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Graham, Final Report, Lillian Agnes Jones Fellowship:
“The Enduring Magic of Banff in Alberta’s Film Industry, Post 1960”

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to continue researching the incredible, uncompiled, largely unknown and enduring history of filmmaking in Banff.

My project had two goals: deep research into Bruno Engler and Nicholas Morant to understand the extent of their involvement in film history, and research into the continuing involvement and importance of the Stoney Nakoda and the Banff mountain community to film after 1960.

I undertook my work in the archives from January 31 to March 11, 2022, spending on average three days a week there for six weeks. Your collection of film material, including photographs, first hand accounts, books, movies, working notes and personal and business documents, is comprehensive; one of the best, most accessible collections I’ve come across in my research at numerous archives across North America. It provides unusual personal perspectives and information about the film industry not found anywhere else, and insight into the intimate connections between filmmakers and Banffites so valuable to my careful reconstruction of the marvelous, rollicking story of filmmaking in Alberta and the enduring magic of Banff in that story.

My research on Bruno Engler demonstrated how these connections endure through time. It also revealed a much deeper involvement in the film industry

than I first thought. For example, I discovered he was involved in the second movie made by independent Alberta filmmakers, a tantalizing tale of the Doukhobor resistance entitled *Naked Flame* (1964) which features dancing naked women, among other things. I discovered he was involved in a number of other independent Alberta films, as well.

Engler also had mysterious relationships with the film industry that were largely unspoken of and undocumented. I discovered he appeared in the 1968 Paul Newman/Joanne Woodward film *Rachel, Rachel*, based on the Margaret Laurence novel, *A Jest Of God*, and shot on location in Ontario. Little information exists on why he appeared and what kind of relationship he had with Paul Newman at the time, and for me, evoked elements of the last conversation I had with Ralphine Locke before she died, when she indicated Banffites have had deep, personal, private relationships with Hollywood figures since before 1920. Her comments have, in part, driven my research, and certainly played out again when the staff in the archives showed me a file folder of personal photographs by O. Kathleen Wilson, full of un-staged, carefree shots of stars such as John Barrymore and Flo Zeigfield sharing rare leisure time with Wilson and her colleagues from the Chateau Lake Louise each summer she worked there in the 1920's. These kind of relationships are remarkable in the film industry, and not a common occurrence. Little is known about the beginning and extent of Engler's relationship with Paul Newman, and I promise you I will continue to look into it.

I also learned the enduring power of the legendary Swiss Guides of Banff, instrumental to filmmaking in the very early days of filmmaking and pretty much passing the torch to Engler in 1953 when he worked on movies such as *The Far Country* (1954), through his personal records, interviews, a wonderful tale he told

of hanging out with Rudolph Aemmer and Eduard Fuez (two of the most important guides to early film history) at an isolated mountain lodge in the late 1950's while trying to orchestrate an avalanche for the Academy Award winning Walt Disney movie, *White Wilderness* (1958) and records and anecdotes of his work on movies such as *Buffalo Bill and the Indians...* (1976) with...Paul Newman.

For example, Engler warned the director of *The Far Country*, Anthony Mann, that an avalanche would happen around 3 o'clock in the afternoon while they were filming the cast trekking up the massive Athabasca Glacier ice field with pack horses. Mann chose to ignore him. Bad choice. Massive chunks of snow and rock came roaring down the glacier around that time and Engler saved the film's star from certain death. She later called Engler "The God of the Glacier" in media interviews and said the cast and crew bowed to him, and respected everything he said after the incident. Engler recounts that 20 years later, that while working on *Buffalo Bill and the Indians...*, he heard the crew talking around the fire one night about a legendary Banff mountain guide who saved Anthony Mann and his cast from an avalanche in 1953. "I didn't tell them it was me", said Engler. ("The God of the Glacier" would be a great title for an exhibition on Engler and his movie photos and work, if you ever wanted to do one. You certainly have enough material for it.)

When I met the stubborn, meticulous, persnickety, iconic, loveable Nick (Nicholas) Morant on my first day of research, the biggest question I had was why a "Special Projects Photographer" for the CPR, who was completely unknown to the film industry, would be hired to stage some of the most impressive train stunts of all time, for some of the biggest movies and biggest directors of all time: *Superman* (1978), *Silver Streak* (1976), *Days of Heaven* (1978) and possibly *Fast*

Company (1979), a race-car movie filmed at the Edmonton Speedway by David Cronenberg - all undertaken at the end of his career, just a few years before he retired in 1981. I scoured your archives looking for the answer, reading interviews about him, examining his personal notes and books, studying his collection of photographs for clues (noted by several who spoke about him as “the most valuable collection of photographs in Canada” and “being held in Banff”). I had all but given up hope I would find it, when it hit me one lunch hour. It was because he was Nick Morant.

The CPR had a long history of involvement in the Alberta film industry, even being given script approval on many films before 1960. So when the CPR was enlisted to help director Arthur Hiller with the ‘train stunt’ scenes for *Silver Streak*, they put Nick Morant in charge of ensuring contractual compliance. What Hiller and producers discovered, was that, other than Nick being an annoying stickler for details who didn’t let them get away with anything not stipulated in the contract, he was meticulous and knew trains better than anyone, knew the mountains and understood the complexities of timing shots for the railway and stopping speeding trains because he had done so many exacting shots for the CPR, all in perfectly staged, exacting detail, perfect composition and in the best light. He conveyed those marvellous abilities to staging the train shots for their movie, including the still legendary runaway sequence of a passenger train racing through Calgary at breakneck speed. Done in one take. From a series of strange little notes and drawings in his miniscule, ever present notebook (which you have in your collection).

I found several previously unknown movies with Nakoda cast members and a number of personal accounts by Engler and others on what it was like to work

with them. This gave me a different perspective and more complete picture of their involvement and importance to the industry. I've spent five years working with ten to 15 Elders from all three Nakoda bands in a group setting to gather their perspectives and record their undocumented, uncredited history in film. This deepens the understanding and broadens the knowledge base about their involvement, and will be invaluable to my second book.

Thank you for this marvelous opportunity to examine your amazing collection on filmmaking in Banff. My head is full of information and wonder as my work as a Lillian Agnes Jones Fellow ends, and my work gathering and compiling material to create deeper understanding of the enduring magic of Banff in the film industry continues. A big shout out of thanks to the wonderful staff of the archives - Elizabeth, Kayla, Kate, Katelyn and Jacinda - for their tireless efforts to help me open up this history and their patience as I watched scenes from movies to figure out how Nick did it - over, and over, again.

Mary Graham, March 2022