

1947: The formation of the International Film Festival

In 1947, at the same time as the Yorkton Film Council was beginning its distribution service, James Lysyshyn, field man with the NFB, faced the group with another project.



Jim Lysyshyn, Nettie Krysk, and Paul Welgan are the second, third and fourth individuals in the photograph. We are looking for help in identifying the others in the picture.

“This was the era of great film stars,” he wrote, “who won Oscars and filled Canadian movie houses. I searched for an idea which would restore the prestige of documentary films, as a way of convincing people that serious films could be important, glamorous in their own right.”

The project was, of course, a documentary film festival, a plan to “steal some of the glitter from the Hollywood Oscar.” Lysyshyn had heard that the Edinburgh Festival of the Arts was to add a film section, a totally new offering in its festival line-up. In his mind, the Yorkton Film Council would be perfect to take on a similar venture. The members of the Council were the descendents of pioneers, Lysyshyn thought, “who would be likely to try something new.”

At first, this “perfect” group from Yorkton was not so willing to take on the task. The council told Lysyshyn that most of the films for such a venture would come from the NFB or Crawley Films and people in the area had already seen them. In addition, film festivals were unheard of at the time in North America. The Cannes Festival had been founded only one year earlier; the Toronto Film Festival was not to be established for

another thirty years. Never one to hear no, however, Lysyshyn returned one month later with another proposal, an international film festival. Ruth Shaw, long time volunteer and board member, said it took a year before the council became convinced.

“The idea of foreign films coming here (to Yorkton) to compete was the clincher,” Lysyshyn said. The festival would offer films other than the Canadian documentaries a Yorkton audience had already seen. Besides, the international aspect of the festival was prestigious and innovative.

The descendants of Saskatchewan pioneers, that group ready to try something new, said “yes” and Yorkton’s International Film Festival was born.