

## FILM REVIEWS

*Cree Hunters of Mistassini*. By Boyce Richardson and Tony Ianzelo. 59 min., 16mm, color. (Documentary Educational Resources, 5 Bridge Street, Watertown, Mass. 02172)

In the introduction to his 1977 edition of *Films for Anthropological Teaching*, Karl Heider wrote, "No film can stand by itself as a teaching instrument. . . . As a general rule, the most useful films for anthropological teaching are those with adequate printed materials to supplement the specificity of the visual image." *Cree Hunters of Mistassini* details the 1973 winter camp and life of the Blacksmiths, the Jollys, and the Voyageurs and includes striking visual images of many aspects of their folklife including architecture and building, crafts, hunting and fishing, foodways, instrumental and vocal music, recreation, and custom and belief. The three families journey into the woods in the fall and, as is customary for their tribe, build themselves a lodge and secure almost all of their food for the entire winter from hunting, fishing, and trapping. Their only normal contact with the outside world is in the form of two visits made by a Hudson Bay Company employee to pick up their furs and leave the few supplies that they purchase. Most of the folklife pictured, however, is not explained either in the film itself or in the brief blurb that Documentary Educational Resources sends to accompany it. The wide distribution and importance to North American Native Americans of the string games illustrated, for example, is simply not discussed in either the film or the blurb. The film largely leaves to the viewer the task of recognizing and analyzing the visual images of folklife shown and thus proves Heider's point that a good film needs a good ethnography to accompany it.

Interestingly enough, there is a 342-page book by one of the filmmakers (*Strangers Devour the Land*, Boyce Richardson, 1976), but it is not an ethnography. It tells the story of how and why the film was made. Its major theme is the impending disaster of having the Cree traditional hunting lands flooded as a part of the James Bay Development Corporation hydroelectric power project. The book does add a limited amount of ethnographic information such as the fact that the winter lodge built by the families was larger than such houses usually are (at least partially because the film crew flew in the required 70 pounds of nails) and that the filmmakers flew the hunters on a reconnaissance flight to locate moose, landed them near the moose they found, photographed the shooting and butchering, and transported the meat back to camp by airplane, whereupon it was brought into camp and the joyous reception and feast shown in the film was photographed. There is still no information given about string games, but the film is somehow much more meaningful and valuable after one has read the filmmaker's account of his motives and actions. At the feast, for example, there is shown a fleeting glimpse of a candle that has been inserted into a coil of bannock. It might be easy to erect some elaborate theory about the significance if one had not read the explanation in the book that the feast took place on the filmmaker's birthday and the bannock was an improvised birthday cake. The book's extended descriptions of the people featured in the film also make it easier to identify them, and with them, in the film. The book is a good book (some of the best sections remind one of Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* or Gazaway's *The Longest Mile*), and it makes a good film better. The truth seems to be that a good anthropological or folklife film not only benefits from an accompanying essay describing and analyzing what is shown (Center for Southern Folklore's *Ray Lum: Mule Trader* package is still probably the best example in folklore film) but also from the kind of first person

collector's description of his or her part in the process as suggested by Jones and Georges in *People Studying People*.

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*Tarheels in the Northwest*. By Wayne D. Sourbeer. 30 min., 1/2" videocassette, color. (Tomwil Films International, 5315 Wilkinson Avenue, Hollywood, Calif. 91607)

In the *Atlantic* of February 1864, Miss E. H. Appleton published a story entitled "Half-Life and Half-a-Life." Its protagonist was a house-bound, poverty-stricken, drudgery-burdened Kentucky mountain woman, dreaming of a more beautiful life. She envies the flatboat men who journey up the Big Sandy to Catlettsburg and one day falls in love with a prosperous mining man who tries to elope with her before he abandons her. Undaunted, she flees the mountains to become a school teacher in Cincinnati. Miss Appleton's story was one of the earliest popular fictionalized treatments of Appalachian outmigrants.

Since that time, the stream of local-color stories and novels, songs, jokes, newspaper and magazine articles, and scholarly studies of Appalachian outmigrants has been unabated. We have the longitudinal "Beech Creek" studies by sociologist James Brown, some remarkable poems by regional poet Jim Wayne Miller, Wilma Dykeman's *The Dollmaker*, Hazel Dickens songs, and much else. After World War II especially, newspapers in large cities like Cincinnati, Detroit, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., warned frequently of the menace that immigrating hillbillies were to public order, health, and morality.

Unfortunately we don't have many documentary films that treat this massive, protracted, and complex migration, and it is a shame, for the subject begs for serious cinematic treatment. Moreover, most of the available written material focuses upon migratory streams in the eastern United States. But hill people have been going west for many decades. As early as 1940, Woodrow Clevinger's University of Washington M.A. thesis examined southern mountaineers who went to western Washington (mainly to work in the lumber industry) after 1890: the Amburgeys, Cockreham, Ensleys, Ledfords, Silers, Vances, and many other families from western North Carolina to Skagit and Snohomish counties, and the Daughertys, Fugates, Hatfields, McCoys, and Stammers from eastern Kentucky and West Virginia to Lewis and Cowlitz counties.

So I looked forward to this film. Unfortunately it proved a disappointment. Despite its broad title, it is in fact mainly an impressionistic treatment of a single second or third-generation Tarheel outmigrant bluegrass musician (O. C. Helton) and a bluegrass festival in Darrington (Snohomish County). The persistence of southern mountain culture is suggested principally through some threadbare stereotypes: bluegrass music, a hog killing, moonshine drinking, snuff dipping, clogging, and tough talk ("we don't have any colored people here and really I'd advise 'em not to"). These elements are offset only slightly by scenes of a community meal, a service at the Glad Tidings Assembly of God, and a musical entertainment at the old folks home.

This sort of tired and simpleminded dualism may be all right for KCTS in Seattle (whose credit line is first to appear on the screen), but it should not be acceptable for the National Endowment for the Arts (for whose money thanks are given in the second). Even Clevinger's relatively brief 1942 *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* article (which briefly discusses Darrington) suggests far more substantial analytical and interpretative possibilities than are even hinted at in this film.

I have an idea that even bluegrass fans might be disappointed in *Tarheels in the Northwest*. We don't learn (except through a few fragmented performance examples), how local bluegrass repertoire or performance practice compares with what is to be observed elsewhere, for example.