

THE LABRADOR INSTITUTE OF MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

LABRADOR/ANS ON FILM

SCREENING #5: IRON FROM THE WEST

As the first of Labrador's post-World War II "mega-projects," the developments in what we now collectively refer to as Labrador West are some of the most richly audio-visually documented in all of Labrador. As a result, we hope to show you more films about this region in the future. For the purposes of this month's screening, however, our intention is to provide you with a "primer" of Labrador West, or more specifically, of the activities that led to its establishment. Notice how these films seem to suggest an alternate geography of Labrador West, a geography that puts that area smack in the middle of a land-locked corridor that extends from Sept-Îles in the south to the now dismantled community of Burnt Creek in the north (in other words, the western edge of Nitassinan). Have people's understandings of this geography changed radically since the development of the region?

1. *Dr. Wishart's Labrador Journey* (11min 25 sec, n.d.) Admittedly, we know very little about this piece. All of the information that we do have is embedded within the film. Shot during the summer of 1936, *Dr. Wishart's Labrador Journey* seems to be an audio-visual document generated during the course of a geological survey of western Labrador and northern Quebec. The distinction here is important: rather than documenting the survey itself, or the geology for that matter, it appears the intention of the film was to document the journey from Trois-Pistoles on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, north through western Labrador and ultimately to what appears to be North West River. Those familiar with the Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railway (QNS&L) will no doubt recognize that two-thirds of Dr. Wishart's trip coincides with the route of the railway. As we know nothing of Dr. Wishart's intentions, it is difficult to contextualize this piece – we seek your assistance in this matter.

2. *Up the Line in '53* (24min 46 sec, Cinécraft, n.d.) One of the first industrial films to be produced directly for the Iron Ore Company of Canada, *Up the Line in '53* documents the construction of the QNS&L. As far as we know, this is the only film that exclusively documents this project. While the film is typical of most industrials of the period, notice the manner in which the un-credited director bookends this piece. Our "voice of god narrator" (a standard convention in documentary films whereby we do not physically see the person narrating) is personalized through the depiction of his calendar, ashtray and the portraits of his children. Why would the director choose to personalize the narrator in this way?

3. *Ore in '54* (27min 54 sec, Cinécraft, n.d.) A companion piece to *Up the Line in '53*, *Ore in '54* is a retrospective of all of the infrastructural development in the corridor connected via the QNS&L. While its companion piece exhibits the same tendency, notice this film's emphasis upon the effort to overcome if not outright defeat the environment. This seems completely at odds with current ideas of development. Are these films simply a product of their age, or does this attitude reveal deeper about the activity of mining?

4. *Civics and Iron* (4min 53sec, 2009) Directed by Mark Turner and Justin Blum. We close this month's screening with a short film co-directed by the curator of this series. More a visual essay than film, *Civics and Iron* owes much to *Dr. Wishart's Labrador Journey* in that it is a contemporary retracing of Wishart's path. As opposed to wilderness or railway, the directors document a well-travelled overland road as well as the products of fifty-plus years of development. Acknowledging and situating this history, the directors construct this piece with excerpts from a variety of industrial films about the region. How does this technique compare with the use of historical photographs (e.g. *The Last Days of Okak*)? Has the way people perceive this region changed significantly since Dr. Wishart's journey?

Coordinated by Jon Beale

Curated by Mark Turner

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