

Radical Dreamer

The Passionate Journey of Graham Spry

BROADCAST PREMIERE

APRIL 30, 2008 – SCN, TVOntario, BC Knowledge Network, CLT

A White Pine Pictures and Soundings/Steele Inc. Production

The Filmmakers

Peter Raymont – Producer/Director/Narrator

Bruce Steele – Producer/Director/Writer

Kealy Wilkinson: Consultant

Voice of Graham Spry: Eric Peterson

Music: John Welsman

Produced in association with



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58 Minutes

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SYNOPSIS

Radical Dreamer: The Passionate Journey of Graham Spry explores the fascinating life of the “Father of Public Broadcasting”.

Graham Spry (1900-1983) played a central role in the creation of modern Canada. But he was too far ahead of his time, and paid a huge price for advocating his vision for Canada, a vision that has now become part of the character of this nation and includes the two defining realities in Canada; the struggle to retain a culture distinct from that of the United States, and the attempt to create a bi-cultural, now multi-cultural state in Canada.

A young Graham Spry, Oxford graduate and League of Nations translator, dreamt of a Canada with “middle power status” on the world stage. Canada, Spry wrote, should be a “bicultural state”, with unemployment insurance, universal medical care, a national publicly owned radio network and other social and political benefits that have since come to define the country. “Canada can become a model for other nations,” said Spry.

Spry helped found a new political party in the depth of the depression (the CCF, now NDP). He organized Canadian clubs across the country and published several influential magazines; Canadian Nation, Canadian Frontier, Canadian Forum, Arts In Canada, Farmers Sun, New Commonwealth. They were full of the vision of a vibrant Canadian culture and of a unique democracy. Spry championed the new medium of radio, calling it a “central nervous system” for Canada, a force for education and culture. He would eventually earn the unofficial title of the “Father of Public Broadcasting”.

His close friends and associates of the time included Lester Pearson, Eugene Forsey, Frank Scott, King Gordon, Brooke Claxton, Tommy Douglas, Alan Plaunt, Frank Underhill and many others. While most worked within the established order, Spry worked tirelessly from the fringes of the political culture to popularize his ideas.

Spry never became a member of the Canadian establishment. He ruffled too many feathers in the 1930s with his “radical ideas”. Spry landed on the brink of poverty and was told that his ideas had made him “unemployable in Canada”, that he must “leave the country to be cleansed”.

For three decades, Spry lived in England as an oil executive, journalist and diplomat. He was involved in negotiations for the Independence of India and reported on Canada’s role in World War II. He rubbed shoulders with Gandhi and Nehru, Sir Stafford Cripps and Roosevelt. After the war, he became the most influential citizen of Saskatchewan who *never* lived there. As Agent General for the province in England and Europe, he helped market the Wheat Board, champion the Port of Churchill and found British doctors who broke the Doctors’s Strike in Saskatchewan, initiating Medicare in Canada.

Interviews in the film include Graham Spry ‘s daughter, Lib Spry, his grandson, Jeremy Spry, journalist Larry Zolf, former Saskatchewan Premiere, Allan Blakeney, CEO of the National Arts Centre, Peter Herrndorf, and former CRTC Commissioners John Meisel and Robert O’Reilly.

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The Passionate Journey of Graham Spry

Radical Dreamer: The Passionate Journey of Graham Spry weaves rare archival material with contemporary voices to unravel the secrets of this nation-builder who faced many of the same challenges that confound policy makers today.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY:

This film has been “in development” for 25 years!

Bruce Steele and Kealy Wilkinson began discussing the idea of a film on Graham Spry shortly after Spry's death in 1983. Steele is a radio and television writer, host and producer of Soundings/Steele Inc. in Regina. Wilkinson is a Toronto based broadcast consultant and Director of the Canadian Broadcast Museum Foundation.

Wilkinson had been a friend and colleague of Spry since 1968 when she was hired as the Director of Spry's Canadian Broadcasting League (CBL), an Ottawa based lobby group for public broadcasting and broadcast issues in general.

Steele met Spry at a lecture given by the “Father of Canadian Broadcasting” at the University of Waterloo in 1969. Within a few weeks of their meeting, Spry had engineered a place for Steele on a CBL project lobbying for a local citizen access channel on Canadian Cable TV systems.

In the late 1990s, Steele recruited the support of Richard Gustin, Executive Director of Programming for the Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN). There were a few false starts with other producers before Gustin introduced Steele to Peter Raymont, president of White Pine Pictures in Toronto at the 2004 Banff International Television Festival. Unbeknownst to either Steele or Gustin, Raymont had visited the Spry household as a child in Ottawa and had shared an apartment with Spry's son, Richard, in Montreal.

Steele and Raymont penciled a napkin deal in the bar of the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, and met with Wilkinson in Toronto shortly afterward. With development support from SCN, Steele began research at Library and Archives Canada in August of 2004, searching through the 33 meters of documents and recordings in the Spry collection. Steele wrote a 50-page film treatment.

The project was turned down by the agencies that Raymont and Steele had thought would be the most obvious supporters. They began a three-year period of fund raising. SCN made the lead commitment, followed by The Canada Council, the Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund, TVO, Knowledge Network, Access Alberta and Canadian Learning Television, with additional funding from the Canadian Television Fund. The support of the Saskatchewan Archives Board and Libraries and Archives Canada were central to the project.

Pre-production began in April, 2007. Filming began in Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan, and Oxford and London, England in October of that year. Writing and editing began in November 2007, and the film was completed in April, 2008.

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