

For a Canadian Film Archives: A Brief

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In his seminal history of the Cinémathèque française, Laurent Mannoni observes that the word “cinémathèque” preceded—by a good many years—the actual realization of the archival project it stood for.¹ This is especially true in Canada where, in spite of early governmental interventions in film production and distribution (The Ontario Motion Picture Bureau was created in 1917, the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau in 1918), no systematic attempt at the preservation of the moving images documenting the life and culture of the rapidly developing country emerged before the 1960s. That, in spite of multiple calls for the collection and archiving of significant moving pictures formulated even before the film industry had converted to sound.²

One of the driving forces behind the creation of what would in time become Cinémathèque québécoise—the first Canadian film archive to join the Fédération internationale des archives du film (FIAF)—was Guy L. Côté. Born in Ottawa to a well-to-do family (his father was a senator) in 1925, Côté was the recipient of a Rhodes scholarship in 1947. While enrolled at Oxford University, he got involved with a film society and produced amateur films. This led him to be hired by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) in August 1952. Between 1954 and 1956, Côté occupied a post in the London Distribution Division of the NFB. From 1952 onwards, he was also involved with the Canadian Federation of Film Societies.³ These functions, combined with his frantic collecting activities, led Côté to become in 1963 the first president of Connaissance du cinéma (later Cinémathèque canadienne, and then Cinémathèque québécoise), a post he would occupy until 1968.

The following report was first drafted in 1954 while Côté was working in London for the NFB. It benefitted from exchanges that Côté had with Ernest Lindgren, curator of the British Film Institute’s National Film Library, as well

as with Henri Langlois and Mary Meerson from Cinémathèque française. Coté's passion for archives and acquisitive fervour had been sparked by visits to the Cinémathèque française in the early 1950s, and the Canadian was indeed compared to Langlois on some occasions.⁴ A Cinémathèque québécoise curator, Louise Beaudet, for instance remembered that, if, as the legend goes, Langlois kept films in his bathtub, Coté stashed reels underneath his bed. (In an interview with journalist Luc Perreault, Coté corrected Beaudet's statement: there were only posters under his bed.⁵) Coté's vision for a Canadian film archive nevertheless differed in one essential way from Langlois' work at Cinémathèque française, in that he did not place access at the center of the projected archive's mission. The following report demonstrates an understanding of the importance of selection, cataloguing, documentation, and preservation (Coté discusses the duplication of nitrate reels on safety stock, for instance), but makes sure to explicitly state that "An Archives should have no interest in making, selling, distributing, utilising or discussing films" (section II). This is most likely because Coté understood that the film industry had to be reassured that works selected for preservation would not generate revenues for an alternative network of venues competing with commercial film theatres, and because he also saw the projected archive's activities as complementary to those of the Canadian Film Institute (created as the National Film Society of Canada in 1935) and of the numerous film societies already established across Canada.⁶

Multiple iterations of Coté's 1954 report, including the April 1957 version reproduced here, were submitted over several years to many governmental departments and agencies, as Coté believed that private collections came and went, and that only the State could truly ensure preservation (see section V). Coté appears to have been worried about scaring away the penny-pinching bureaucrats for whom he had produced this report, and to have somewhat disingenuously underestimated the workforce required by such an undertaking. Section VI thus asserts that the "The initial minimum staff [of the archive] would probably be two or three persons (including the Curator, a trained librarian assistant, and another helper with negative cutting experience), together with the part-time services of a suitable Technical Officer to oversee the storage of the material." But even this wildly optimistic proposal failed to convince its target audience of bureaucrats, which led Coté to eventually take the matter in his own hands. He joined forces in the early

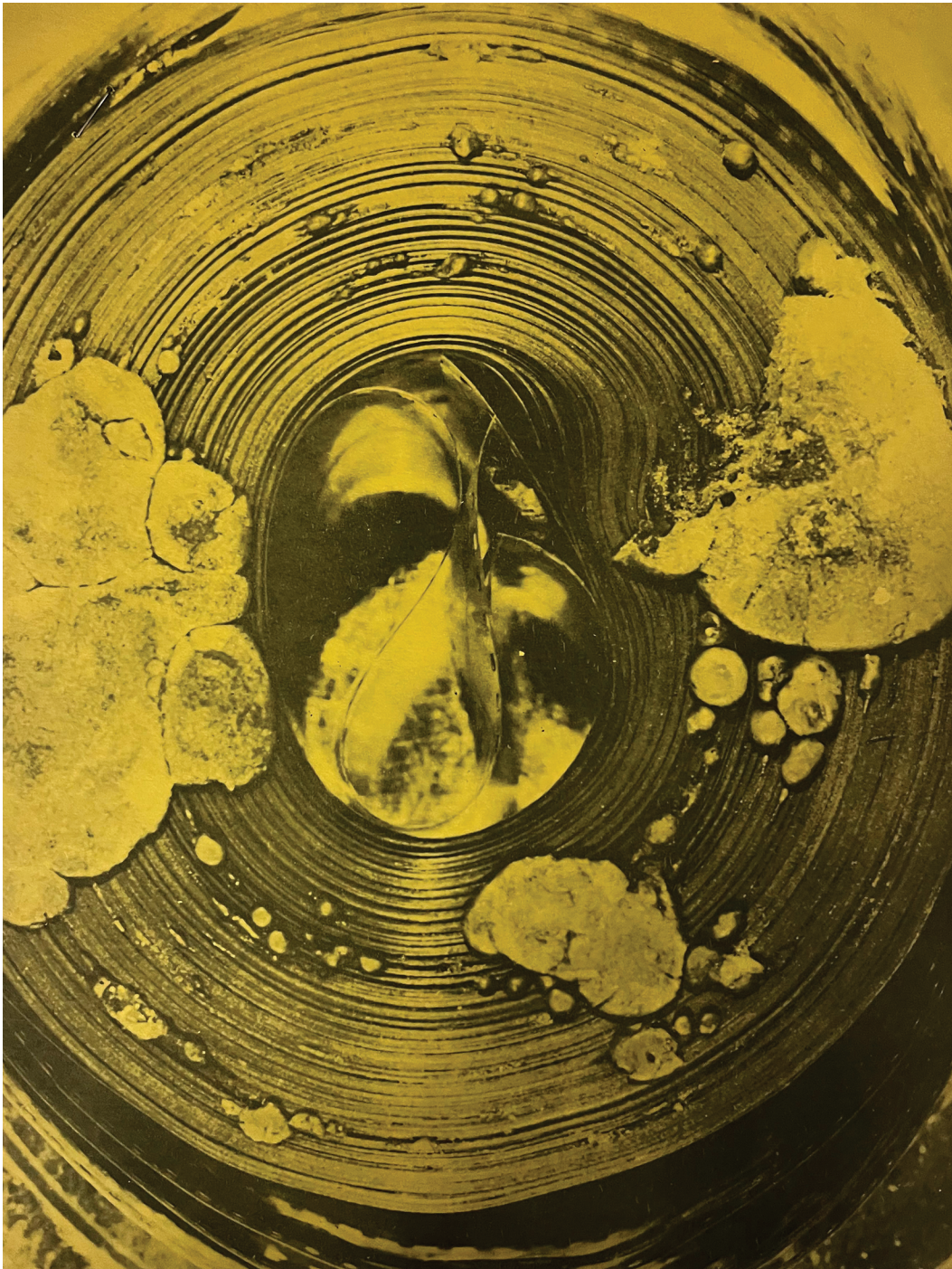


Figure 1. A reel of motion picture film in one of the final stages of chemical deterioration. In this phase, a glutinous matter oozes from the film; in this last stage, the film decomposes into a yellow dust. (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, New York)

1960s with a number of other prominent Montreal cinephiles and, after a few eventful years expertly reconstituted by historian Antoine Godin-Hébert, finally managed to get the cinémathèque first known as Connaissance du cinéma off the ground.⁷

For a Canadian Film Archives A Brief⁸

Guy L. Côté,
London, England,
August, 1954.

PART I

I – Introduction

If you walk through the front door of the Cinémathèque française, past a small group of miscellaneous individuals who are all clamouring for tickets to the evening's performance at Henri Langlois' famous Repertory Theatre, you will enter a small darkened ante-room where the great film names of yesterday relive their almost forgotten glory. Here, the walls bristle with old photographs and crudely drawn animation strips; on a table, a rickety "zootrope", a sort of circular stroboscope, still resuscitates for the curious the gallop of a horse that trotted some 120 years ago for the amusement of the Paris salons. Ghosts, as evanescent as the light and shadow play on a silver screen, must surely haunt the Cinémathèque; and if, late at night, they emerge from the recesses of their film containers and wander down the Champs-Élysées, they must certainly feel a little lost among their wide-screen stereophonic compatriots.

How changed today is the curiosity of half a century ago! The principle is the same, yes. But everything else is bigger, clearer, louder, faster, more expensive. A kaleidoscope of uses now extend the cinema's range and influence. All at once it has become many things: the faithful and objective recorder of physical phenomena, the mirror of today's events that will become tomorrow's history, the social platform from which the demagogue rouses his public, the teacher's blackboard on which the actuality of a far-away land is brought to life, the purveyor of escape for millions of people

who have come to look forward to its imaginary world of beautiful ladies and dashing cavaliers. Good or bad, the cinema is with us—each country has had its pioneers, Méliès, Lumière, Cohl, Porter and Hepworth, to experiment, develop and adapt.

So with Canada. Film in our country has also had its pioneers. They have done well and our cinema has grown strong. Today, the Federal Government is maintaining at public expenses one of the world's largest and best organised single producer of public information films. Yet the teacher, the scientist, the journalist, the social worker and even the showman, who all use our films and are grateful for them, are collectively too busy to think of their preservation. Is there no one in Canada to ignore the terrible urgency of a film yet unshown and cast a backward look to yesterday's wastebin?

This brief pleads the cause of film preservation. It will argue that it is important for any nation to safeguard its motion pictures. It will show how some countries have already done this and will present a few principles on which may be established a National Film Archives in Canada.

II – What Is a Film Archives?

The most important of a Film Archives is to prevent films from being destroyed, or from destroying themselves. To the film archivist, it should be a bottomless vault into which films will be stored, only to be occasionally shown again for legitimate purposes of study and consultation.

III – Why Have a Film Archives?

If the historian's lot is seldom a happy one, the Canadian film historian's fate is nothing sort of disheartening. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, no one in our country has as yet aspired to that lofty title and succeeded in chronicling the coming of age of Canada's film industry. And yet, what a testimony can be found in our old film cans...

The development of our Dominion into nationhood, scarcely older than cinema itself, is there to be seen, and not only imagined by the descriptions of the printed word. Our old customs, ceremonies and traditional dances are there to be saved from the eroding passage of time. The popularity of the entertainment film can be a valuable indication of contemporary trends

in public taste. And the achievements of our film artists have also a rightful claim to our interest. In fact, the study of all these developments is a legitimate field of human endeavour, for what has happened in the past must inevitably condition the future. The motion picture, though not always recognised as such, has been a prolific recorder of men's thoughts and men's actions, and it has joined that select company of books, shapes, pictures and sounds that form a country's heritage.

It is clearly evident that each country owes to itself to preserve this heritage, but the absence of individuals in Canada willing and able to chronicle our native cinema is testimony to the great difficulty of carrying out this work. Film is stored in scattered and often forgotten places; it is expensive to buy and expensive to keep; it requires much time to see and infinite patience to catalogue; most of all, it needs authority and competence to select.

The story of the minor civil servant who was one day asked to dispose of 50 years' accumulation of old correspondence. Enslaved by his routine, and fearing to shoulder alone such monstrous responsibility, he gave orders to make triplicate copies of everything before the originals were destroyed. Alas! Such is not the case for films, where prints are "junked" for the few cents worth of silver they contain, but the story illustrates the need for an organisation competent enough to decide on the value or the lack of it, of old film material. This authority does not yet exist in Canada, and so, every year, valuable footage is destroyed by private companies while the Government's own accumulation continues to attain elephantine proportions and weigh more and more heavily upon its conscience. Only through a Canadian Film Archives can a practical selection be made of existing material, before it deteriorates irrevocably for lack of care.

IV – How Soon Should We Have a Film Archives?

Since 1949, most 35mm films have been printed on non-inflammable stock, whose practical life has been estimated at several hundred years. Previous to this, nitrate stock has been used. The instability of this type of material is notorious, and if nitrate film is stored in sealed cans, or is subjected to large fluctuations of temperature, it can easily suffer various kinds of serious damage, such as fading, sticking or shrinking. Eventually, it becomes impossible to project it, or even to make duplicate prints on safety stock.

The speed with which this damage occurs varies with the quality of the original material, the use it has had, and its present storage conditions. In some cases, film stored away and forgotten about has been shown to disintegrate in less than a decade. Once a “disease” has actually set in, the print may become useless in less than a year. These are known facts.

At the moment, the number of old Canadian films who are badly in need of “first aid” is said to be relatively small. But if we consider that the first official Government films were made over 25 years ago, and that the film records of the First World War are now 40 years old, it becomes clear that further delay will make the salvage operations immeasurably more difficult and costly. While the Government’s own accumulation is being given as careful a storage as its unwieldy size will permit, the same can undoubtedly not be said for many privately produced films. The need for co-ordinated action, it seems to me, is urgent in the extreme.

V – Who Should Pay for a Film Archives?

An institution whose prime object is to preserve cannot find within itself the financing that it needs. Private art collections have come and gone, but only the state has finally assured the preservation of the world’s great paintings. National libraries, important buildings of the past, and even the living theatre have all, in the final analysis, been taken over by the state. A museum works for the future, but foresight alone will not pay the bills today. Canada’s film archives can only be supported by an outright grant. Where will this money come from?

In no other country of the world has the film industry collectively taken the initiative to establish a film archives—naturally, producers have supported such organisations, once set up, by providing prints for preservation. More than half the existing archives now receive all their operating budget, or the major portion of it, directly from the state. Only one (the George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.) has even been founded by an organisation having a commercial interest in the film industry. From my brief acquaintance with the situation in Canada, it would be utopian for anyone to hope that our independent film industry could today come to the rescue. Indeed, I believe that if the Canadian Government does not make the grant itself, no money will be forthcoming from other sources until long after the fragile material of film has crumbled into uselessness.

VI – How Much Would a Film Archives Cost?

While more study and knowledge of existing material would be needed to attempt an estimate of the probable cost of a Canadian Film Archives, some idea of the work involved can be sketched out. The initial minimum staff would probably be two or three persons (including the Curator, a trained librarian assistant, and another helper with negative cutting experience), together with the part-time services of a suitable Technical Officer to oversee the storage of the material. Much of the expense will be printing and storing the films, and this will obviously depend on the number and length of titles selected. In the case of contemporary material, gifts from the industry or reclamation of used prints will go a long way towards keeping the budget within reasonable proportions, but there is no alternative, in the case of old material, but to transfer the bulk of it to acetate stock before the original nitrate begins to show signs of deterioration. To give an example, there are some 180 silent one-reel films, 40 sound one-reel films, and some to [sic] one-to-three-reel films, all produced by the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau between 1919 and 1939, and all candidates for duplication on modern fine-grain stock. The estimated cost would be slightly less than \$25,000, for those films alone. Of the historically famous *World in Action* series of the N.F.B., produced by Stuart Legg from 1942 to 1945, some 35 issues appeared, between one and a half and four reels in length, most of which would probably need a fine-grain composite on acetate from the original negatives.

For an estimate of the operating costs, I would suggest that the advice of Mr. Richard Griffith, curator of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and of Mr. James Card, Curator of the Film Library of the George Eastman House, Rochester, N. Y., would be particularly helpful.

While many films in the collections of archives all over the world are still on nitrate stock, a number are being transferred to safety stock, and the question arises whether the original nitrate negative should be destroyed when a fine-grain safety positive has been made of it. In the opinion of most Archivists, one of the greatest safeguards in film work is the storage of the same film in a variety of different places, so that if one library is destroyed through acts of God, wars or riots, another Archives can always be called upon. Thus, some German classics were destroyed during the war in Germany, but copies were held in London. Recently, the São Paulo Archives in Brazil was gutted

by a disastrous fire, and half their precious collection was lost: luckily, certain masterpieces whose source had been the São Paulo Archives had been deposited with the French Cinematheque.

Some time after the war, part of the film library at Pathe, New York, was destroyed by fire. Deposited there had been precious footage on events such as the first airmail flight in the Arctic in 1924. Not even a print remained. Luckily, a fine grain in perfect condition was purchased by the National Film Board in 1943, as part of their war-time operations for the *World in Action* series, and this is now being used as alternative source material.

The disposal of the original nitrate negatives of Canadian films is therefore a matter of some importance, and serious consideration should be given to either storing these negatives in another vault somewhere else in Canada, or offering the material to the British, French and American archives for them to store.

VII – Who Should Administer a Film Archives?

In the film world, as in all great financial empires, there are set rules and regulations to which all must subscribe. One of the most inflexible of these rules is that a film should never be shown except for the benefit of its owner. Any can of film holds a financial potential, and for this reason the owner of an old film will prefer to destroy it rather than to give it away to someone who may, one day, show it in competition. A film archivist's job is to preserve copies of many films that still possess considerable earning potential. To do this, he must be in a position to guarantee, and to implement his guarantee, that his preservation copies will in no way be used against the interests of the rightful owner. He must earn the confidence of the trade and be strong enough to deal firmly with the inevitable flood of demands that will be made for so-called "private" showings not under the Archive's direct control. To accomplish this, it is both sensible and healthy for the archivist to be administratively dissociated from any group that makes, sells, promotes or shows films, either for money, for public information, for "art's sake", or for any other reason. The clearer the distinction between the archives and any such organisation, the more solid will be the position of the archivist. I strongly recommend that the Canadian Film Archives should therefore be a separate entity to the National Film Board and to the Canadian Film Institute, both of

whose spheres of influence largely surpass the film archivist's preoccupation to preserve cinematic material.

In a sense, film preservation could possibly be considered as falling within the scope of an organisation like the National Gallery (which, after all, does keep "visual material of cultural value"). But I think it would be wisest, in the long run, to make the Film Archives a special branch of the Dominion Archives and to locate it in Ottawa. This would certainly place it in the strongest possible position of responsibility vis-à-vis the film trade, would ensure that the taxpayer's money would be spent under close surveillance, and, as long as the Film Archives' fairly special range of interests were kept well in mind would give the organisation a very desirable national and international standing.

VIII – How Should We Set About Establishing a Film Archives?

There are about 25 film archives in the world today. Each has found its own peculiar formula. Each has grown out of a different set of circumstances. This brief cannot do more than present a generalised scheme for which others may find a more concrete solution. Keeping films presents a great technical problem, and a detailed plan for a Canadian Film Archives can only be drawn in the light of a comprehensive study of existing conditions. I therefore suggest that, on the basis of the very inadequate exposition that follows, the Government allocates a small grant, through the Dominion Archivist's budget and under his responsibility, to study the question, visit the American film archives, seek the advice and experience of the International Federation of Film Archives, discuss the findings with the Canadian interests involved, and draw up a comprehensive plan on which the Government may confidently act in providing a yearly allocation of money for the work envisaged.

It is particularly important that if work is begun on film preservation work, it should be conducted along the lines of a true Film Archives, even if the initial material concerned is limited. Should private producers initiate Archival Sections in their libraries, or should the Government decide to make a selection of the vast accumulation of material it does have, the criteria along which this work should be conducted would have to be as broad as those suggested under the Chapter on "Selection Committee". There is real danger, in such activities, that only the immediate concerns of the librarians

involved will guide the selection and preservation of material; this has been demonstrated in the past by private companies who have kept only that material having some possible commercial value for (say) newsreel compilation of historical events. Unfortunately, material once thrown away is lost for all time: such is the collection of the Ontario Government's Motion Picture section; only a few examples of whose productions remain in private hands or at the N.F.B.

PART II

I – Plan for a Canadian Film Archives

II – The Advisory Board

The Advisory Board of the Canadian Film Archives should consist of representatives from the National Film Board, the Canadian Film Institute, the Association of Canadian Motion Picture Producers, the Canadian Association for Adult Education, the Canada Foundation, and eminent personalities in the fields of education, sociology and cultural life. Its appointment should jointly be recommended by the Government Film Commissioner and the Dominion Archivist. Its first task will be to draft, through a working committee and utilising the initial grant mentioned in the previous chapter, a concrete plan and suitable working budget which will then be submitted through the Dominion Archivist for the Government's consideration. Upon the establishment of the Film Archives, the Advisory Board should remain as a Consultative Body, occasionally meeting to review the situation and advise the Dominion Archivist on the progress of the Film Archives' activities. Ideally, it should not be necessary for the Advisory Board to meet more than once a year, once the Archives are properly set up and the main questions of policy elaborated.

III – The Curator

The Curator should be directly responsible to the Dominion Archives, from which he should receive a yearly budgetary appropriation. He will be the chief executive of the Film Archives and will have to possess quite a versatile combination of qualities. First, he will have the dedication of an inveterate

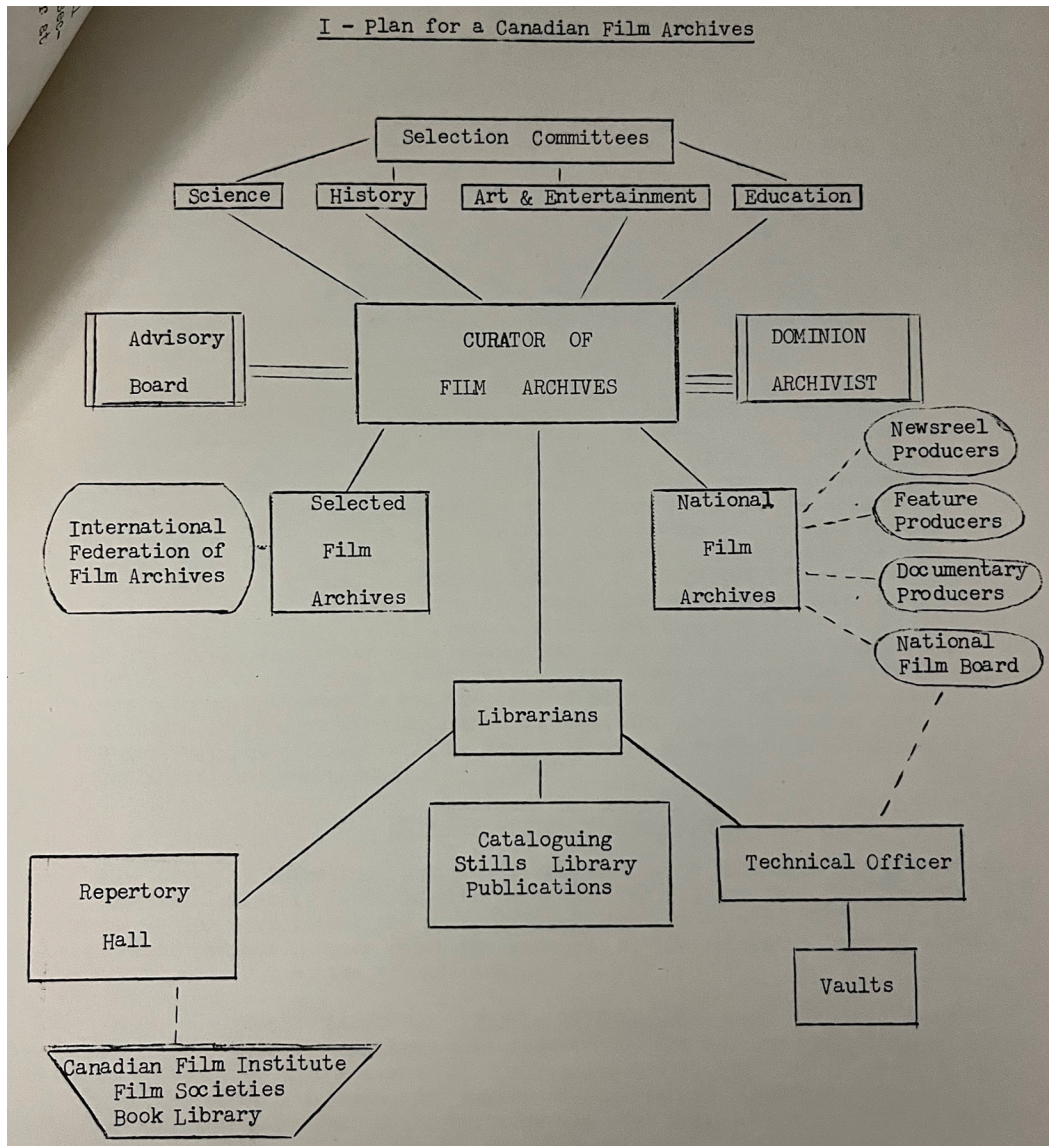


Figure 2. Plan for a Canadian film archive.

collector, possessing a true appreciation of the cinema as an art form, and a profound respect for film as a document. He will have a will of iron to resist the entreaties of film groups who will besiege his door for viewing prints. He will have the finesse of the diplomat to soothe the suspicious producer who will want iron-clad assurances that his commercial product is safe in his hands. He will have a sufficient range of contacts in cultural and university circles to rally around him competent selection committees. He will know

how to stretch a budget to twice its probable value, for he will never have enough money to realise half of what he will be asked to do. He will learn to rummage through attics and dustbins where, doubtless, some of the most valuable “finds” will be made. He will be both active and passive, experimental and reactionary.

IV – The Selection Committees

A Selection Committee’s function is to recommend for preservation those films which it feels deserve permanent recognition in a Canadian Film Archives. The work is all the more difficult because viewing films is a long and sometimes tedious process which the wise men of the Selection Committee will not always have the time to undertake.

The National Film Library in England has nevertheless found the system of Selection Committees most successful, and has recently divided its original Committee into a number of specialised units. In England, ten or twelve is thought to be a satisfactory number of members per Committee. Because most of these live in London, the Committees can meet once at little expense to the Archives: members receive no remuneration for their services and act mostly in an Advisory capacity, much of the routine work being done by the Library’s officers. Thus it is that distinguished authorities have successfully been called upon to serve upon these Committees.

In Canada, I would recommend that there should be four such Committees, each specialising in one aspect of the Archives’ work:

The History Committee: here will be found representatives from the Dominion Archives, the National Film Board, the Newsreel Association and the National Museum of Canada, as well as professors of social history and political economy. They will establish general lines of policy and will instruct the Archives’ librarians to make preliminary selection of valid material and establish working relationships with newsreel and documentary film producers. The criterion will be that of preserving Canada’s history year by year, as it unfolds.

The Science Committee: here will be found representatives from the literary, artistic and cultural circles of Canada, together with social historians, film craftsmen and film appreciation groups. Their criterion will be the selection of that Canadian material which has an artistic validity of its

own, which illustrates the growth of our film industry, which records the development of the other arts in Canada, or which is a valid comment on popular taste and thinking. The problem of viewing, in this particular case, will not be as overpowering, as there are active groups who are devoted to the film and who will gladly make a preliminary selection of material (and who in fact will probably do so without having to be asked twice: I refer to Film Societies). The problem here will be that of limiting the selections, for the criteria that can be applied can suffer infinite variations of interpretation.

The Education Committee: here will be found representatives of school and adult education departments, together with educational film producers and exhibitors. They will select those films which have made the most contribution to the use of the cinema as an audio-visual pedagogic tool in Canada, together with those whose social message will have been particularly effective. Thus the use of film can be documented historically. The problem of selection will doubtless lie in the difficulty of obtaining suitable information about each film's effectiveness and circulation.

It goes without saying that the "representatives" mentioned should not be considered in strict definition of the word. Rather, the Committees will be made up of individuals who, by their associations with the organizations mentioned above, are best qualified to arrive at a wise selection of the material available.

V – The Library Services

The Archives will have a number of full-time librarians upon whose shoulders will fall some of the Selection Committee's more tedious chores, and whose responsibility it will also be to devise a suitable indexing system to the material which will be accumulating. Cataloguing is an art of its own, especially when the material to be catalogued is so difficult to classify, or even to describe. The librarians will continually be chasing producers, distributors and exhibitors for preservation copies of the selected films. They will assemble still photographs from the film preserved (this should not be confused with the stills department of the N.F.B, for example, whose work is independent of any particular film), and will be responsible for letting the rest of Canada know what the Archives possesses. Their interest should also

extend to preserving written matter of definite historical interest, such as old film-scripts, production data, early programmes, etc., but it should be the responsibility of the Canadian Film Institute to establish a proper book library for general use and to sponsor historical and critical publications on the cinema.

VI – The National Film Archives

The National Film Archives will consist of films made in Canada, or about Canada, or by Canadians. It will have a purely national character which will give to the Canadian Film Archives its distinctiveness and its value in relation to such an international commodity as film. Through the Curator and his librarians, close relations will have to be established with the National Film Board, the independent documentary and feature producers, and the newsreels companies. The purpose will be twofold...

(i) To negotiate for the deposit of single projection copies of films chosen by the Selection Committees: it would of course be greatly desirable to institute the “legal deposit” system whereby the Archives would have the right to request items of its own choice. Such legal deposits have been instituted in some countries, notably in the Iron Curtain countries, but it might be that the pressures that would be brought to bear in Canada to prevent such a move from becoming law might effectively hinder the future development of the Film Archives. Failing the legal deposit, then, the Archives will usually have to ask for the gift of used projection prints still in good condition (the budget of both the Archives and the producer would probably prohibit the donation or the sale of new prints). This is the system most often used by archives in other parts of the world, and the prints thus acquired are usually deemed to become the physical property of the Archives. It will also be wise to set aside a small budget for the acquisition of important material which it may be impossible to secure otherwise.

(ii) To ensure that the printing materials of the selected films are prevented from destruction: many producers, who will still be using these materials, will not want to part with them, but a legitimate purpose of the Archives will be to secure the co-operation of the producers in storing printing materials of important films in an adequate manner, and agreeing to turn these over to the Archives once they have served their purpose. As a corollary, it

has occasionally happened that, an original negative has deteriorated , the producer has called upon the Archives to make, from its preservation copy, a new set of printing materials—for which the producer was truly grateful.

I could quote numerous examples of the manner in which these activities could be implemented. It is often the practice of commercial distributors to “junk” their projection prints once the rights of the film have expired. The cost of these prints has often been taken “off the top”, i.e. deducted from the first revenues, and the producer, who usually retains the ownership of the prints, no longer has any use for them. In the case of newsreels, the situation is even simpler: nothing “dates” commercially more than a newsreel, and issues a few months old become obsolete and valueless to all but the film archivist. In England, even television newsreels are being deposited in negative form one year after they have served their purpose.

VII – The Technical Department

This is one of the greatest headaches of a film archives, for it is a continuing and increasing expense to store valuable film. Such activity demands much specialised knowledge: deterioration must be detected before, and not after, it occurs; shrunk films must be rehabilitated; all films must occasionally be inspected and new prints must sometimes be made before the original disintegrates. Because of these inherent difficulties, therefore, I would suggest that the physical storing of the films should be conducted, at least initially, under the supervision of the N.F.B.’s Technical Services Division. The cost, however, should be borne by the Archives, if this organisation is to achieve its independence of administration and eventually possess its own storage facilities within suitable distance from the center of its operations.

But, one may ask, why duplicate in Ottawa what will be excellently done in the N.F.B.’s own new vaults in Montreal? To my mind, there are two valid reasons: (i) most of the Government’s old negatives are on nitrate stock, whose short life has already been pointed out, and in this collection will be found the bulk of Canada’s really important film documents; I feel that selected preservation copies on safety stock should be made as soon as possible, to safeguard more effectively against deterioration; (ii) if an explosion or a fire ever destroyed the N.F.B.’s vaults, unlikely as such an event may be thought to be, there would be no other suitable library from which one could replace

the valuable filmic documentation thus lost. For these reasons, an initial plan for an Archives should allow for a special grant to be applied immediately to making non-flammable copies of the most precious films chosen by the Selection Committee.

Since the cost will vary proportionately to the amount of material to be preserved, it is imperative that the Archives be not considered as a general repository for all Government films, the accumulation of which is enormous. In this connection, special note should be taken of the report by the Committee on Departmental Records (U.K.) who, while recommending that Government films should be placed under the care of the National Film Library, is careful to point out that the material to be preserved will be selected by the N.F.L.'s Selection Committees, in consultation with the Government Departments concerned, and that other films will then be destroyed or otherwise disposed of.

VIII – The Selected Film Archives

The Archives will inevitably include in its vaults some films which would not find their justification in the National Film Archives, just as the National Gallery has a selection of paintings of the European masters. Initially, however, the Archives budget will have to be ear-marked to the most pressing problems of rescuing purely Canadian material, and the Selected Archives should not be given undue importance.

Apart from those foreign films which may first be found in Canada, the Archives main supply of foreign preservation prints will come through exchange with other archives. There is an International Federation of these archives whose function is to establish certain lines of policy and make possible the exchange of material. This is usually on a film-for-film basis, and is conducted, in principle, with the "parent" archives, i.e. the archives who first found the film and holds the initial copy from which all others have been made. Naturally, such exchanges, or "indefinite loans", do not carry exhibition rights. On a film-for-film basis, however, the smaller archives could scarcely build up a representative collection, and there have been cases where a parent archives has provided copies at print costs without insisting on a similar return. But since the "finds" of an archives are its only source of bargaining power, this practice is not usual.

It is of course imperative that the most important films in the history of the cinema be preserved in more than in [*sic*] one country, for in today's troubled political world, even a small out-of-date Atomic bomb would be sufficient to wipe out an irreplaceable collection of films. Thus it is that some of Germany's classics would have disappeared without trace after the fall of Berlin, had not the French, British and American Archives taken the precaution of holding their own copies of these films.

Large archives can permit themselves to accumulate anything of permanent value, no matter what the country of origin, but how far a small archives should go in this direction is open to question. I personally feel that the small archives, instead of trying to ape its big brothers could well assume a speciality, such as experimental films, or documentary films, and thus with a limited budget serve the cause of international film preservation. In Canada, the documentary speciality would possibly be most apt. I have already been given unofficial assurances that such an activity would find a most welcome place within the international community of film archivists.

It is in this context that one of the Canadian Film Archives' interests will be to secure from Canadian producers the assurance that their films selected for preservation may be exchanged with the archives of other countries, as long as it is strictly understood that these exchanges do not carry with them exhibition rights. Canadian producers may of course permit the circulation of their films in these other countries, but they are under no obligation to do so, and the foreign archives affiliated to the International Federation have undertaken to assume responsibility that the producer's rights will be protected.

IX – The Repertory Hall

Any film archives must have some place, no matter how small, where its films may occasionally be shown. Bona-fide film students, film professionals and film historians should certainly have some means of access to the collection. Some archives take the point of view that an original copy, or unique copy, should never, under any circumstances, be shown through a movie projector; this necessitates having duplicate copies made, with the consequent expense. But even assuming that this problem is not insuperable, the question of how often, to how many people and under what circumstances a preservation film can be shown, is one of the more delicate aspects of a film archives' policy.

The French Archives, for example, have a very small hall, seating capacity 50, where every year the films are shown once, or at the most twice. There is no advertising and distribution of prints to film societies. The trade tacitly shuts its eyes to this minimum of activity and, although no admission charge is made, the revenues derived therefrom are microscopic. The French film enthusiasts are annoyed at the Cinémathèque for refusing to make its films available, but there is no doubt that this strict policy is a good one and has earned the respect of the trade, while preserving the unique character of the institution. Nevertheless, in France's unsteady economy, the Government appropriation that supports the French Archives is subject to fluctuation, and the Cinémathèque has had to fight tooth and nail for its existence.

The English Archives, on the other hand, have adopted a somewhat more liberal policy. The National Film Library, as it is called, is a part of the British Film Institute, and the Institute has a "loan section" of 16mm. and 35mm. films. Many films from the N.F.L. have found their way into this loan section, and thus have been studied and enthusiastically shown by appreciative groups. The distribution is usually cleared with the producer, but sometimes a film is circulated without permission, especially when it has been impossible to locate the rightful owner. It is said that the revenues derived from these operations barely covers the costs of prints and printing replacements.

However, as the film appreciation movement gains in importance and maturity, more and more of the material hitherto distributed through film archives may be taken over by commercial organisations. Such was recently the case in England for *Birth of a Nation*, *The Blue Angel*, and *Potemkin*. In the U.S.A., at least one New York distributor is taking a greatly increased interest in the "silent classics". It would, I believe, be unwise for the Canadian Film Archives to initiate on its own much distribution of duplicate prints as is being conducted, for example, by the Museum of Modern Art. If the operations yielded a profit, the Archives have no real title to the revenues, and many of the most popular films might have to be withdrawn later on after considerable sums had been expended in setting up suitable distribution facilities.

It is for these reasons that I am recommending that the Canadian Film Archives should devote most of its activities to preservation, that it should have but one repertory hall, in Ottawa, where the projection of films will be under the Archives' direct technical control, and that access to its collection

should be guided by the general lines of policy already established for the Dominion Archives.

X – Relations with the Canadian Film Institute

There will naturally be some films in the National and the Selected Archives which will pose no problems for non-theatrical exhibition to interested groups. It should be the aim of the Archives to help film societies and film historians by making available duplicate prints of some the Archives' films to the Circulating Library of the C.F.I. In general, this should be on the strict condition that the permission be obtained from the producer. It may even be necessary for the C.F.I. to buy the non-theatrical rights, in which case I can only say that this will be a most healthy procedure.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Mr. Ernest Lindgren, Curator of the National Film Library, Monsieur Henri Langlois, Directeur de la Cinémathèque française, and Madame Meerson, also of the Cinémathèque française, for their sympathetic help in providing much factual background for the writing of this brief. The opinions and recommendations here expressed, however, are mine, and mine alone.

London, August 1954
(Revised – Montreal, April, 1957.)
Guy L. Cote.

Appendix I La Cinémathèque Française

Subsidized and Controlled by the State, through an Administrative Council
President: Jean Grémillon
Secrétaire Général: Henri Langlois
Plus
Treasurer, Vice Presidents, Assistants, etc.

Plus

Delegates from Centre National de la Cinématographie (a government department), from the Ministry of Finances, of National Education, and of Commerce and Industry.

Half the members of the Council are nominated by the State, including the post of Treasurer. The representatives from Ministries have the right of veto.

In principle, the films of the Cinémathèque can only be shown at the Cinémathèque itself. The organisation consists of:

1. A public library of books and magazines exclusively devoted to the cinema; original documents, manuscripts, posters, set designs, etc.
2. A stills library of 100,000 photos and 3,000 original negatives, which are placed at the disposal of historians and members of the press, according to the procedures of the Bibliothèque Nationale.
3. A collection of 50,000 films, classified and kept in good condition by a Technical Service. These films are stored in a Blockhaus given to the Cinémathèque by the State.
4. A Historical Research Service, whose function is to find and collect those documents which are indispensable to the knowledge and study of the History of Cinema.
5. A Service dedicated to publicise cinematographic culture by publishing books about the cinema, organising exhibits in France and abroad, collaborating with international film festivals, and teaching the history of Cinema in the Sorbonne and in various professionals schools.
6. A film museum, consisting of a repertory hall where the great classics are shown in a series of planned programmes.
7. The Cinémathèque is a member-founder of the International Federation of Film Archives, and possesses various exchange agreements with other archives. Entrance to the repertory hall is free, provided a symbolic admission fee is paid, plus one franc. Regulations prohibit the Cinémathèque from providing its films to other organisations, such as Cine-Clubs.

Appendix II

The National Film Library

Founded in 1936, as part of the British Film Institute, the N.F.L. now possesses some 20,000 reels of film, and new titles are being added at the rate of

1,200 reels a year, a figure which represents some 10% of the films registered yearly for exhibition in Great Britain. The N.F.L. employs eleven full-time officers in its work of film preservation. The following quotations are taken from B.F.I. publications, and concern the aims of the National Film Library.

“The Repertory will ensure the permanent preservation, in the national interest, of copies of good films, fictional and non-fictional, notable either for some outstanding technical excellence, or for their influence on the history of cinema: of scientific research films of all kinds, including anthropological films, and of any films such as newsreels and documentaries, judged to be of importance as historical documents, either socially, politically or economically. In preserving these films for posterity, it will prove a source of constant enrichment to the nation’s critical consciousness and will render invaluable service to her young film producers, to science, to education and to history.”
(July, 1935)

“The ordinary entertainment films have a considerable historical value. The very fact that the entertainment film is so completely dependent on popular approval makes it the most sensitive record of the mass thought and feeling of our time. The difference between the films of 1921 and 1941 is as much a difference between two social periods as it is between two stages of technical development. In fact, the constant flow of story films, designed only as amusement for the hour, records more or less accurately our behaviour, our speech and our dress—and will provide for the discerning social historian of the future alarmingly accurate data regarding our habits of thought and our social preoccupation.”

(October, 1941)

During the N.F.L.’s first year of operation, some 273 films were accepted for preservation. For the next ten years, additions averaged 200 to 250 films yearly (not including newsreels) and by 1945 the films were being stored in 62 vaults. More than 400 newsreels were added in that year, and the number of issues subsequently added have averaged 150 to 200 a year. In 1952, 102 major films were added, plus 308 short films, plus newsreels. Today, the B.F.I.’s documentation of actuality material is second to none, although the French Cinémathèque claims to have a much more complete and representative collection of cinematographic achievement.

Appendix III

Sources of financing of existing Film Archives

Archives entirely supported and administered by the State (9)

U.S.A. (Library of Congress)
Japan (Tokyo)
Poland (Warsaw)
Yugoslavia (Belgrade)
Uruguay (S.O.D.R.E.—Montevideo)
Italy (Rome)
Czechoslovakia (Prague)
Austria (Vienna)
Portugal (Lisbon)

Archives largely supported by a state grant, and enjoying “semi-official” status (2)

France (Paris)
Great Britain (London)

Privately founded archives receiving large subsidies from the state (2)

Italy (Milan)
Holland (Amsterdam)

Privately founded archives half subsidized by the state (1)

Denmark (Copenhagen)

Privately founded archives receiving a small amount of state help (6)

Switzerland (Lausanne)
Belgium (Brussels)
Sweden (Stockholm)
Germany (Wiesbaden)
Argentina (Buenos-Aires)
Venezuela (Caracas)

Entirely private archives (6)

U.S.A. (Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. & Eastman Collection, Rochester)

Iran (Teheran)
Uruguay (Uruguaya, Montevideo)
Brazil (Sao Paulo)
Peru (Lima)

Notes

1. Laurent Mannoni, *Histoire de la Cinémathèque française* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 12.
2. See for instance: Jean Béraud, "Cinéma et archives", *La Revue moderne* 10.1 (November 1928): 16.
3. Guy L. Côté file, Médiathèque Guy-L.-Côté, Cinémathèque québécoise.
4. Luc Perreault, "La Cinémathèque québécoise a vingt-cinq ans. Le fruit de la passion et de la raison", *La Presse* (22 October 1988): E20.
5. Perreault, "La Cinémathèque québécoise a vingt-cinq ans", E20.
6. See: Charles R. Acland, "National Dreams, International Encounters: The Formation of Canadian Film Culture in the 1930s," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 3.1 (spring 1994): 3-26; "Patterns of Cultural Authority: The National Film Society of Canada and the Institutionalization of Film Education, 1938-1941", *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 10.1 (spring 2001): 2-27.
7. Antoine Godin-Hébert, "Aux origines de la Cinémathèque québécoise", *1895* no. 86 (2018) : 76-114.
8. This version of the report was salvaged by Michel Martin after Côté's passing, and is now part of the Médiathèque Guy L. Côté collection at Cinémathèque québécoise.

