

# precarious establishment

Jaan Pill talked with some of the older hands in Toronto, and gives us a thumb-nail sketch of some of the companies, the projects and the preoccupations of these 16mm filmmakers.

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by Jaan Pill

*What does it take to survive as an independent producer in Canada's non-theatrical industry?*

*The answer that kept recurring among the independent producers I spoke to – both those featured here and ones left out of this survey because of space limitations – is that for the independent, the film business is first of all a business. And survival in that business simply means success at selling your services, products and ideas. Period.*

*Many of the producers originally had their start with CBC or NFB, where the requirements for survival are usually of a vastly different order. When you're on a government payroll your salary often has no direct relation to productivity as measured by your products. And your production costs often don't have a direct relation to your film's selling price.*

*One issue that came up over and over was the Film Board's pricing policies for its educational films. The Board argues that it has cornered only 10 per cent of the largely American-dominated education and library market – and that it's opening up the market for Canadian producers by selling its products cheaply. But many independents, such as Insight's, Pen Densham, argue that as a private entrepreneur you can develop a production that happens to parallel a Board pro-*

*duction – and then find that the Board sells film at a third of your own selling price. "The American competition," he says, "at least is a healthy competition, in that it's going at the same prices."*

*Another issue is the Board's control of government sponsored films. While the independents speak highly of the efforts that Walford (Wally) Hewitson of the Sponsored Programme Division has made to improve relations between the two sectors on this issue, many of them also call for legislation – such as deletion of clauses 9 and 11 from the National Film Act – to further decrease the NFB monopoly. As Graeme Fraser of Crawleys points out, the film medium could be sold much more widely to government departments if the Board didn't stand in the way.*

*The immediate concern of most producers, however, is the CBC, whose \$500-million budget dwarfs the Film Board's budget under \$50-million.*

*The independents – through the revitalized Canadian Film and Television Association increasingly acting as one voice that speaks for the entire industry – are pushing for a vastly improved deal for the taxpayer by requiring the CBC to buy instead of make their own productions – and they're making their point with a sales presentation in the form of a unique film directed at senior decision-makers in Ottawa.*

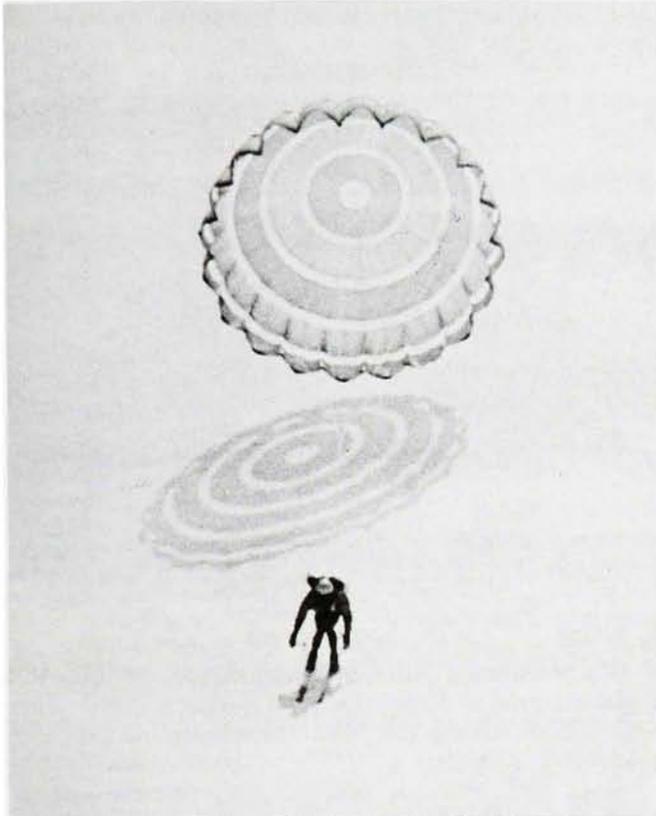
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*Jaan Pill is a free-lance writer and artist who lives in Toronto.*

**Jaan Pill**

**Crawley Films Limited** was founded by Frank Radford ('Budge') Crawley in Ottawa in 1939.

Crawley Films has now made over 2500 films including sponsored films for just about everybody and also features as well as 700 commercials and promos. And it has won over 200 national and world awards including an Oscar (1976) for **The Man Who Skied Down Everest**.



The parachute opens in Crawley's **The Man Who Skied Down Everest**

Also, Crawley Films is a member of 'IQ' – International Quorum of Motion Picture Producers – an association of major international producers, who use each others' services when producing outside their home countries. Crawley's vice president Graeme Fraser is an IQ past president.

Of CBC, Crawley notes that "They're subsidized 500 million dollars a year. Nobody knows how it's really deployed. They're just absolutely hagridden with overhead." The solution, he says, would be to cut the budget in half. "The programs would be better. They've got such an overhead of useless people. That's their trouble. It's empire building like you wouldn't believe."

**Chetwynd Films Limited** was founded in 1950 by Arthur Chetwynd, who till then had been teaching physical and health education at the University of Toronto.

The company's first productions were coaching, educational and Red Cross films, followed by several years of childrens' shows for CBC.

Chetwynd Films made football films for Big Four football teams until 10 years ago, has made Grey Cup films since 1947, and films for the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede since 1952.

Sports films make up a third of the business. Also accident prevention, medical films and lots of travel films are

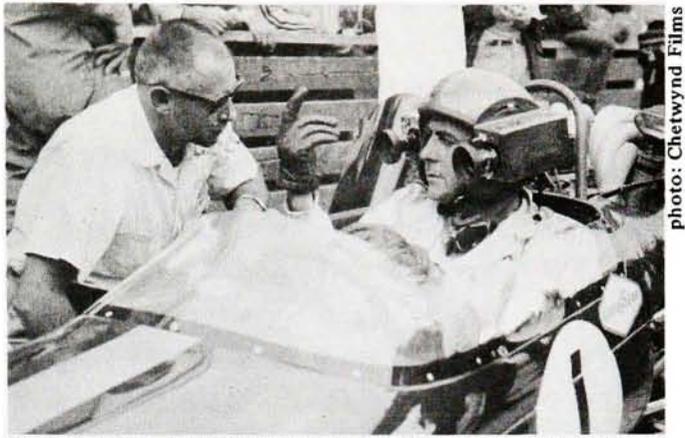


photo: Chetwynd Films

Grand Prix Canada 1967: Robert Brooks CSC, at that time Chetwynd Film's Photography Director (and now President of Robert Brooks Associates) gives instructions to Jack Brabham on the operation of Chetwynd's helmet camera.

produced. Over 3000 films all told to date have been made.

Chetwynd stresses that the non-theatrical business is "a communications business, pure and simple" – which explains, for example, why the company is involved with things like the Canadian Schenley football awards, where it stages a two-hour show combining film, live music and speeches.

And finally Chetwynd Films is very much a family company – employing Arthur Chetwynd, his wife Marjory and son Robin (who's now the owner and president).

**Westminster Films Limited** has been in business since 1958 and has made strictly sponsored drama, industrial and documentary films. "Name it, we've done it," says production coordinator Margaret Beadle.

It has also produced slides and multi-screen productions, such as the 6 1/2 hour communications seminar show for Bell Canada.

Don Haldane and Lee Gordon are the two owners. Haldane is currently co-ordinating the Discovery Train (for the NFB), a special train sponsored by the National Museums and comprised of ten museum cars depicting scenes from Canadian history that will travel across Canada for the next five years.

Haldane is Westminster's president. Lee Gordon, who both directs and produces, serves as executive vice-president. Also Keith Harley does model animation and special effects.

Westminster has six permanent staff members plus freelance technicians and cameramen. It has always been a medium-sized film house. Gordon and Haldane prefer its size to that of an expanding company, as it allows them to be personally involved with each project.

**Quinn Laboratories Limited** was started in 1968 by Findlay Quinn who had his start in 1946 when he joined the Film Board. In the war he served as an RCAF squadron gunnery officer who used films for training and as a result became interested in filmmaking.

In 1957 he left the Board to run Transworld Film Labs in Montreal.

Around this time it happened that Bob Crone, a producer, director, cameraman, soundman in Toronto, was regularly sending work to Montreal. Crone decided to form a service

unit and contacted Quinn for the lab and Len Green for sound division. The result was Film House.

Some years later, both Quinn and Green left, and Quinn started Quinn Labs. (Green now runs the NFB sound division.)



Findlay J. Quinn

The sound division of Quinn Labs – Mirrophonic Sound – was started in 1974. Quinn is president of Canadian Film and Television Association and has had a major role in its revitalization. (He credits his predecessors Harold Eady and Gunter Henning for getting the ball rolling.)

I asked Quinn for an estimate on annual dollar volume for the industry. He put it at \$100 million for all the projects that CFTA covers. He says that features are about 25 percent of dollar volume. Estimates from other sources were in the same range.

*During the preparation of this issue of Cinema Canada, Quinn Labs were sold to Film House. We chose not to edit the copy but to let it stand, a tribute to Finn Quinn and his contribution to the industry. Ed.*

#### KEG Productions Limited

KEG, started in 1964, is named after the three principal shareholders – G.S. Kedey, Ralph Ellis and Dan Gibson.

KEG's TV wildlife series – **Audubon Wildlife Theater** – has never been off the air since 1969. The series, which has been shown in about 40 countries, was financed through presales based on pilots.

KEG also produced **Wildlife Cinema**, another wildlife series for TV, along with **To The Wild Country** – and a feature film, **Wings of the Wilderness**.

Ralph Ellis serves as KEG's executive producer. Like Arthur Chetwynd and Findlay Quinn at the end of World War II, he went directly from RCAF into the film business. And like Quinn, he began with the Film Board. He stayed on for

8 1/2 years, ending up in New York as the Board's United States sales distribution manager.

After leaving NFB he founded Freemantle of Canada Limited, an international distribution company in Toronto, whose holdings he sold 7 years later.

Right now KEG is relatively dormant. In 1968 Ellis had formed a production company, Manitou Productions Limited, for **Adventures in Rainbow Country**, a dramatic series for children. He presold the series in England, Australia and Canada on a presentation basis to get the money to produce it.



Dan Gibson with his nature family in KEG Productions' feature film **Wings in the Wilderness**

Ellis reactivating Manitou to co-produce with CBC **Wild Canada**, a series of 13 hour-long TV specials to run for a four year period, starring John and Janet Foster, Dan Gibson's producer on the series.

Along with Manitou, Ellis has a distribution company, Ralph C. Ellis Enterprises Limited, that brings TV series such as **Upstairs, Downstairs** into Canada.

**International Cinemedia Center Limited** began in Montreal in 1969 when Joseph Koenig, John Kemeny and George Kaczender left the National Film Board.

Koenig says that before he joined the Board in the early '50s, he was a reporter for some trade papers in Montreal. He began as a writer for NFB educational film strips, then moved to educational films.

Looking back, he's pleased he had to make a living on the outside before he went to work for the Board.

"A lot of people didn't and still don't have that experience and it's a serious – a very serious – problem."

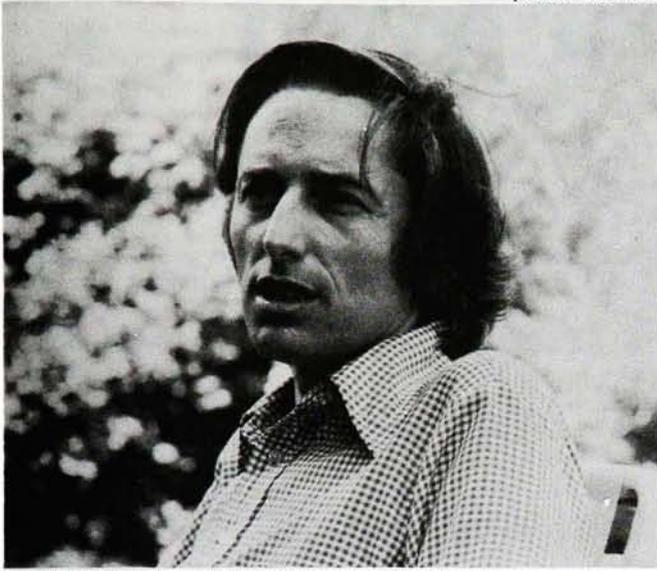
At the Board, Koenig directed films like **Origins of Weather** and **Climates of North America**, both of which gained widespread popularity.

Among the films he produced were **Cosmic Zoom** and **Imperial Sunset**.

International Cinemedia has made sponsored films as well as features including **The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz** and **White Line Fever** (a successful movie "about truckers for Columbia in which "All the good guys have funny names and don't wear ties and all the bad guys wear ties, speak good English and have paintings on their walls.")

Koenig stresses that his company's first job is to sell communication. For example much of its educational work involves 35 mm film strips. "We've found it's very important," Koenig says, "because the market for 16mm films... has simply dried up."

photo: Jaan Pill



Joseph Koenig's first job is to "sell communications"

They've moved into the print (as in paper and ink) medium too. "We've got to provide communication stuff. We can't just be movie makers. We find that's not what people want to buy. They want to buy a service."

The company moved its head office to Toronto in 1977. Kemeny, who is its president, is in Los Angeles concentrating on features.

**Insight Productions** was launched by John Watson and Pen Densham in 1970 with a series of fillers for CBC.

They've recently produced several TV specials including *Toller*, *World of Wizards* and *Stallone, The Million-to-One Shot*.



John Watson, Malcolm Bricklin and Pen Densham during an Insight shoot

The latter film resulted from Densham's stint as 'intern' to Norman Jewison in Hollywood on *F.I.S.T.*, the feature starring Sylvester Stallone.

Insight divided the past year between Toronto and Hollywood — where Universal hired it to do a documentary on Stallone's new feature, *Paradise Alley*. Instead of using interviews with actors, Insight wrote lines which the characters deliver as if they were actually stepping out of the film for a moment to talk to the audience.

Impressed with the results, Universal then hired the company to do the feature's product reel and trailers.

Insight finds such projects "an ideal opportunity to discover the inner workings of a successful major films corporation."

Recently, Insight cut back on staff and production in Toronto — to ensure that they stay personally involved with each film instead of becoming a film factory. As well, they want to concentrate on projects pointed toward international-sale TV specials and features.

Concerning the National Film Board, Densham says that independents working for them are learning to please producers, when they really should be out learning to please audiences.

**Nelvana Limited** was formed in 1971; the principals are Patrick Loubert, Clive Smith and Michael Hirsch.

As result of the success of its animated TV special *A Cosmic Christmas*, Nelvana is now moving along with *The Devil and Daniel Mouse*, which will run on CBC and Radio-Canada and on the same American stations that carried *Cosmic*.



Weez Weezel wields a gavel while Beezlebub promotes rock 'n roll in Nelvana's new TV special, *The Devil and Daniel Mouse*

As well, George Lucas has selected Nelvana to do the first animation of several *Star War* characters — 10 minutes of animation for a 90-minute TV special produced in Los Angeles.

And it has received a script-development grant from CFDC for an animated feature.

Meanwhile Nelvana continues with live-action industrial and educational films and a series of half-hour family entertainment documentaries.