

E A S T E R N W A V E

by Chris Majka

Film production companies have been coming to Atlantic Canada ever since the Shipman Studios came from the United States in 1919 to shoot the silent film *Back to God's Country* in New Brunswick (or maybe even before - I'm not a film historian). In more recent years films such as *The Bay Boy*, *My Bloody Valentine*, and *Children of a Lesser God* have all been shot in this area. Nevertheless, production has been, at least until recently, irregular and sporadic. What film activity has taken place, both by indigenous producers as well as those from outside, has often been regarded relatively indifferently by the provincial governments in the region. Film was often seen as a marginal activity with little significant economic impact.

That image seems slowly to be changing and the recent creation of Film Nova Scotia, an organization whose mandate it is to help and encourage film production in the province, is evidence enough. Film Nova Scotia replaces the Nova Scotia Film Resource Centre, an organization founded seven years ago with somewhat similar purposes. At that time the provincial government, acting on a report by Hadley Robertson who studied a variety of film commissions in the United States, was convinced of the need to establish some organization which might encourage film production in Nova Scotia. It was a time of fiscal restraint, however, and the government did not wish to be shown to be spending additional funds and so the department of Culture, Recreation & Fitness did not act directly to establish such an office. Rather, it encouraged the local office of ACTRA to make a request for this purpose and then the government financially supported this 'private sector' initiative. Ho hum - the convoluted path of governmental action. In any event the consequence was the creation of the Nova Scotia Film Resources Centre. This office was active in promoting film production although principally in terms of encouraging outside producers to come to this area.

Over the years there was a considerable degree of grumbling by local filmmakers that this office was not responsive to their needs and had an unclear and undefinable mandate. This arose partly because neither ACTRA, which ostensibly funded and administered the centre, nor the department of Culture, Recreation and Fit-

ness, which *actually* provided the monies, was willing to assume responsibility for it. It thus drifted in a kind of bureaucratic limbo.

In 1984 the provincial Task Force on Film and Video presented a report to the government with a number of recommendations, one which was that the role and mandate of the Film Resource Centre be re-evaluated. As a result of this, a Board of Directors was created in 1985 and proceeded to review and revise the policy of the Centre. This led, in 1986, to the establishment of the Film Nova Scotia Society which receives money from the provincial government through the department of Culture, Recreation & Fitness to operate Film Nova Scotia. The new director of this office, replacing Marcelle Gibson - who had been with the Film Resources Center since its inception - is Christine Cruickshank. She told me that under its new mandate she sees three principal goals for Film Nova Scotia:

1) To promote Nova Scotia as a location for films as widely as the limited resources of her office will permit.

2) to assist in promoting the resources of the province, in terms of location scouting, information of the production infrastructure, etc. to filmmakers both local and outside.

3) and to see that as many Nova Scotians as possible find employment in all sectors of the film industry and its related service industries.

She is careful to stress that all forms of assistance offered by her office are available to local as well as outside (or as they are termed in this region 'offshore') filmmakers and production companies. The office does not undertake to do any production management itself nor does it involve itself in hiring of personnel directly. It does, however, maintain an ever-growing file of cast, crew and other people involved in various aspects of the industry as well as an archive of production stills and information, all of which are available to anyone interested in filming here. This information will eventually be computerized in a database in such a way that complete profiles of regions of the province can be given to production companies. These would include local and municipal authorities, rental companies, hotels and restaurants, names and addresses of extras, etc. An off-shoot of this compilation of data is the plan to publish, in the near future, a film directory for the province

which will include some of this information.

In terms of future directions, another of the recommendations of the Task Force on Film and Video was to establish an actual Film Commission in the province with wide responsibilities including a budget providing development and production money to writers and producers. This proposal is currently the subject of a study by an interdepartmental governmental board within the Nova Scotia government which is drafting legislation for the creation of such an entity (rumours about town give it an operating budget of \$800,000, but then we all know never to trust rumours). If and when it comes into existence, Ms. Cruickshank anticipates that Film Nova Scotia and its activities and responsibilities would become incorporated into the larger framework of this organization.

The idea of film commissions to co-ordinate the growth of film industries, although not a new one, has been slow to catch on in the Atlantic area. As previously mentioned, there has been some scepticism that film could be an important factor in the economic equation. In this light it is interesting to see that in the wake of the success of *Children of a Lesser God*, which was filmed in New Brunswick, the NB government has recently established its own film commission which is called the Tourism, Recreation and Heritage Film Commission. More on this in a future issue.

In the meantime calls from Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, as well as from down the street come in every day and Ms. Cruickshank, with one part-time assistant, tries to prepare and send out packages of information which were urgently needed yesterday. She will give callers an earful on the beautiful and varied locations available, the number of skilled local production personnel, the advantageous money and tax situations, the lower costs of filming in the area and the ease of bringing in production equipment. She's convinced that we're on the brink of a new and exciting era of film production in the province. Any takers?

TORONTO - A former CBC producer and radio commentator is the new communications and research director of ACTRA.

Doug Coupar will be responsible for Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists' publications, policy research and media relations.

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