

American way of life and the meaning of democracy. The subjects have been as diversified as the following sampling of titles indicates: "Voice of a Choir" (Bethlehem, Pa.), "Hurricane Circuit" (Miami, Florida), "Museum of Science and Industry" (Chicago), "A Union Local" (Pennsylvania), "Peewee, High School Freshman" (Conway, New Hampshire), "Community Advisory Center" (Bridgeport, Conn.), "International Ice Patrol" (U. S. Coast Guard), "U.C.L.A." (California), "Land of Enchantment" (Southwest U. S.)—a hundred titles in all. Production is still going on.

In making films for use outside the U.S., the problems have never ceased being staggering. Some of the films have been real achievements, some are only acceptable, and some poor by any standards. If one important element was missing from many of the films it was naturalness. Can a victorious democratic (but not perfect) nation display itself with utter naturalness to an impoverished ally or to a conquered undemocratic nation? The job, if it can be done at all, is a hard one. It would be a safe bet to say the films we made and showed were every bit as successful as the rest of the ideas and materials which have made up our overseas "persuasion" projects. The fault is less a deficiency in film-making than in the perplexing state of the world and our rather uncomfortable place in it.

Following are reviews of some of the films mentioned in this catch-all on Government film operations. All are offered for purchase through the Government Division of United World Films, 1445 Park Ave., New York 29, N. Y. For rentals consult nearby 16mm. libraries.

—CECILE STARR.

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## The Film Forum

### GOVERNMENT RELEASES

### The Saturday Review's Guide to Selected 16mm. Sound Films

**MY CHILD IS BLIND.** *Produced by Unity Films for the U. S. Army. Distributed as above. (20 min.)*

This is one of the most extraordinary of all the Government films made for overseas use. A mother is faced with the fact that her newborn child will be blind for life. First she and her husband must overcome their own feelings of bitterness, guilt, and grief; their child will need special security and comfort that can be found only at home with loving parents. But as the child grows he needs to meet the outside world. To help him find his place he is sent to a nursery school for blind children and is soon absorbed into the activities and sensations that are part of every child's growth. With trucks and blocks, nails and mallets, the newcomer forgets himself and his problems.

Each child has a special tactile symbol (clothespin, bell, etc.) by which to recognize and claim his chair or his coat-hanger. The children listen to stories, play with dolls, use finger paints, model with clay, dance, and sing. They learn to walk alone and in groups, to feed themselves, to pour their own glasses of orange juice. In outdoor weather they climb and run, skate and bicycle in the joy of physical freedom. That is, most of them do. The film is honest enough to show, here and there, a child who just sits and cries.

Over their sleeping figures during afternoon nap the film has this to say about the blind children: "Once this would have been their only way of life: each alone, passive, exploring only himself—but here it is only an interlude in a busy day."

What is extraordinary about this film? First of all, its director, Victor Solow, had remarkably fine material to choose from, and he chose well. The film is not dramatic or pathetic—it is real. The commentary is neither too much nor too little; read by Burgess Meredith in a soft and understanding way, it is probably the best film narration he has ever done. But beyond these niceties of film-making, "My Child is Blind" has special value as a kind of allegory about being left out or being given a place; about the cooperation and love that develop when we are intelligent in planning for it; about all people and all nations, every living thing that is and must always be handicapped in some special way, dependent upon each other and its surroundings if best potentials are to be realized. It is an allegory worth remembering when we are looking around for subjects for films about democracy and people.

"My Child is Blind" is also available at service-charge cost from The Light-house, 111 East 59th St., New York 22.

**SWAB YOUR CHOPPERS.** *Produced by United Productions of America, for the U.S. Navy. Distributed as above. (7 min., color)*

How and why to clean teeth properly

is the subject of this UPA cartoon which features a sailor named Humphrey and his two other selves, Lazy and Ignorant. Humphrey doesn't bother to brush his teeth—his lazy self tells him he's too sleepy, and his ignorant self tells him it doesn't make any difference anyway. After some crippling tooth-aches and a season of appointments with the dentist and the grinding machine, Humphrey learns the importance of tooth care. From here on he is a regular encyclopedia telling and showing the other men how to use tooth brush and dental floss properly.

It is likely that anyone old enough (or young enough) to have teeth will find a film of this sort the best possible learning incentive. Not only is it educational and amusing, it also manages to make care of the teeth seem a pretty important business. What more could you ask of a film?

**THE FAMILY.** *Produced by Herbert Kerkow Productions for the U. S. Army. Distributed as above. (20 min.)*

In democratic family living the main point is that each member is dependent on the others for his own well-being. The family in this film is laudable for sharing work, worries, and wishes; but trouble comes when the teen-age daughter disregards the domestic budget and buys an expensive party dress with her "own" money. Father gets angry, everyone gets upset, but they all pull together in the end. "The Family" is a simple little film that can be recommended mainly because it seems somehow to be going in the right direction. Although the print I saw was disturbingly out of sync, the people, the lines, and situations were generally appealing.

**TANGLEWOOD STORY.** *Produced by M.P.O. for the U.S. State Dept. Distributed as above. (21 min.)*

Koussevitsky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra are shown along with the students and teachers at this famed summer music establishment, practicing, rehearsing, and performing—but without any of the spirit and style that went into such a great film as the OWI's tremendous "Hymn of the Nations" which featured Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra.

**ADULT EDUCATION.** *Produced for the U. S. Army, and distributed as above. (22 min.)*

This investigation of the purposes and achievements of a program of evening classes for adults at a Long Island school comes off reasonably well, all things considered. It tells flash-back stories of the progress made by several students in classes on art, public speaking, and mathematics, and gives an important, but limited, interpretation of the values of lifelong education.

—CECILE STARR.

## AMERICANA

(Continued from page 21)

chief's own lithe daughters to warm his bed. Meek named the willowy Indian maiden "Virginia" for his native state, and she bore him many children.

Joe Meek experienced all possible hardships of life on the frontier. He lay trembling in a thicket and watched Indians chop to pieces his trapping partner whose gun had misfired. He wandered in the upland desert with an expedition which drank its own urine to keep from dying of thirst and sucked blood from the ears of its pack mules to stave off starvation. He also killed a Digger Indian who "might" have stolen his traps. It was an age in which a man shot first and thought up the justification afterwards.

When Meek finally became the emissary to gain territorial recognition for Oregon, he arrived in St. Louis with no money. This was logical, for there was not a silver coin or piece of currency in all of Oregon. Folks lived by barter. Meek boarded the steam cars and sat stony-faced when the conductor asked for his ticket. Around himself he had wrapped a greasy, smutted blanket. The poor trainman at last gave up. A few weeks later, the central figure in this episode was the personal guest of the eleventh President of the United States.

By polling ninety votes, Meek sat in Oregon's pioneer legislature. Once he kept some of his hungry constituents satisfied, at least temporarily, by convincing them that a big pumpkin in a sack was really a haunch of juicy venison. Perhaps the political game wasn't so different in 1850 as some of us imagine it to have been!

It is too bad this excellent book by a master of frontier literature does not contain a map, so that the reader can follow Joe Meek's doughty wanderings, from the District of Columbia to the mouth of the Columbia River.

## They Make It Strong

SMOKY MOUNTAIN COUNTRY. By North Callahan. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 257 pp. \$4.

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