.

Budge remembers: "It was hard to sell because people didn't want to buy films. All you could do was go out and hustle. You knew that if you put in a certain amount of time you could sell a picture, but your volume would be 12 to 15 thousand dollars a year gross and your film costs might be two or three thousand."

It becomes obvious from talking to Crawley that his enthusiasm for film, coupled with his hustling business style sparked the company during its earliest period. That is until the arrival of Graeme Fraser in 1946.

A large part of the credit for the survival of Crawley Films over the past 40 years must go to this man. Business Screen stated that Fraser had "sold more film than anyone else in the world," which may sound like hype but in the area of sponsored films, it is not an overstatement.

In time, the company developed into two separate entities with Fraser supervising the sponsored films or industrial documentaries and Crawley concentrating on the feature films and the entertainment side of things.

An interesting footnote to this history is the fact that A.A. Crawley, while he may not have approved of his son's career choice, supported the company once it was underway. When he became convinced that film was more than just a hobby, his holding company Orme Bannon Ltd. became sole owner of Crawley Films, which ensured that the company had financial backing.

The company grew slowly at first and retained the feeling of an extended family for a number of years after the war. The people who worked there

Photos: Crawley Films

HISTORY

remember spending long hours for little pay, but the whole group was learning mostly by trial and error. As a group they lived together, worked together and relaxed together, so it is not surprising that a number of the ex-alumni of "Crawley College" met their wives and husbands while working there.

Filmmaking is by its nature a collaborative process and so often it is difficult to give credit to all those who contributed to the making of a film. This is especially true of the film *The Loon's Necklace*, which was produced over a number of years, until it won Film of the Year at the first Canadian Film Awards in 1949. As director George Gorman suggested, "Everybody who worked at Crawleys had a hand in the making of that film." The prize that year was a painting by one of the Group of Seven, donated for fifty dollars, and for some inexplicable reason the prize was never collected by Crawleys.

The Loon's Necklace was made on speculation and it was only after it won the award that Imperial Oil decided to sponsor the distribution. It went on to win many other awards, but the increased recognition also brought with it a business load which put a strain on the co-operative spirit of the organization.

By 1949, Crawley Films had 33 employees and that's when the company spirit began to change. The founding members like Grant Crabtree began to resent the influx of freelancers and the importing of talent, particularly from England. The community feeling began to come apart and some of the original employees felt exploited.

Most of the profits were turned back into the company, which is the best way to establish a business, but the process did cause some ill will among certain employees who felt that they were more than just employees.

Tom Glynn who was General Manager for years recalls the Annual Meeting at Crawleys with some retrospective amusement. And former Music Director Bill McCauley remembers the standard line Budge gave to any employee who asked for a raise: "You are the best staff member we have, but you know we bought all this equipment so maybe next year..."

However, while the pay proved to be on the subsistence level, Crawleys was a great training ground and a backdoor into the National Film Board. Looking on the positive side, anyone who worked at Crawleys was getting paid to go to film school.

In 1950, while a very young Claude Jutra was accepting the award for Best Amateur Film at the CFA, Crawleys received recognition in the Sponsored Film category. This award was dominated by the company for many years, and reflects where the energies of the company have been directed.

Budge has always had an uncanny ability to spot talent in amateurs and give them the opportunity to demonstrate that talent. Both Chris Chapman and Bill Mason began their respective film careers at Crawleys, as did a long list of actors and actresses including Genevieve Bujold and Christopher Plummer.

Women were given an opportunity to develop at Crawleys; usually starting as researchers or assistants before moving on to television or other companies. Betty Zimmerman who now heads the International Service of CBC Radio began as a production assistant, a title which covered a whole gamut of duties.

In keeping with the attitude towards women during the 1950s, most were never given the opportunity to become directors - with one exception. Sally MacDonald worked very capably as a producer/director for years in the industrial sponsored side, turning out films on a wide range of subjects.

During the early 1950s, Judy Crawley undertook a long range series of films produced for National Health and Welfare and eventually sold to McGraw-Hill Films in New York. The series was called the *Ages and Stages Series* and each film covered a particular stage in a child's development, with each episode having a catchy title like *The Terrible Twos* and *The Trying Threes*, etc. A unique element in the series is the fact that she used her own children for the

in London.

Peter, who directed *The Rowdyman* in 1972, recalled his earliest years in Canada during a Cinema Canada interview: "I started as an apprentice in the J. Arthur Rank training program... before I came to Canada in 1955. Here I worked at Crawley Films, which was another great place to learn in those days, because you had to do everything from edge numbering right the way through."

A major change occurred in 1954, when the new wing was built onto the front of the old church hall and an office was opened in Toronto at 21 Dundas Square to make television commercials.

In 1958, when Imperial Oil received a special Canadian Film Award for "its encouragement of high standards in Canadian Film Productions," Crawleys

with the director and editor Rene Bonniere for one year of location shooting along the North Shore from Tadoussac to the Straits of Belle Isle.

The subject of the 13 half-hour programs may seem a little recondite for a commercial company, considering that Crawleys was already involved in a major TV series. However, the Crawleys had a keen interest in Quebec dating back to *Ile d'Orleans* in 1938 and *Canadian Power* made in Charlevoix County the next year. The series is mainly of ethnographic interest today, but it had a profound effect on the subsequent films made by Perrault - in particular, the film trilogy *Pour la suite du monde*, *Le règne du jour* and *Les voitures d'eau*.

Following the critical, if not financial, success of these two endeavours Budge



● Above: Crawley shooting *Newfoundland Scene* (1951) with his trusty Cine-Special. Right - top to bottom: Conferring over a script, Lorne Greene and director Stanley Moore; narrating *Pride of Possession*, Kate Aitken and Fred Davis, while Bill McCauley (seated) and Tony Belts look on; the Crawley Films' mobile unit.



films. Chris Chapman remembers Judy "with a frying pan in one hand and a pencil in the other."

Judy's contribution to the establishment of Crawley Films cannot be overlooked. For the first three decades of the company Budge and Judy were thought of as a team as recognized by the special Canadian Film Award which they received jointly in 1957. She acted as a balancing influence on Budge, as did his father Arthur A., and between the two of them they kept Budge's sometimes misdirected enthusiasm in check.

Budge won the Film of the Year Award again in 1952 for the *Newfoundland Scene*, which was once again sponsored by Imperial Oil. Most of the footage was shot by him with assistance from one of Crawley's best cameramen, the late Stanley Brede. Budge used his faithful Cine Special during the filming and he managed to damage his eye during a particularly violent storm.

As the demand increased for sponsored films during the '50s, more technicians with experience were brought over from Europe, most notably Peter Carter's father Donald, who had worked for Gaumont British Instructional Films

began to build a film studio in the Gatineau. The studio was built in preparation for the production of a major television program. *The R.C.M.P. Series*, a 39-episode series financed by Crawley, McConnell Ltd., the CBC and the BBC.

The series is very dated today when viewed in relation to the changing image of The Force (from "We always get our man!" to "Cheque book justice" in 25 years). However, it did give an opportunity for many Canadian actors to perform in an international production which was shown in Britain, Australia and eventually syndicated on U.S. television. Don Francks played the clean-cut Constable Mitchell and there were countless roles for Murray Westgate, Frances Hyland, Douglas Rain, Lloyd Bochner, Toby Robins, Eric House, Bruno Gerusi, John Drainie, Tom Harvey, Chris Wiggins, Cec Linder, Jack Creely, John Vernon, Tom Kneebone, and Martin Lavut, as well as Larry Zahab who metamorphosed into Larry Dane.

The St. Lawrence North Series (*Au Pays de Neuve-France*) was produced simultaneously with *The R.C.M.P. Series*. On January 12, 1959 the creator and scriptwriter Pierre Perreault left Ottawa

contracted to make 130 five-minute limited animation cartoons in the *Tales of the Wizard of Oz Series* for Videocraft of N.Y. By the time that the hour-long final special *Return to Oz* was completed and aired on February 9, 1964 on the G.E. Fantasy Hour, Crawleys had 40 animators including Bill Mason and Norman Drew (who now runs his own animation studio) working there.

Vic Atkinson, who was art director on the series, has criticized Budge for not keeping this nucleus of talented animators working together. However, one of the main reasons that the animation department was neglected, was the dedication Budge demonstrated for the idea of producing dramatic feature films.

In 1962, Rene Bonniere convinced Budge to bankroll David Walker's feature-length script called *Staircases*. The story concerned a mild-mannered man whose well-manicured lawn suddenly erupts in mushrooms. The point of the film had something to do with ecology, but was ahead of its time in voicing a concern about the environment. (If it were re-released today, I'm willing to bet that we would get some

academic trying to convince us that the film was a Structuralist message about herpes!!

Released as *Amanita Pestilens (Poisoned Love)*, it only found an audience once at the 1965 Berlin Film Festival, where it was sold to West German television and beamed into East Germany for rather obscure political reasons. *Amanita Pestilens* had a number of minor distinctions to its credit, including the first screen appearance of Genevieve Bujold, the first Canadian feature filmed in colour and the first feature shot simultaneously in two languages (French and English).

This \$300,000 bomb, rather than discouraging Budge, prompted him in typical fashion to invest money in another feature. He put up \$150,000, matched by a Canadian investor, plus \$250,000 from Walter Reade, the U.S. theatre/distributor, to produce a film version of the Brian Moore novel *The Luck of Ginger Coffee*. Robert Shaw and his wife Mary Ure starred in the film with *The Empire Strikes Back* director Irvin Kershner guiding it through an eight-week shooting schedule.

Once again, Budge managed to spot talent waiting to be developed; particularly in the case of Kershner, who had previously only directed two B-movies, *The Hoodlum Priest* and *Stakeout On Dope Street* (both films shot by Haskell Wexler). And Robert Shaw was virtually unknown in the film world, although he was an author and stage actor in England.

Shaw, Ure and Kershner lived in the Gatineau, not far from the Crawley House while the film was being made in Ottawa and Montreal. There is an unconfirmed story that Shaw was so impressed with Budge Crawley's personae that he patterned his portrayal of Henry VIII after him in *A Man For All Seasons*.

So in 1965, Crawleys had a critical winner, taking the CFA for Best Theatrical Feature; but any financial gain was wiped out by the loss on the previous feature and some "creative book-keeping" on the part of Walter Reade. There was also criticism of the film because it had Canadian personnel only in the supporting roles and the technical crew. However, the company has always had a very continentalist point of view, a possible reflection of Budge's own personal outlook.

The sponsored film division was very busy in the years immediately preceding Expo '67, cranking out films promoting the idea behind the festival and encouraging people and groups to participate. *Quality of a Nation*, which contained statements by famous Canadians as produced for the E.B. Eddy Company, as well as *Come to the Fair* and *Saskatchewan Jubilee*. Although the later film was not designed to promote Expo, it still serves as a very good example of the style, and it does not seem as dated as some of its contemporaries.

The year before the Centennial itself was frantic with activity. Crawleys contracted to produce a number of Pavilions including the Kodak and Canadian National, as well as acting as consultants for the Canadian Government Pavilion. It consisted of a revolving theatre, with five four-minute films on the history of Canada; the best one being Michel Brault's *Settlement and Conflict*.

Motion, a film by Vincent Vaitiekunas for the CN Pavilion was well received and went on to win a number of awards. It was subsequently released theatrically by Warner Bros. following the event. In

fact Vaitiekunas is one of the most consistently creative individuals who has worked in the sponsored division. He has produced some excellent examples of the genre including *Multiplicity* (CP), *For Want Of A Suitable Playhouse* (Shaw Festival), *The Sun Don't Shine On The Same Dawg's Back All The Time* (Canadian Open/Seagrams) and *Canada at 8:30* (Volkswagen).

By 1969, Crawley Films had completed 1800 motion pictures, 600 TV commercials, 100 slide shows and garnered 180 national and international film awards. The company was the busiest commercial producer of educational and documentary films in North America—second in the world.

The next year Budge became involved with a feature production, when he was

and an alternating male and female lead playing the Danish prince. Needless to say, it did not play in Preoria or anywhere else for that matter. Perhaps the strangest of all was his involvement as producer/distributor of Murray Markowitz's ode to lesbianism, *August & July*, a 90-minute romp in the country. Even Budge admits that the poster which depicted the two women kissing, was the best thing about the film. While the casual observer considered Budge Crawley to be the Godfather of Canadian Filmmaking, by 1974 he seemed to have become a soft touch for every aspiring filmmaker in the country.

However, Budge Crawley redeemed himself to a great extent by once again rescuing material from another film; in this case, *Everest Symphony*, a Japanese

tions had the rights to the book previous to Budge, but they decided that it wasn't possible to make a film. This assessment did not dissuade him and he has been struggling along with the project ever since.

Budge's contribution to the development of a viable feature film industry in this country cannot be overlooked and should not be downplayed. In my attempt to be as accurate as possible in telling the story of Crawley Films, I have possibly done him an injustice by emphasizing the negative factors which led to the decline of the company. It is very difficult to put Budge in a proper political perspective, because he is and always has been "a hardcore individualist", as one person put it so succinctly. In a country where conformity is practically enshrined in the Constitution, he stands out like the proverbial sore thumb.

The history of Crawley Films and Budge Crawley were inextricably wound up in each other until the sale of Crawley Films to Atkinson Film Arts on Wednesday, May 12, 1982. Budge is still out there hustling to make his feature *The Strange One* and I, for one, hope that he manages to find the right script, which has become something of a holy grail for him.

In the beginning, he could have taken the easy road and continued as an accountant in his father's business and today he would be sunning himself in Florida with his contemporaries. (Personally, I can't see him slowing down long enough to sit anywhere). Instead, he chose to strike out in a bold new direction, which he is still following even after all these years. His instinct for the possibilities of the new medium have been unique and his experience spans the gulf between silent amateur films and Pay-TV (no mean feat in itself).

Always the maverick, the loner, Budge has paid for his outspokenness in criticizing the powers that be in a country as overgoverned and overregulated as Canada. Sometimes he conjures up images of Peter Finch as the Mad Prophet in *Network* with his line, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" It is interesting to speculate what the Canadian film industry would be like today if more people had listened to him. Budge's assessment of the ineffectiveness of the capital cost allowance in creating a stable feature industry has been vindicated ten-fold by the disasters of the last two years. He has always had the best interests of the film community at heart, particularly when he saw government bureaucrats, unscrupulous hustlers and bankers teaming up to make a fast buck.

I think that the history of Canadian filmmaking would be very different today if more people had the fortitude to say what was on their mind, rather than going along with the prevailing mood or current trend. Budge Crawley stands out because he approached the question of establishing a feature industry from such a personal perspective, and he was willing to invest so much of himself and his own resources. Operating outside of the Montreal-Toronto axis, he not only managed to survive, but prosper during the good years. How can you criticize a man who is willing to invest everything he has in an idea he believes in?

In the end, Budge is a solitary figure, who says what he thinks and, in retrospect, if some of what he has said is contradictory, there is always a gem of wisdom hidden in the bravado. He is a figure to be admired for his courage and, above all, his determination.



● A 'regular' on the speaking circuit, Crawley discusses film in Winnipeg with Des Loftus of the Secretary of State's office (1970s)

brought in by Maclean-Hunter to rescue the ill-fated Festival Express Film, a documentary of the concert tour which was scheduled to travel across the country by train. Out of the footage of Janis Joplin, The Band, Ian & Sylvia, Robert Charlebois, Sea Train and The Good Brothers in concert mostly in Toronto at the CNE, would come the 1974 rock documentary *Janis*.

Budge spent most of his time acquiring rights to further footage from around the world and trying to pry the Festival Express footage loose from Toronto lawyer and film distributor, Willem Poolman. Sandra Gathercole, who worked at Film Canada at the time, remembers Crawley chasing Poolman and herself around the streets of Toronto in a Keystone Cops scene. Poolman had the footage Budge needed and he was determined to hang onto it, so a chase ensued with Poolman loosing Crawley by pulling his car into a parking lot and lying on the seat. In the end, Budge found the film stored in the Jack Frost Foodlocker in the west end of Toronto. The rest is history, as they say.

In the interval between the Festival Express and the release of *Janis* in 1974, Budge served as producer on a number of independent features. He acted as executive producer on Peter Carter's first feature *The Rowdyman*, starring and written by Gordon Pinsent, in 1972. The same year, he took another chance on Rene Bonniere and Richard Leiterman and lost when they shot the Thog Theatre Troop's experimental version of *Hamlet*. The play which was based on the original folios, had no sets

film about the expedition to place a skier on the famous mountain. Budge had the experience to see that the focus of the original film was all wrong, because it examined the expedition rather than the skier. This situation is not surprising considering that the cameraman did not like the skier Miura and refused to shoot any close-ups. It is not widely known that Crawleys had to shoot this material and match it with the original photography as they were piecing together *The Man Who Skied Down Everest*, which became the 1975 Academy Award winner for Best Documentary Feature.

Even during the production of this outstanding film there were problems, as the film editor Bruce Nyznik recounted. Lawrence E. Schiller, a Mars Bar munching Hollywood con man managed to convince Budge that he was a film editor and it took legal action to get the bulk of the film away from him. The finished film, however, bears the credit "Editorial Concept and Direction by Lawrence E. Schiller," which is testimony to his effectiveness as a wheeler-dealer.

Next, Budge and Bruce were in New York with the work print of the film, when a cab driver drove away with the print in his trunk and was never heard from again. Crawley Films had to make a claim to the Hartford Insurance company to pay for the cost of rebuilding the film from scratch.

From 1968 on, Budge has been concerned with a personal project to make a film version of Fred Bodsworth's novel, *The Strange One*. Walt Disney Produc-