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The Display of a Tourist Nation: Canada in Government Film, 1945-1959

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Article abstract

Between 1945 and 1959, the Canadian Government Travel Bureau experimented with the production of films to promote tourism that were shown in Canada and the US. As both propaganda and instruction, these films tell us much more than is immediately apparent, providing clues to post-war ideas about nation-building, economic reconstruction, citizenship, and the relationship between the state and consumer culture. Using established stereotypes of tourist venues and experiences, as well as creating tropes about government administration and the tourist "industry" itself, the political economy of the tourist trade was transformed in these films into a commodity for mass consumption.

The Display of a Tourist Nation: Canada in Government Film, 1945-1959

ALISA APOSTLE

At Ottawa in 1947, Leo Dolan of the Canadian Government Travel Bureau (CGTB) rose to address a meeting of the Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference with an announcement. The CGTB had decided to begin producing tourist films. Dolan explained that while to date, "the railways and provinces had done such a splendid job in this field," it was now time for the CGTB to get involved.¹ The CGTB's incursion into film production marked the beginning of a twelve-year campaign during which the bureau used every available outlet to make tourism in Canada "Everybody's Business."

At the end of the twelve-year period, the CGTB published an article in its annual report entitled "Everybody's Business: Travel in Canada." Extolling the virtues of tourism as Canada's third largest export industry, after newsprint and wheat, the article reminded readers of the multi-faceted significance of tourism. "Most Canadians are frequently tourists themselves, and expect and appreciate good facilities and a hospitable welcome in the regions they visit," they explained, "in return all share the obligations of the good host."² In 1959, far from being a novel message to the public, this article expressed what had become an industry script, representing the entrenchment of essential definitions of Canadian tourism. 1959 was also the year that the CGTB wrapped up its twelve-year film program in favour of what it hoped would be a more popular medium – television advertisements. This essay examines the films produced during that period as part of the CGTB project to promote both Canada to tourists, and the tourism "industry" to Canadians.

In the approximately thirty films produced by the CGTB, two distinct genres emerged. On one hand the bureau produced films that they called "educa-

The author would like to gratefully acknowledge the help of supervisors Karen Dubinsky and Ian McKay who read an earlier draft of this paper. Many thanks also to Jean Matheson and Michel Poitras at the National Archives for their patient and expert assistance with the film research. All film stills are reproduced with the permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2000.

- 1 *Summary of Proceedings, Second Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Honourable Dr. J.J. McCann, chairman (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1948), 55.
- 2 *Annual Report of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Fiscal Year 1958-1959* (Ottawa, 1959), 14.

tional," directed at Canadian audiences; they were essentially propaganda films. The other type of film produced was purely promotional, aimed at tourists with the explicit purpose of advertising Canada's tourism attractions. Given that CGTB films simultaneously legitimated the tourism industry and tourists, as well as the state and its citizens, these films dealt with many overlapping subjects. These included typical tourist stereotypes, such as Niagara Falls, Mounties, and National Parks, but the films also created and used tropes about the administration and production of the "industry" itself.³ These tropes included such concepts as "Tourism is Everybody's Business;" the positioning of Canadian citizens as good tourist hosts; the importance of good roads, good facilities and good manners; and always the much-fetishized "tourist dollar."

National tourism is a perfect subject for an exploration of the relationship between state and consumer culture, and between consumers and citizens. While the focus of much recent consumer history has been on the relationships between state and consumer society, the role of national tourism has only recently been drawn into these analyses.⁴ Tourism in the mid-twentieth century was an economic activity inherently enmeshed in the exchanges of commodity culture; national tourism programs manifested specific combinations of nation building and commodification.⁵ From its inception in 1934 until the 1970s, the CGTB was the only federal organisation charged with the mandate to both develop and promote tourism. Furthermore, because of the CGTB's function as an organ of the Canadian state, the subjects of its films were not limited to the tourist product itself. Rather, these films served as vehicles for both industry and governmentality,⁶ featuring tourist objects and places but also telling

3 Recent scholarship on mid-20th century tourist stereotypes of Canada include Mike Dawson, "Consumerism and the Creation of the Tourist Industry in British Columbia" (Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 2001); Karen Dubinsky, "'Everybody Likes Canadians': Canadians, Americans, and the Post-World War II Travel Boom," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, eds. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

4 Recent works addressing consumer culture and state society include Susan Strasser et al. *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Lawrence Glickman, ed., *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); and dealing specifically with tourism, Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough, eds., *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*.

5 More scholarship could be done in Canada on the relationship between post-WWII nation-building, consumer culture, and tourism. Two articles on the topic written by American scholars include Victor Konrad, "Recurrent Symbols of Nationalism in Canada," *The Canadian Geographer*, 30/2 (1986): 175-180 and Douglas C. Nord, "American Images of Canada: Courtesy of the Canadian Tourism Industry," *North Dakota Quarterly* 52/3 (1984): 257-78.

6 I am drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality as developed in Colin Gordon, introduction to *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell et al., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1-53. Here, governmentality is described as a particularly liberal practice, one that marries government and rationality in the state's pursuit

explicit and implicit stories about the government and industry processes that gave rise to this tourism.

By taking an extended look not at Canadian tourist sites, but instead at the manifestation of a rationalised, state-planned "industry," this essay aims to expand the definitions of what constitute the subjects and objects of the representation of tourism. In the CGTB tourist films produced during this period, the political economy of the tourist trade was transformed through visual display into a commodity for mass consumption. Because of the inherently visual and narrative qualities of twentieth-century tourism, it was only fitting that the practices of mass tourism were themselves subject to similar processes.⁷ These films expressed the complexity of the CGTB mandate, which combined both explicitly governmental and commercial roles. The films were a medium in which the contradictions of modern nation-building and the commodity culture of tourism were manifested. Because of the complicated identity of the CGTB, both as agent of government and as advertiser and producer of a tourist Canada, the organisation's messages were often confusing or contradictory. While this paper focuses upon the governmental themes in the films, it is the display of these contradictions that is fundamentally of interest.⁸ This essay looks at how some of these contradictions were translated visually, and argues that, in the films produced for the government-driven tourist industry, Canada, Canadians, and the structures of tourism as an economic activity were themselves reified.⁹

CGTB Film Background

The Canadian Government Travel Bureau had a modest but successful beginning in 1934 when, armed with a budget of \$200,000, it abruptly took over from the railways the task of selling Canada as a tourist destination.¹⁰ This

of economic security. A recent article that draws on this concept in relation to the NFB is Zoë Druick, "Documenting Government: Re-examining the 1950s National Film Board Films About Citizenship," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 9/1 (Spring 2000): 55.

7 A fair amount has been written on the relationship between tourism, consumerism, and visual culture. On the earlier aesthetic relationships of tourism see Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). Chris Rojek and John Urry draw on visual culture theorist Martin Jay in their *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

8 This paper is part of my doctoral thesis. All of the films discussed here were recovered and transferred to video for viewing purposes. The descriptions come from actual footage, not from film transcripts.

9 For the concept of "reification" developed by the Frankfurt School, see Frederic Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*: 130-148. Jameson fittingly cites tourism specifically as "the familiar example" of the process of reification, 131.

10 The best-known book about the CPR's role in creating Canadian iconography is E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada* (Banff: Altitude Publishing, 1983). Greg Eamon's master's thesis is a study of the politics of Canadian travel film in the 1930s: "Associated Screen News of Canada: an illustration of corporate and governmental influence on Canadian motion picture production" (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 1991).

move marked the beginning of efforts to consolidate tourism under centralised government administration, efforts that continued and expanded through to the end of the 1950s. Although the Second World War witnessed a certain decline in CGTB activities, the organisation never entirely lost momentum and, by 1946, it was once again in full swing.¹¹

In the 1940s and 1950s, film opened up a whole new realm of expression for government departments mostly, though not exclusively, mediated by the documentary expertise of the NFB, the organisation mandated to manufacture government film product.¹² In one sense, then, the government tourism industry's involvement in this medium was a natural progression. It was, however, exclusively under its own name that the CGTB created at least two dozen of its films from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. It thereby created a very deliberately branded association among itself, its government identity, its product, and its messages. The CGTB also co-operated with the NFB in administering the distribution of at least another hundred documentaries through what it called "Travel Film Libraries," located across the United States.¹³

The CGTB was the tourism body in which governmental imagination directly intersected with the aesthetic shape and physical landscape of the country. This organisation was not merely a glorified advertising and sales agency that created and distributed idealised images of Canada, though it certainly did this. Largely under the stewardship of Leo Dolan, the CGTB also devised policy for and oversaw the manufacture of infrastructure to support Canada as a "tourist nation." Everything from building the Trans-Canada highway, choosing the location of new national parks, campgrounds, airports, and resorts, to solving the accommodation shortages of the post-war years fell within the bureau's purview. Canada's tourism topography, even to the present day, was altered according to the imperatives of this ever-hopeful sector.

Nevertheless, the CGTB's main product was "information": information about Canada, its citizens, the tourism sector, and by extension, the state itself, and finally tourists, the consumers of these "products." Throughout the 1950s, the bureau had a department with the specific title of "the Information Division." Information during these years was a malleable concept often used interchangeably with propaganda, promotion, advertising, and education. The CGTB information activities ranged widely and included the co-ordination of newspaper and magazine advertising, sport shows, radio shows, conferences, special tourist events, and dozens of large-scale photography campaigns. One of its staple information productions came through its enquiry/answer section,

11 Canadian Government Travel Bureau, *Canadian Government Travel Bureau: A Brief History 1934-1966* (Ottawa, 1966).

12 For more on the role of the NFB during these years see Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board from 1949 to 1989* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

13 National Film Board, *Canadian Travel and Wildlife Films* (Ottawa, 1954).

where the letters written by previous and prospective tourists were carefully analysed and answered. The CGTB also conducted professional travel surveys, which it then applied to its promotional campaigns. Film production was only one of the bureau's many information activities.

After the Second World War, the production and dissemination of information became highly contested terrain for government officials and bureaucrats.¹⁴ The star of the government information industry during the war had been the NFB, charged with the production of the country's wartime propaganda films. After the war, however, interest in reconstruction ruled in Ottawa, and the federal government's focus shifted to other nation-building concerns and methods. Tourism in general was one of the big hopefuls in the years immediately following the war. In 1948, even the government heads of reconstruction got on board. C.D. Howe, minister of trade and commerce, and Donald Gordon, the deputy governor of the Bank of Canada, attended the annual Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference to urge the potential of tourism as a major engine of the Canadian economy.¹⁵ At the conference, Howe informed delegates that, for the first time in history, the CGTB appropriation would surpass the million-dollar mark. Howe delivered this message to encourage the industry, to assure them that tourism was, in fact, on the federal agenda, and to solicit their continued investment therein.

While CGTB budgets soared, the fortunes of the NFB in Ottawa waned dramatically. Throughout the war, the film board was considered innovative, having done cutting-edge work under the leadership of the pioneer documentary filmmaker, John Grierson. However, with attitudes hardening after the Gouzenko spy scandal in 1945 and the subsequent departure of Grierson, the NFB became a casualty of "cold war paranoia."¹⁶ NFB operations were brought in line with the more conservative attitudes and policies of the Cold War era, and for five years the NFB was a favourite target of bureaucratic criticism of the pettiest type.¹⁷ Taking their cue from Ottawa, various delegates at the Dominion-Provincial Tourist conferences took pot shots at the NFB, complaining of its inaccessibility and lack of co-operation with the tourism industry, and the NFB was characterised as a hotbed of communist sympathy.¹⁸ However, much of the criticism resembled institutional hostility and competitive opportunism.

14 This point comes across nicely, but implicitly, in Evans.

15 *Third Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Right Honourable C.D. Howe, chairman (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1949), 9-11.

16 Ted Magder, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 69.

17 Magder, 60. On the internal upheaval in the NFB at the end of the war, Grierson's departure and the fallout from the Gouzenko spy scandal see Evans.

18 While this is most blatant at the Second Dominion-Provincial Conference in 1947, the NFB continued to be treated by some tourism industry delegates with suspicion into the 1950s, as demonstrated in subsequent conference reports.

In 1947, conference delegates attempted to pressure the NFB representative, Mr. Bowker, into a commitment to produce tourism films for them, but funded from the NFB's own appropriation. The NFB was told there was "no subject with which the National Film Board could more properly concern itself." After consistent needling from the tourism delegates, Bowker firmly replied that the NFB would not get into making tourist films unless sponsored by the government departments involved.¹⁹ Eventually, a compromise was reached. The NFB would serve as the main production house for CGTB films, funded from CGTB budgets, but distributed through NFB networks under the film board operations. Tourism films were presumably deemed appropriate material given the political climate. However the discourse was shaped, either as Cold War suspicion or as fiscal squabbling, the reality for the film board was that by 1950, "aggressive, creative documentary work was out [and] cautious educational filmmaking fully in accord with government policy was in."²⁰

From the late 1930s through the 1950s, the NFB mastered the public distribution of "general interest" films through networks that included factories, schools, and churches, as well as service clubs and community centres in rural areas.²¹ These non-theatrical venues were considered extremely important, though the film industry did not believe they reached as large an audience as theatrical and later, television, showings. During the first decade of its own film production, the CGTB continued with these tried and true screening methods but also put new emphasis on venues where tourists were likely to congregate. Non-theatrical venues for travel films included holiday resorts in the Laurentians, Montreal, Quebec City, and British Columbia. This was an early example of target marketing: the CGTB assumed it would have more success attracting American tourists already engaged in Canadian tourism. The CGTB also held screenings in public city parks, national parks, and on steamships travelling up the Alaska coast. It targeted sportsmen's clubs, grade schools, high schools, and universities as travel-film venues.²² As well, through the 1940s and 1950s, the CGTB showed its films as trailers at theatres across the country, capitalising again on a pre-existing network.

As a federal body, one of the most important policies the CGTB had to observe was the equal development and promotion of all areas of Canada, which required a trans-Canadian definition of the country and purportedly neutral representations of nature and recreational activities from region to region.

19 *Second Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 28-31.

20 Magder, 69.

21 For more about the NFB and other public film screening practices in the decades from the 1930s through the 1950s see Magder and Donald Buchanan, "The Projection of Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, April 1944, reprinted in Peter Morris, *The National Film Board of Canada: The War Years* (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1965).

22 *Third Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 46-47.

But this need to represent Canada in its totality also lent itself nicely to the representation of the Canadian state, or nationhood, as itself a central characteristic of what "Canada" actually meant. In CGTB productions, "Canada" and state government were presented as mutually enforcing entities.

The CGTB also developed the idea of a fundamental link between the state and the economy of consumerism. In 1948, Mr. Alan Field, the secretary of the National Film Board, opened his address to the Dominion-Provincial conference with the quixotic quest to define what exactly a "tourist film" was. "One question that has often arisen," Field stated, "is what exactly is a tourist film. No concrete definition exists for a 'tourist film.' All films, other than specialised films, have some interest for people who wish to come to Canada or are planning to visit this country."²³ By widening its definition in this way, the CGTB could now play a role in depicting and defining a broad range of activities that affected both government and the economy. This ambiguity of what constituted the genre of "tourist film" reflected the complex position of the CGTB itself, and allowed the bureau to participate in both the economy of post-war consumerism and the affairs of the state.

Mr. Tourist Dollar and the balance of payments

The first objective of CGTB filmmakers was "the education of Canadian citizens" themselves. At the 1947 conference, Colonel Arthur Welsh, minister of travel and publicity for Ontario, proposed that "one common problem that had to be met was the education of our own people. We have got to point out to our own people the benefits of the tourist industry to every man, in every province, in every walk of life." The conference delegates concurred, passing a resolution that the federal government take immediate steps to produce documentary films for distribution within Canada that would "depict the economic value of the tourist industry to the whole people of the country."²⁴ To that end, the CGTB established a committee and charged Dolan and others to act as an editorial advisory body on the matter. The emphasis on national education adopted at the early conferences suited the CGTB's mandate perfectly. The provinces and railways had, according to Dolan, done a splendid job with the representation and selling of their own jurisdictions, but since the CGTB was prohibited from taking such a specific focus, it turned its attention to the propaganda of nation-building more broadly. As one member of the conference stated, what they wanted "was not a picture showing beautiful scenery, but one to educate our own people."²⁵ This shift further blurred the boundaries between information, advertising, and propaganda. In the years that followed the 1947 conference,

23 *Third Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 25.

24 *Second Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 29, 53.

25 *Second Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 31.

three films were produced to these specific ends: *Welcome, Neighbour* (1949), *Travellers' Cheques* (1952), and *Tourist Go Home* (1959). In these, the definition of the tourist film was again expanded and two further sets of subjects were incorporated: the nature of Canadian citizenship and the processes of economic activity itself.

Propaganda has been defined as distinct from other forms of publicity because it "tries to determine happenings in the public sphere [and] seeks to persuade the body politic, or some significant constituency within the public sphere." Propaganda, Paul Rutherford argues, "normally addresses or 'constructs' the model person...[as] the advertiser to happy consumers, and the propagandist to good citizens."²⁶ The CGTB's educational material presented a further discursive shift, however, as reflected in its 1959 article, "Everybody's Business: Tourism in Canada."²⁷ Here, Canadians were addressed as always both producers and consumers in what one delegate at the conference actually termed "the tourist plant."²⁸ Tourism was not just a leisure activity, but a productive "industry." In the three educational films produced over the next twelve years, Canadians were depicted in a complex way as willing participants in the objectification of Canada and as objects of tourism themselves. At the same time, Canadians were encouraged to themselves consume their own product. Yet this Canada, as the films blatantly told their Canadian audiences, was itself a construct, a myth, cemented together with the very explicit language of nationalism. National identity and national pride were the tropes pulled out to give structure and meaning to these inherently consumer activities; the nation itself became something to be consumed.

From 1947 until 1952, when the Dominion Bureau of Statistics calculated the first-ever deficit in Canada's tourist balance of payments, tourism promotion in Canada was driven by the idea that the sector was of tremendous economic importance. During the 1947 currency crisis, when Canada's exchange reserve of American dollars dropped precariously low, the federal government banned imports and restricted Canadian travel to other countries. At the same time, the national tourism sector got involved in a program to hoard American dollars. This, combined with the more general impetus of post-war reconstruction, created an obvious focus on the economic importance of Canadian tourism. In 1947, C.D. Howe told the Dominion-Provincial Conference that

26 Paul Rutherford, *Endless Propaganda—the Advertising of Public Goods* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 8.

27 *Annual Report of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Fiscal Year 1958-1959* (Ottawa, 1959).

28 *Report of Proceedings, Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference* (Ottawa, 1947), 5. This was the first of the series of inter-governmental conferences. Karen Dubinsky has also written about the idea of the "tourist plant" in article " 'Everybody Likes Canadians': Canadians, Americans, and the Post-World War II Travel Boom," cited above.

one of the main priorities of the government was “stockpiling American dollars.” In 1949, Dolan again reminded delegates that, “the cold hard fact is we are after US dollars.”²⁹ The two films produced in this period, *Welcome, Neighbour* and *Travellers' Cheques*, obeyed the conference resolution to tell their stories along economic lines.

Welcome, Neighbour, produced by the NFB for the CGTB, was released during “Tourist Week” in 1949 in more than 500 theatres across Canada.³⁰ *Welcome, Neighbour* was a straightforward, narrated documentary. Against a background of images showing tourists arriving in Canada by car, plane and boat, an upbeat narrator told viewers that each year the “friendly invasion grows,” with six million tourists, mostly American, coming to Canada each summer. The lesson for the audience, in this case a Canadian audience, was that, “The job of entertaining millions of guests has become one of Canada’s biggest peacetime industries. Tourism is important to the nation’s economy because American dollars spent on hunting and fishing licenses and food and retail purchases are American dollars which can be used to buy coal, cotton, machinery and other goods from the United States.” Viewers were also reminded that tourism was second only to pulp and paper for bringing American currency into the country. The framing of tourism as a national industry akin to natural resource industries was a trope that would remain current for years to come.

After the brief economics lesson, *Welcome, Neighbour* reminded the audience that Canada had no monopoly on tourism, and that other nations were also competing for tourists. To allay this concern, CGTB employees were shown hard at work in the Ottawa office. Here they read and responded to letters from tourists. Unfortunately, they were not all happy letters. The film referred lightheartedly to the complaints received from tourists about Canada. An American woman lamented her husband’s indigestion due to poor quality food. In another anecdote, an American man ventured on an automobile tour with his wife and mother-in-law. He informed the CGTB, with explicit irony, that because Canada’s secondary roads were in such bad repair, his mother-in-law would not accompany the couple on any more Canadian holidays. This message was conveyed against footage of a woman bouncing comically in the back seat of a convertible. The re-enacted incidents in the film mirrored themes like these that were raised over and again at the conferences and in other CGTB activities, particularly in the pioneering professional tourism surveys conducted among American tourists in Canada. The responses identified poor food and roads and, later, a lack of adequate accommodation as the only complaints American

29 *Second Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 9; and, *Fourth Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Honourable Robert H. Winters, chairman (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1950), 13.

30 *Canada, Annual Report from the Department of Resources and Development for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1950*, 145.



Welcome, Neighbour (1949). Serving tourists at the CGTB office.



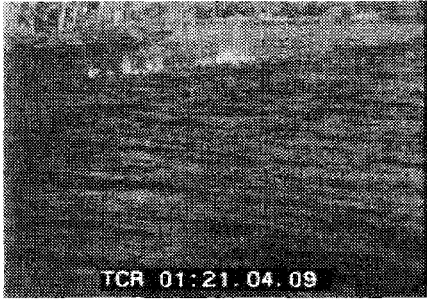
Dominion Provincial Tourist Conference

tourists consistently expressed about Canada. The narrator of *Welcome, Neighbour* moved away from these complaints, however, to end on an upbeat note. Canadians were reassured that in spite of these tourism shortcomings, “the most important asset of all is the warm friendliness of the Canadian people.” Canadian audiences were thus drawn into the narrative and also into the challenge of creating a tourist nation, their “warm friendliness” being the very least they might offer for tourist consumption.

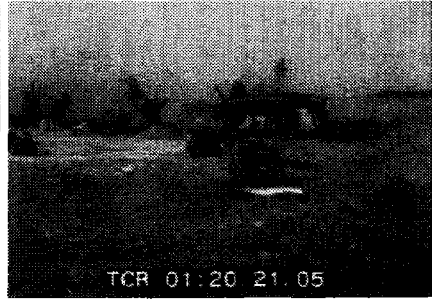
Welcome, Neighbour used another narrative device to bring Canadians behind the scenes of this Canadian industry; it spoke to the audience directly. In what seems an unusual gesture of government accountability, the machinations of the CGTB were themselves depicted. Audiences were brought directly into the CGTB head office. Here government officials were shown putting together new tourism pamphlets about skiing in Canada, part of a campaign unfolding at the CGTB in the late 1940s and early 1950s to present Canada as a year-round destination. The tourism staff was shown surrounded by the paraphernalia of the industry. Travel posters decorated the walls and stacks of travel brochures were piled on tables. The viewers then saw shots from one of the Dominion-Provincial Conferences on Parliament Hill, where again the conference room was decorated with posters sporting the official CGTB slogan, “Canada – Vacations Unlimited,” which had been adopted in 1947.³¹ The same slogan appeared for years on every promotional product that the CGTB created. The narrator impressed upon viewers the fact that ministers from every province in Canada attended these conferences every year because “all parts of Canada have a vital stake” in tourism. The process of creating a national tourist industry was again reified and rendered into a narrative, but in this case it was the government, as represented by the CGTB, that was positioned as the subject of the film. Images of government workers doing their jobs and images of

31 Canada, *Fifty-sixth Annual Report Department of Trade and Commerce, year ended March 31, 1948*.

THE DISPLAY OF A TOURIST NATION



Welcome, Neighbour (1949). Restocking fish.



New Brunswick National park under construction.

the tourist product they manufactured were juxtaposed, giving both the same level of significance.

Showing little concern for a discourse of authenticity, *Welcome, Neighbour* focused rather on drawing the audience into the process of creating a tourism product. Before-and-after images of the tourism “industry” were juxtaposed to show the relationship between government intervention and the success of the tourism industry. A happy angler was shown fishing on a quiet Canadian lake, followed by a shot of a plane flying over a lake, releasing a stream of water and fish from its belly, re-stocking the lake for more tourists. The film showed the hatcheries where these fish were cultivated before they were released into the wild. Scenic nature shots were juxtaposed with footage from New Brunswick where bulldozers and construction crews worked to create a new national park in a devastated landscape. More crews were shown working on the construction of new highways and campgrounds. All this was narrated as a proud ode to the industry and state mobilisation, rather than a celebration of tourism itself. *Welcome, Neighbour* went behind the scenes to reveal the construction of what was usually expressed as a seamless tourism narrative, a seamlessness that the industry had, until that point, deliberately promoted. The film, in keeping with the reconstruction concerns that shaped it, revealed a tourism industry under construction. Canadians were thus positioned as participants in the “friendly invasion” by their southern neighbours, and were also drawn into a discourse depicting an active state, responsible to and for its citizenry.

Schoolchildren were not ignored in the dissemination of this new national message. The CGTB and its supporters thought that the induction of Canadian citizens into a recognition of the value of the future tourism industry should begin as early as possible. In 1948, the same year that C.D. Howe urged the conference to recognise the importance of tourism to Canada’s economic future, delegates declared that “children should help in an educational campaign.”³² They passed a resolution stating that, “Schoolchildren can be an

32 *Third Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 25.

important factor in making Canada more attractive to tourists,” further expounding upon “the importance of educating schoolchildren in tourism.”³³ Three years later, this idea was transformed into celluloid in the film *Travellers' Cheques*.

Travellers' Cheques, according to the CGTB's 1952 annual report, was designed to “emphasise the value of the visitor industry to all classes of Canadians.” It was released in 1952, only one year after the CGTB reported Canada's first deficit in its travel account, which caused much concern at the Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conferences for the next couple of years.³⁴ *Travellers' Cheques* made use of some new narrative techniques. It opened with a school trip at the stock exchange. The teacher, also the narrator of the film, showed his students a stock market ticker tape and gave them a little lesson on economics. He then asked the students if they could think of one very important export industry that was not represented on the ticker tape. The students could not guess, so the film dissolved into scenic footage from across Canada: fishing in Newfoundland, Magnetic Hill in New Brunswick, winter sports in Quebec, Niagara Falls, national parks in the Prairies, and so on. The provinces had contributed to making the film by donating “typical” tourist footage from their own film stocks, and so these scenes were not only stereotypical but also recycled and thus further reified as objects of tourism.³⁵ After this round of tourism images, the camera returned to the schoolchildren, and the teacher asked them if, after seeing these images, they could guess what he was talking about. The students all raised their hands to reply in an excited chorus, “the tourist industry!” The assumption in the students' recognition of these Canadian scenes as tourist images was that the students and audience alike were already familiar with them as representations of *the tourist industry*. The teacher then turned to the camera and addressed the classroom and the audience simultaneously. “No matter what holiday you choose, from low-budget camping to high-class resort...there is something for every taste and budget in Canada. You just pay your money and take your choice.” This shift to the second person in the teacher's address effectively fused the film's two audiences, schoolchildren and viewers, into a single group of potential tourists and tourism providers.

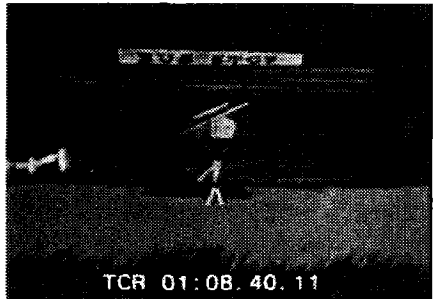
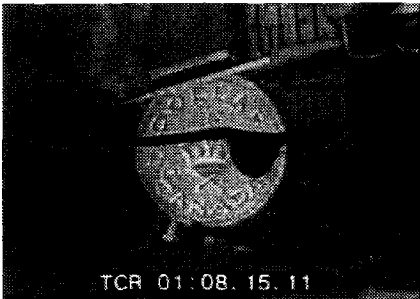
The schoolteacher then moved to the next topic, the much-fetishized “tourist dollar,” now anthropomorphized. “Tourists spend money wherever they go” he stated, following with a question, “Who stands to benefit from the tourist trade?” The next visual sequence in the film was an animated cartoon segment that featured Mr. Tourist Dollar, a walking-talking dollar coin. Mr. Tourist Dollar, view-

33 *Third Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 7.

34 Canada, *Report of the Department of Resources and Development for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1952*, 120.

35 Canada, *Report of the Department of Resources and Development for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1953*, 130.

ers were told, is “a very popular fellow...because wherever he goes walking he’s always leaving part of himself behind.” Sure enough, the film showed this character walking in and out of restaurants, shops, and bus stations, with yet another pie-shaped chunk missing from his body at every stop. The audience was then told that, “people directly concerned with services benefit directly, and almost everybody in Canada benefits in the long run...though tourism is an invisible export industry, it earns Canada 250 million dollars every year.” Images show Canadians buying refrigerators, stoves, new hats, tractors, and automobiles. This film, according to Dolan, was “a further attempt to bring home to the man on the street the meaning of the Canadian tourist industry.”³⁶ The film text juxtaposed government experts obsessed with the calculation of the tourist dollar and its significance to the national balance of payments, with what it assumed were the interests of Canadians: their consumer spending power.



Travellers' Cheques (1949). Mr. Tourist A much-spent Mr. Tourist Dollar Dollar

The final message in *Travellers' Cheques* reflected one of the CGTB's greatest concerns in the decade after the war: the quality of tourism accommodation and of the service “industry” in general. *Travellers' Cheques* concluded with shots of Canadians on spending sprees in various shops on behalf of the tourist industry. These were juxtaposed with images of hotels, motels, and resorts in various stages of construction wherein bricklayers, painters, and other building trades are represented. While these images of construction flashed by, the schoolteacher told viewers, “the more new motels and other services Canadians can offer, the greater will be the number of tourists travelling in Canada.” Because of shortages after the war, the state of general accommodation and housing had become a national issue by the early 1950s, and the tourism sector also felt the pinch. Not coincidentally, this era witnessed a growth in camping holidays, as various governments invested in developing campgrounds in and around provincial and national parks. Over the next few years, attention was focused on the need to ensure the levels of service neces-

36 Ibid.

sary for Canada to compete effectively in the tourist market. Provincial governments responded by establishing grading systems for accommodation. During this period of scarcity, delegates at the 1948 conference reported that veterans were building larger houses so that they could rent rooms to tourists. Farmers with extra space also took in tourists. Delegates were unhappy with these arrangements, believing that tourist accommodation should not be provided as a “sideline” but should be professionally administered. Responding to these concerns, Howe told delegates that the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation was developing a plan to help fund the development of tourist accommodation.³⁷ Tourism was to be not just an industry, but a professionally planned and managed one in which the “experts” took the lead.

Films for American Tourists

The CGTB’s first films aimed at tourists were a series of specialized fishing films, but in 1949, it produced its first five more general “tourist films.”³⁸ They were *Canoe Country*, *Canadian Cruise*, *Famous Fish I Have Met*, *Road to Gaspé*, and *Winter Carnival*. Over the next decade, the CGTB produced another nine films in the same genre exclusively for television.³⁹ The NFB made most of these films for the CGTB, the exceptions being *Maritime Holiday* and *Up in Border Country*; private film companies produced those two films, which the NFB still distributed.⁴⁰ Again, the many imperatives of the CGTB overlapped in these films. Very specific tourists were formulaically identified in the films and were portrayed performing standard tourist activities. Canada itself was reduced to specific sites and characteristics.

All fourteen films produced between 1949 and 1959 figured the tourist as an American, and five of them feature explicitly American families. Dolan described *Maritime Holiday*, released in 1954, as the depiction of “a typical

37 *Third Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 33.

38 The first instructional fishing films were targeted at what Leo Dolan considered the “deluxe” tourist market – sportsmen. Many of the earlier tourism promoters were themselves “sportsmen” and like Dolan, had an affinity with their intended audience. These films were titled *Atlantic Salmon* (1947), *Great Northern Tacklebusters* (1947), *Speckled Trout Across Canada* (1947), *Canadian Smallmouths* (1948), *Coho Salmon on the Fly* (1948), *Spinning for Silvers and Steelheads* (1949), and *Mighty Muskie* (1953). Most of these were produced in association with *Field and Stream* magazine in an advertising and distribution deal that Leo Dolan had negotiated. The many unique attributes of these films and their specific context are addressed at length in my Ph.D. thesis.

39 These made-for-television films were *Canadian Cruise* (1949), *Famous Fish I Have Met* (1949), *Road to Gaspé* (1949), *Canoe Country* (1949), *Winter Carnival* (1949), *From Tee to Green* (1950), *Indian Canoeemen* (1950), *North to Hudson Bay* (1950), *Sailing in Canada* (1950), *Silks and Sulkies* (1950), *Hunting with a Camera* (1952), *Maritime Holiday* (1953), *Escape to the Rockies* (1957), and *Up in the Border Country/ Central Circle Tour* (1959).

40 For more about the politics of film production and the competition between the NFB and smaller private production houses see Ted Magder and Gary Evans, cited above.

family on vacation in the Maritime Provinces." NFB promotional literature described the other family films in similar terms. *Canoe Country* shows the "Watsons of Cincinnati" as they "travel by canoe along the old fur-trade route from Lake Superior to Hudson's Bay [sic] in northern Ontario." *Canadian Cruise* is similar in that it follows an American family on their forty-foot boat through the Rideau Canal system and on to Montreal. *Up in the Border Country* tracks a family from Rockford, Illinois, as they make a central-circle tour of the northern United States and southern Manitoba and Ontario. The film depicts the family setting out with a tent, boat, and car and "stopping at beauty spots such as Kakabeka and Seven Sisters Falls, as well as at picturesque campsites, motels, and resorts."⁴¹ Through these generic travel films, the identity of the tourist and the nature of tourism were further scripted. Circle tours, camping and accommodation, natural sites, outdoor recreational activity and American families were all depicted as characteristics of Canadian tourism. As part of the narrative structure of the film, these tropes were thus further entrenched as definitive of Canadian tourism.

In 1948, the NFB told the conference that the CGTB had accepted its suggestion for a series of films designed "especially for television." It was proposed that "Conservative estimates show that some 750,000 television sets will be installed in the United States by the end of this year...[and] we are hopeful of very interesting results."⁴² The following year, Dolan reported that, "in order to capitalise on the expanding television market five films were made by the NFB for release in 1949." Unlike the educational films, which targeted Canadians directly and intended to position them as participants in government tourism initiatives, the films made for television were aimed explicitly at tourists from outside the country. The NFB distributed these "travel films" to television stations in the United States. In the early days of television, the NFB charged the networks a rental fee for broadcasting the films. This payment system was perhaps feasible then, as broadcasters sought content to fill airtime. However, already by 1952, Dolan was questioning the wisdom of charging for the travel films; he felt that the fee would discourage broadcasters from airing the films. Travel film libraries then adopted the policy of lending films to the networks free of charge.⁴³

There was a downside to the advent of television. As more and more consumers bought televisions, attendance at traditional film venues fell off, and

41 This and other NFB film descriptions come from a document e-mailed to me by the NFB titled, "Films produced by the National Film Board of Canada for the Canadian Government Travel Bureau," n.d.

42 *Third Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 45.

43 Canada, *Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources Annual Report, fiscal year 1956-1957*; and, *Seventh Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Honourable Robert H. Winters, chairman (Ottawa, 1952), 31.

distribution became a serious issue for the CGTB and its partner in the enterprise, the NFB. In the 1952 *Travel Film Report* presented at that year's government conference, Homer S. Robinson of the CGTB stated that, "the impact of television had been considerable in making it more difficult to secure audiences for 16mm films."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, travel film promoters attempted to maintain a presence in all distribution channels, reporting in 1952 that during the previous year their travel pieces were "telecast on 321 occasions from television stations beamed to the USA audiences"; the next year, the number of these telecasts increased to 404.⁴⁵ Television broadcasting marked the final spatial shift for tourist films, as they were introduced directly into the viewer's home.

In 1952, Mr. Lochnan of the NFB told the annual conference that the film board's outlets were trying to gain more market coverage. To that end, the NFB had opened a Chicago office devoted exclusively to distribution of travel films, and it had reorganised the office in New York to the same effect. "There has been," he told the conference, "undue emphasis on school distribution...[and] there will now be more emphasis on adult distribution."⁴⁶ Thanks to these measures, the films made for television served double duty: they were available free to television networks and could also be loaned to the general public and other organisations through the travel film libraries and other outlets. Public and university libraries in the United States were the most important non-commercial distribution outlets for Canadian travel films. Recognising that fact, the CGTB published and distributed a booklet called the *Canadian Travel Film Library*, listing over fifty locations across the country where films were available.⁴⁷ By 1953, the CGTB and NFB expanded their American non-television film circuit to follow the Canadian distribution system. Other venues apart from resorts and various tourist locales included "large audiences in industrial plants in several of the North Central states."⁴⁸ As the number of advertising and commercial display sites expanded, the CGTB intensified its efforts to distribute its films as broadly as possible. On the non-theatrical circuit, it no longer addressed only people already identified as tourists. More and more, it targeted consumers at large in schools, public libraries, and the workplace.

Though the results of the CGTB's early experiments in television advertising were mixed, still the promoters embraced the new medium with enthusiasm. In 1951, the report of the Film Committee claimed that the "growth of

44 *Seventh Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 30.

45 Canada, *Report of the Department of Resources and Development for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1952*, 123, and Canada, *Report of the Department of Resources and Development for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1953*, 130.

46 *Seventh Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 36.

47 *Eighth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Honourable Jean Lesage (Ottawa, 1953), 20.

48 *Eighth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 18.

television film distribution has been spectacular, and television is rapidly becoming a major medium through which knowledge of Canada is being brought before mass audiences in the United States."⁴⁹ Through television advertising, tourism promoters effectively tried to collapse two distinct consumer identities: television audiences in general and potential tourists in particular. There is no documented evidence that the advertising imagination of the CGTB thought very clearly about the links between early television audiences and potential tourists. In terms of advertising research, the travel bureau was relatively unsophisticated, and its promotions aimed at an undefined mass market. Nonetheless the various identities implicit within that large group soon became discernible in both the film products and the discussions thereof. In 1953, the promoters first explicitly probed the make-up of this television/tourist audience. In that year, Stuart Griffiths of CBC television told federal-provincial conference delegates that, "the TV audience is a family audience and travel films made for television should have a family appeal."⁵⁰ The same year, the CGTB reported that, according to official statistics, Americans still contributed over ninety percent of all tourism receipts to Canada.⁵¹ Whether implicitly or explicitly, it was this combination of characteristics, American and family, that would define the content of the CGTB tourist films made for television.

The films made for television during these years met the main content criterion imposed on the CGTB: that was, to represent all of Canada equally. *Winter Carnival*, *From Tee to Green*, *Famous Fish I Have Met*, and *Sailing in Canada* all cover their respective topics – winter activities, golfing, fishing, and sailing – in a cross-country fashion. Nevertheless, some more regional films, such as *North to Hudson Bay*, *Road to Gaspé*, *Silks and Sulkies*, and *Maritime Holiday*, were produced. These were responses to provincial concerns about lack of representation in this new federally sponsored medium.⁵²

As the range of topics covered by these films broadened, cracks appeared in the federal travel film initiative. By 1954, various provincial representatives started to complain about the quality of the films representing them. They felt that films such as *North to Hudson Bay* and *Silks and Sulkies* did not adequately emphasise the "travel aspects" of certain provinces. Moreover, they considered that some films that the NFB distributed as travel films had been created from footage developed for other films with other purposes. At the 1954 conference, delegates declared that "composite films, using industrial and agriculture material

49 *Sixth Dominion-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Honourable Robert H. Winters (Ottawa, 1951), 20.

50 *Eighth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 20.

51 *Canada, Annual Report of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources for the Fiscal Year, 1953-54*, 109.

52 *Tenth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Honourable Jean Lesage, chairman (Ottawa, 1955), 22-23.

in detail, are not suitable.”⁵³ *North to Hudson Bay* is a perfect example of this kind of film. It was purportedly about tourist travel to Hudson Bay but included a good deal of footage about the area’s economic development, from whaling to government scientific experiments. In 1955, Dolan agreed that there was a problem, declaring to that conference that “These industrial scenes should be removed from some of the so-called travel films.”⁵⁴ Clearly there was a limit to the definition of economic promotion that the CGTB was prepared to accept as its role.

By 1955, discontent for a variety of reasons was rampant, with both the provinces and the CGTB increasingly unhappy with the quality and effectiveness of travel films. Just the year before, in 1954, a negative statistic had emerged from one of the CGTB tourist follow-up surveys. It revealed that, of all the influences that persuaded people to come to Canada, the advice of friends rated highest at 38.2 percent, with films and television coming in the lowest at 1.4 percent.⁵⁵ That same year, a CBC report brought more bad news when it informed conference delegates that network programs were dominating the desirable evening hours, leaving travel films on television to enjoy, at best, a secondary audience.⁵⁶ In 1955 Dolan recommended to the conference that the CGTB should “get out of the production of travel films and instead be able to buy the best prints available for use in our film libraries.”⁵⁷ The CGTB felt that its budget was inadequate to create new content and at the same maintain high-quality, up-to-date prints for television and film distribution.

***Tourist Go Home!* – the final CGTB film**

In 1957, Leo Dolan retired from the CGTB to take up a new appointment as the Canadian Consul General in his much-loved Los Angeles.⁵⁸ Dolan’s retirement coincided with John Diefenbaker’s Conservative victory at the polls.⁵⁹ Though not exclusively a Liberal supporter, Dolan’s career had flourished in post-war years under the sway of the federal Liberals. Hailed at the 1957 tourist conference as “Mr. Canada,” Dolan’s retreat to the United States clearly demonstrated both his political dexterity and his comfort with the American milieu.⁶⁰ Alan

53 *Ninth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Honourable Jean Lesage, chairman (Ottawa, 1954), 14.

54 *Tenth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 25.

55 *Ninth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 18.

56 *Ninth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 13.

57 *Tenth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 25.

58 Canadian Government Travel Bureau, *Canadian Government Travel Bureau: official history*, n.d.

59 Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, *Canada Since 1945: Power Politics, and Provincialism* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981), 190.

60 There is a biography of Dolan’s life, political involvement and career, prepared by his secretary, in the Leo Dolan collection at the National Archives of Canada, MG 30, volume E257, file “biographical information, 1949, 1956.”

THE DISPLAY OF A TOURIST NATION



Tourist Go Home! (1959). American tourist family

American tourists receiving unfair exchange.

Field, previously manager of the CGTB's New York office, replaced him as head of the Canadian travel bureau. That same year, the CGTB announced that it was officially retiring from film production and would concentrate in future on the purchase of good quality prints for distribution.⁶¹

Yet the CGTB produced one final film in 1959. Called *Tourist Go Home!*, this production marked the apogee of the CGTB's experience with film. It can be read as the most complex of all films the CGTB produced; it was also one in which all of the CGTB's functions converged. *Tourist Go Home!* followed in the footsteps of the two instructional propaganda films produced earlier in the decade, *Welcome, Neighbour* and *Travellers' Cheques*. By 1957, conference delegates saw a new need for "service films" in the travel industry, "films of instruction that could be shown to people such as waitresses and others"⁶² who directly provided the services offered to tourists. In order to address this demand, *Tourist Go Home!* attempted to cram all the knowledge created to date about the tourist "industry" into a single thirty-one-minute film. The official, and seriously understated, NFB description of *Tourist Go Home!* called it "A film pointing out the importance of good public relations in the tourist industry."⁶³ Instructing through irony, this film showed the audience all the flaws that an American family on vacation might encounter in the Canadian tourist industry. A film within a film, *Tourist Go Home!* was ultimately a parody of film noir, of tourism promotion, and of the tourist film genre itself.

The film opened with a visual of the slogan "Tourist Go Home," painted graffiti-like on a brick wall. A film noir sequence followed in which a secret agent ran up a night-lit street. Under his arm was a film canister containing a

61 *Twelfth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, Honourable Alvin Hamilton, chairman (Ottawa, 1957), 31.

62 *Twelfth Federal-Provincial Tourist Conference*, 31.

63 This and other NFB film descriptions come from a document e-mailed to me by the NFB titled, "Films produced by the National Film Board of Canada for the Canadian Government Travel Bureau", n.d.



Tourist Go Home! (1959). *Anti-Tourist League*

film that he had stolen from the CGTB, which he hoped to sell to the Canadian “Anti-Tourist League.” This league was housed in an office markedly similar to CGTB offices seen in previous films. It was decorated with reams of Canadian tourism paraphernalia showing totem poles, nature scenes, and the slogan “Canada – Vacations Unlimited.” The League decries the selling of Canada’s resources to the tourism

industry, the audience was told, and its mission was the creation and dissemination of anti-tourist propaganda. The audience then joined the Anti-Tourist League in the screening of one such anti-tourist film, accompanied by the cynical narration of one of the League’s members. It was intended that the viewers of this film-within-a-film would enjoy the mistreatment of an American nuclear family of four that travelled to Canada in a big convertible, only to be abused by the Canadian tourism industry. These innocent tourists were given poor accommodation, unfair exchange, bad and over-priced food, and souvenirs made in Japan. After viewing this “uncut” tourist film, one of the League members turns to the audience gleefully and proclaims, “Aha! I think we have four fewer tourists to Canada next year.”

Tourist Go Home! is the perfect film with which to conclude this discussion. Through the use of irony, however awkwardly handled, Canadians were drawn into the contradictions of the tourism industry. They were asked to sympathise with the hapless American tourists, but at the same time, were implicitly shown how to resist that very industry. Canadians were instructed, through the incredulous frowns on tourists’ faces, on the pitfalls of foreign-made souvenirs, unfair currency exchange, bad food, bad accommodation, and unfriendly service. Even more to the point, *Tourist Go Home!* made tourist films and their producer, the CGTB, into the central subject. The organisation itself had become emblematic of certain kinds of tourism information and practices.

This film, like all CGTB-produced films in the preceding decade, revealed the essential complexity of the organisation and its messages. The functions of propaganda and instruction merged with other now-standard tropes to position the Canadian audience both as consumers and as producers of the tourist product. Even resistance to the tourism industry was commodified through the satiric attempt to render that resistance harmless as part of the overall language of tourism. In a final twist, the irony of the film and its structuring as a story within a story worked both as a revelation of, and an invitation to, complicity between Canadians and the CGTB.

THE DISPLAY OF A TOURIST NATION

The tourist films produced by the CGTB told viewers many stories beyond those contained in the immediate narrative structures of the films. When read in conjunction with their historical contexts and government and industry imperatives, the films also give up information about other seemingly incongruous subjects that dominated the federal tourism agenda. Nation building, economic and physical reconstruction, the value of the tourist dollar, the shaping of good citizens, and the positive value of government-driven standards and regulation were some of the many political-economic considerations that shaped Canada as a whole during this period. Using established stereotypes of tourist venues and experiences, as well as creating tropes about government administration, and developing the idea that tourism constituted an “industry” that required professional management, the political economy of the tourist trade was transformed in these films into a commodity for mass consumption. The image of Canadian tourism that remains prevalent still is a physical artefact of this historically specific government imagination.