

SPECIAL EVENTS

14TH YORKTON INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Tradition has a way of bearing down and drowning organizations in the swilling swirl of their own make-believe world. Progress is choked to death by irrelevant rules of procedure and an organization's usefulness ceases. The pains of the final fading are usually marked by a sixty second CBC radio eulogy that nets a hungry free-lancer fifty bucks but little insight behind the passing.

Yorkton has held an international film festival for 27 years; "Once every two years is enough, thank you", said the original volunteer committee. Although 27 years does leave a considerable amount of tradition, it is usefulness that has kept the Festival alive.

It would be nice to say small town Western Canadian help-your-neighbor pioneer philosophy made it all possible. That's a large part of *how* Yorkton has survived, but *why* it survived is the type of film community it served and continues to serve.

Short films don't get headlines and tons of critical acclaim. They have a hard time fitting into North American commercial concepts of what is shown in a movie house. So they mostly aren't shown. Nevertheless, filmmakers stay alive by making short films to meet whatever demand or money that can be beaten out of the boards — be it school or corporate. They fulfill a particular useful purpose that goes back a long way.

The fledgling National Film Board, guided by John Grierson, had set up a network of film councils across Canada to show NFB documentaries in the days when a film projector still held semi-mystical qualities. The Yorkton Film Council was soon thinking beyond church basement film showings. Someone got the bright idea to hold an international documentary film festival, and so they did in the fall of 1950.



The audience selected the winner that year and for the next two Festivals. A panel of adjudicators took over the job in 1956 and has done it ever since.

Frank Moriss, who was on the '56 panel, felt Yorkton should get itself a grand prize to symbolize the Festival. The long-time Winnipeg newspaper film critic felt a "Golden Sheaf" would be appropriate as Yorkton was surrounded by rich rolling farm land.

The original Golden Sheaf was cast by Winnipeg Brass and presented to a Czechoslovakian film in 1958. Copies of the original design ran out in the mid-sixties. But thanks to the Saskatchewan Government Insurance Organization (SGIO) a new Golden Sheaf will be designed by Saskatchewan artists and cast in Saskatchewan for presentation this year.

Cold war comedy found its way to Yorkton in 1956 when a two man Soviet delegation flew in to Yorkton's sometime open airport. The RCMP followed the Russians constantly and were probably scribbling copious lists of everyone Russians looked at in the hotel lobby; the crafty commies went down the back stairs and out for an unhindered tour about town.

Besides diplomatic delegations, Yorkton attracted films from literally every continent. The People's Republic of China started entering in 1958, setting a precedent the Canadian government picked up on over a decade later.

The nature of the Festival started to change in the sixties. Television was making a marked impact on people's viewing habits. The Festival format starting changing to include more than just documentary films. The award categories have continued to change from Festival to Festival in an attempt to match the short film industry's progress.

Financing used to be accomplished through silver collections and program sales. As the public demanded more, and costs escalated, government grants started to meet financing needs. The film screenings have always been free at Yorkton which is perhaps the reason Saskatchewan's government came through with large monetary and material support for this Festival.

The 14th Yorkton International Film Festival promises to fill in gaps that other Canadian film festivals leave. Besides the open awards competition, two very exciting workshops, and a trade day involving filmmakers and writers will mean a film immersion *extraordinaire* will occur from October 11 to 15. And it's all being done by building on the tradition to enhance the usefulness.

Don Humphries