

CHARLES DEVENISH WOODLEY

(b. 1910, Toronto, Canada; d. 2003, Toronto, Canada)

Charles Devenish Woodley was born in Toronto in 1910 and lived in this city until his death in 2003. From the moment in 1920 when he held his first camera with bellows of Russian leather, Charlie loved photography. As a boy he was a founding member of the Camera Club at Bloor Collegiate. For most of his adult life he was active with the Hart House Camera Club and the Toronto Movie Club, and he was President of both these organizations on several occasions. His photographs have been purchased and published in many places including Esquire Magazine, Canadian Homes and Gardens Magazine, Mayfair Magazine, the National Film Board of Canada, Photo Canada Magazine, Simpsons, and the Toronto Star.

Charlie had a lifelong interest in the outdoors and in travel, beginning as a teenager with trips to England, New York, Ottawa and Montreal and northern Ontario. After one canoe and fishing trip in Temagami, he had barely enough money for train fare back home, so he bought an old bicycle in North Bay for \$5, loaded on his pack and sleeping bag, and rode it over 200 miles all the way to Toronto on the unpaved road that became Highway 11 or Yonge Street. Then he sold the bike for \$2 and bought a white shirt so he could go home looking decent.

In his late teens, Charlie got to know the news photographers from the Toronto Star and Globe and Mail who encouraged him by buying one of two of his photos for publication.

During the Great Depression, Charlie discovered how to hitch rides on freight trains. One summer, around 1930, he rode the rails out west with a 3 ¼ x 4 ¼ Graflex camera. The next year, with a smaller camera, he made a circuit of the American southwest, and returned in time for classes at the University of Toronto. After he graduated he traveled around Europe for 10 months. True to form, Charlie opted for maximum mobility and independence; he bought a motorcycle and traveled fast, with his camera in tow in Germany, North Africa and the Middle East.

When he returned, he joined his father at the Aldine Press, a small family printing business on Pearl Street in downtown Toronto and, in time, he became the proprietor. In 1937 he married Mary Wilson and together they raised three sons. Family life restricted his travels so he took up moving pictures. In the 1940s he got an 8mm movie camera long before it was easy to take or record family events on film or video, let alone make movies that told a story. His films carefully worked family and friends into a story line, like “Spreading the News” about an inept paper boy; “The Boys and the Bees” about making honey; and “Peregrinations of a Pie” about a hungry hobo who is chased by the local kids for stealing a pie from granny’s window sill where it was cooling.

When new technology ended the printing business, Charlie went back to school and became a Geography teacher at the age of 55. He taught for the next nine years at Western Technical Collegiate and collected material for his classes by travelling extensively every summer with his wife. They took buses from Tehran through Afghanistan and the Khyber Pass into Lahore. They rode the Blue Train in South Africa and the Trans-Siberian.

In all, he photographed over 50 countries and every province and territory of Canada. His work covers everyday life and special events in the growth of Toronto, like the building of the Royal York Hotel and the flight of the R100 dirigible over the half-built Canada Life Building, as well as some of the important changes he saw in his travels around the world.