The Review
Volume 63, Number 1, 1979
Issue Number 345

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Published in English and French by
Imperial Oil Limited, 111 St. Gat Avenue West, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1K3.
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ISBN 0-17-59758

Printed by Graceland Lithographing Limited
Winnipeg is our capital of Arctic art

In September of 1948 a young Ontario artist named James Houston, then living in Quebec, paid his first visit to the Arctic. His destination was an isolated community on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay called Port-Harrison, a once-thriving trading post that had fallen on hard times. Houston went with sketch pad and water colors to paint the Inuit and their land but, as it happened, events were to take an unexpected turn.

The day following the artist’s arrival, an Inuit presented him with a small stone figure of a bear in return for one of his sketches. Houston assumed that “this object was something carved long ago, a family treasure.” But he was startled to discover that it had, in fact, been newly sculpted. The next day he was given two more carvings and, by the time he returned south late in the fall, Houston had acquired a score of small pieces of Inuit art.

That winter, at the suggestion of a neighbor, Houston took his collection and had tea with members of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild in Montreal. They were enchanted by what they saw. Before tea was over, Houston had been promised traveling expenses to return to the Arctic, provided with $1,000 credit at the Hudson’s Bay Company, and given a firm mandate to discover whether the Inuit “could produce carvings in quantity and of a quality that would be salable.”

Houston returned to the Arctic in the spring of 1949, visiting not only Port-Harrison but the neighboring community of Puvungnituq, in search of carvings. When his $1,000 credit at the Hudson’s Bay Company had been used up, Houston dug into his own slim savings for another $500 and kept on buying. He returned to Montreal that fall.

“When I unpacked the boxes,” Houston was to recall many years later, “the guild was as overwhelmed as I had been. In all I had almost 300 small carvings, which I had bought at an average price of just over five dollars. I was flabbergasted when I heard that they proposed to mark them up by as much as 20 percent. I thought the market would never stand it.” He need not have been concerned. The carvings were all sold in three days. Houston hurried back for more, supported this time by a grant from the federal government, which was growing increasingly alarmed about the effects of a shortage of game, especially Arctic fox, on the Inuit economy. At Ottawa’s request he extended his search to more northerly communities.
Traveling by dog sled, Houston visited a number of trading camps surrounding Port-Harrison, Povungnituk, and Cape Smith. Later he also visited communities on the western shore of Hudson Bay, such as Chesterfield Inlet, to spread word of the market for carvings that existed in the South. By 1962 the artist was able to report that "over 20,000 pieces have been brought out and sold by the guide to the Canadian public. The supply has not yet begun to meet the demand."

From such modest, indeed, largely accidental beginnings was destined to develop not only a major industry that has transformed a large segment of the Inuit economy but a new, albeit highly controversial, art form that has achieved worldwide recognition. Today carvings and prints produced by Inuit artists in a score of Arctic communities and distributed and sold mostly through their own cooperatives are in ever-increasing demand (and thus command ever-increasing prices), not only throughout Canada and the United States, but in much of the western world.

Communities such as Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet, Eskimo Point, Holman Island, Great Whale River, and Baker Lake — remote dots on the Arctic map that a decade or so ago not one Canadian in a thousand had ever heard of, let alone visited — are today on the regular itinerary of hundreds of art dealers and collectors. And names like Pangnirtung, Paulosia, Pau, Pitsolik, and others — names that even federal administrators once found so confusing that (in 1941) they assigned numbers to all Inuits — come familiarly to the tongues of many international art connoisseurs.

The critical acclaim accorded much contemporary Inuit art has established Canada on the international cultural map to a degree that it has rarely achieved in other artistic fields. Exhibitions of Inuit sculpture have been mounted in London, Paris, Copenhagen, Moscow, Leningrad, and Tokyo, as well as in major centres throughout the United States. There are examples to be found in several of the world's most highly regarded private art collections and, some years ago, three Inuit pieces were included (alongside works by such artists as Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Picasso) in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's Masterpieces of Three Centuries exhibition. There is an international quarterly magazine devoted to Inuit art and culture (published in New York), and a recent auction of Inuit sculpture in Toronto attracted scores of foreign bidders.

Yet despite these international accolades, official recognition of Inuit sculpture and prints as a valid art form in Canada has been curiously muted. While many fine private collections exist in this country, opportunities for the Canadian public to view even a representative selection of the best Inuit art are surprisingly and depressingly few.

A leading authority of Inuit art, George Swinton, professor of Canadian studies at Carleton University, Ottawa, recently charged that "except for a few loans and traveling exhibitions . . . collections [of Inuit art] are not readily as accessible to the general public as they should be and as other Canadian art collections are." Swinton claims that, with the exception of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Winnipeg Art Gallery "is the only public gallery that has taken Inuit art seriously as a Canadian art form and not as an ethnological curiosity."

Happily, the Winnipeg Art Gallery's collection, from which the accompanying illustrations were chosen, is both large and representative of the best of Inuit art. Under the expert curatorial care of Jean Bioldgett, the collection includes almost 6,000 pieces of sculpture and several thousand prints and drawings, with a comprehensive exhibition program supported by authoritative catalogs.

Although the gallery has had a permanent display of Inuit art since the 1950s, its preeminence in the field dates from 1971 when it added nearly 4,000 pieces as a result of its acquisition of the Twomey collection. A Manitoba geneticist, Jerry Twomey became interested in studying the distribution of artistic talent within families through several generations. He was to spend 20 years collecting Inuit sculpture, not as objects of art, but as samples of stylistic evolutions. As a result of this deliberate scientific bias, the Twomey collection includes, alongside many superb examples, pieces that have been accurately described as "weak, if not badly made." But this, too, is typical of Inuit sculpture as a whole. An assured commercial market has resulted in an increasing proportion of indifferent work, as a votl to many souvenir and gift shops will attest, and the pejora-
tive term "airport art" is frequently well deserved. Swinton divides Inuit carvers into artists, craftsmen, and mere imitators, pointing out that "if we do not make these classifications, time will anyway."

Yet what Swinton regards as a "constant miracle" is that "the proportion of good Eskimo art — of what I consider contemporary Inuit art to be — is considerably larger than that of the art produced and sold in the South. Relative to the small Inuit population of about 20,000, the total amount of good Inuit art is staggeringly large."

While James Houston was primarily responsible for initiating the production of contemporary Inuit art, the Inuit have carved for nearly 3,000 years. However, in the century or so preceding 1948 they had carved, not as an art activity, but to make utensils, boat, weapons, toys, and the occasional souvenir for visiting whites. The achievement of Houston and others that followed him was that, in the words of Canadian anthropologist Dr. Charles Martin, "a fairly routine occupation involving the manufacture of souvenirs was taken in hand and refurbished with aesthetic concepts and standards of artistic workmanship compatible to western tastes."

As these tastes change and as the Inuit become increasingly acculturated into modern life-styles, it is inevitable that their art will also change. Indeed, it is already happening. Objects long familiar to southern Canadians but until recently unknown in the Arctic, such as airplanes, snowmobiles, clocks, sunglasses, and cigarettes, are appearing in increasing numbers in Inuit prints. Red felt pens are used to simulate blood on pictures of cut-up whales.

"This southern influence," Jean Bioldgett has written, "has been manifested, not only in the creation of a market, but in the effects of the types of artwork made for that market. The economic considerations and pressures of the marketplace have prompted the production of artworks pleasing to southern tastes."

In such circumstances it is scarcely surprising that a new generation of artists is growing up in the North with a fading knowledge of its Inuit traditions. It is both understandable and poignant that some young carvers are trying old catalogs of Inuit sculpture to recoup themselves with the work of their elders and that Jean Bioldgett herself is considering mounting an exhibition of Inuit art to tour Arctic communities.
The tax-fact
One way or another, there's no other way

by Paul Miller
Illustrations by Ed de Ruy

Last year was the 150th anniversary of one of the most successful and pervasive institutions in Canadian society, one that Touches the lives of virtually every citizen at some time or another. Yet an elected representative did not make public speeches praising the institution and wishing it years of continued growth; the high-school bands were not called out by a grateful populace for parades to mark the occasion. Canada was celebrating — if that is the correct word — the diamond anniversary of its income-tax system.

It was 1867 when a tax on the incomes of businessmen and individuals was introduced by the federal government (as a temporary measure, the country was issuing) to help finance World War 1. In its first year of existence the new tax method $11.5 million. This is about five percent of the income tax Imperial moved in 1977 (part of the nearly $1 billion the company paid in taxes and royalties to all levels of government).

Most people, when they think about taxation, probably consider it to be just another method devised to separate them from their hard-earned cash. However, as with most complex issues, it depends on your point of view. Looking at it from the perspective of the government, the income-tax system is a major provider of the money needed to fund domestic programs and its recent international commitments.

Of course, income taxes are just one of the revenue-generating mechanisms that governments have adopted to raise money. Sales and excise taxes, royalties, income fees, and property tax are some of the other weapons in their arsenal. Revenue from all these sources plus budget deficits and borrowing make up the government's share of total economic activity in Canada, which in recent years has been more than 40 percent of the total Gross National Product.

Human nature being what it is, people sometimes tend to forget that all of this activity must be paid for, either new or in the future, by individual taxpayers. Their forgetfulness is not surprising when you consider that many of these taxes are hidden. However, even some of the invisible taxes, like corporate income tax, have hidden destinations. After all, corporations only exist on paper. Their taxes are really paid — to varying degrees depending on the company and its circumstances — by customers who pay higher prices for products, shareholders who receive less return on their investment, and employees who receive less in wages and benefits. Another course of action for companies, at least in the short term, is to cut back on planned investments.

In the past decade economic conditions have often dictated that companies choose the reduced-investment alternative. A number of studies have shown that Canada's level of reinvestment does not compare favorably with that of our major competitors. For example, in an age of high technology, our level of investment in research and development had fallen to sixth among 13 industrialized countries recently surveyed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

No reasonable person would suggest that taxation levels are the sole reason for this situation. However, tax policies are surely an important consideration, especially in forming the mental state that largely determines whether or not an individual or a group of investors will place money at risk. In response to this, governments have begun to shift their sights to another attribute of the tax system: its ability to encourage people to do things the government considers to be socially and economically desirable.

The concept of using the tax system to promote certain types of activity is by no means new. In the 14th century the good burghers of the town of Dijon, France, decided that their economy would perk up considerably if people could be persuaded not to go out of business. The result was a failure tax, levied against anyone who did. (History does not record if this is the reason why Dijon has since risen to become the mustard capital of the world.) During the past century the State of Virginia wanted to put some teeth into its warning that bathing was a sinful luxury. The solution was a bathtub tax — a tax that was set at the then exorbitant rate of $40 a sub...
Say what you will about the Canadian tax system, some of its provisions are so astoundingly bizarre as to defy even the most creative imaginations. In fact, throughout the years it has developed into an increasingly sophisticated instrument for encouraging people to do things that help achieve government objectives and at the same time discourage the primary responsibility of any tax system—raising revenue.

D.D. Laughton, a senior vice-president and director of Imperial Oil, says the government can take the following approaches to taxation innovation:

In non-technical terms, one way is for the government to seek success by lowering the tax rate for a certain type of activity, as is the case now for income from manufacturing and processing. In the long term this can attract a higher level of new investment than might otherwise have occurred. The second way is to make it more attractive for existing companies in a particular industry to reinvest their earnings. Finally, a specific type of investment may be desired by government. An example of this would be the recent tax changes to encourage research and development expenditures by industry.

Taxes incentives are not the only means available to government to promote activity; one alternative is to pay direct grants to companies. However, tax incentives have a number of advantages over a grant system. For one thing, major tax changes tend to be front-page news and, therefore, generate a lot of analysis about what the changes mean. People who may be affected by an incentive are understandably interested in paying over these reports, so the news is widely disseminated and quickly absorbed by a large audience.

Another advantage of tax incentives is that it’s easier for taxpayers to determine if they qualify for an incentive and to respond quickly to it. (An application for a grant can take months to process and, even if the company applies to qualify, it may find the grant program’s budget has already been exhausted.) Admittedly, there are exceptions to the general rule about the ease of determining whether a tax incentive applies in a specific case; some interpretations of the laws have been exceedingly complex. In most cases, however, the impact of a tax incentive is predictable, which is a considerable attribute for anyone contemplating a major investment.

For example, a company that is deciding whether or not to build a new factory can determine quite readily if it qualifies for accelerated write-offs (which were introduced into the income tax act several years ago and just recently extended). Having determined this, the company then knows that if it builds the factory before the specified cut-off date it can claim a deduction, in two taxation years, for the entire cost of the factory. This makes the investment more attractive to undertake, by providing a “pay-back” through the taxation system in the early years of the factory’s operation.

However, income-tax incentives are not only available to business and industry. In fact, one of the most popular and successful tax incentives in Canadian history—the Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP)—is aimed directly at the individual taxpayer.

The RRSP concept was first introduced to the Canadian tax system in the late 1950s, as a means of allowing self-employed people to build up the same type of pension benefits that were available to those enrolled in company pension plans. As the years passed the government became increasingly concerned that many older people on fixed incomes, even some of those who received company pension benefits, were suffering because of the eroding effect inflation was having on real purchasing power. To help solve this problem, the government extended the eligibility for making contributions to RRSPs and increased the annual limit for contributions. Public response to this opportunity for combined saving and tax deferral has been nothing short of phenomenal. By 1975 (the most recent year for which Statistics Canada has complete data) more than one million Canadians were making annual contributions to an RRSP—approximately 30 percent more than had been making contributions just two years earlier.

From the government’s point of view, this response by the tax-paying public not only reduces the number of people whose savings will be insufficient to support them during their retirement years—and who, therefore, may require government assistance—in its tax system, but it has also added to the pool of long-term savings. This, in turn, has helped fund certain investments like mortgages, which have been much in demand in recent years as members of the postwar baby boom have reached the age of family formation and home purchase.

Of course, RRSPs are just one of the tax incentives available to individuals. The government will also give you a tax break for contributing to a political party or to a charitable institution or for income received from investments in the shares of Canadian companies.

Tax incentives are reasonably easy to interpret and reach a wide audience very quickly. Because of this, says A.S. Blumen, an assistant deputy minister in the federal department of finance, they will play a significant role in the efforts by governments to affirm that “the private sector and market are the prime engines for development” in the Canadian economy.

One area of the private economy that has had the long-standing support of governments is small business. The term “small business” can encompass a bewildering variety of enterprises—farming, fishing, architecture, shopkeeping—depending on the way you define it. A recent government publication describes small businesses as manufacturing companies with less than 100 employees and all other companies with less than 50. More than 90 percent of the business enterprises in Canada—providing as much as 20 percent of this country’s total goods and services—fall into this category. In some sectors of the economy—the agriculture, forestry, and retailing—small firms account for as much as 50 percent of the sector’s profits. They are also an important source of employment, especially in regions of slower growth, and an important feature of Canadian society, since they are the businesses that many Canadians deal with personally on a daily basis.

It is in achieving national goals, such as increased employment, increased real earnings, and diminished regional economic disparities, that the potential contribution from small business is immense,” says a recent document published by the Hon. Anthony Abbott, minister of state for small business. “It is difficult, in fact, to see how such goals can be achieved without enhanced small business participation.”

Back up these words is a federal system that taxes income from qualifying small firms at a significantly lower rate than the general levy on corporate income (25 percent, compared to the general rate of 46 percent). A small company that is involved in manufacturing and processing qualifies for an additional credit that reduces the tax on its profits to just 20 percent.

D.P. Walter brings the perspective of small business to his participation on committees of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. He is vice-president of E.F. Walter Limited, a Montreal-based company with a total of 80 employees in three offices across Canada, which supplies a range of, of products, ironworks goods, and other products to domestic industries and export markets. Walter’s view, a tax-incentive system makes sense “as long as it is equitable—in other words, doesn’t give one company an advantage over competitors—and directed toward viable economic opportunities.

Every venture must change and incentives can help in the start-up stages of an investment, especially a marginal one. But the primary consideration for a business must still be whether or not the investment is basically a sound one,” says Walter.

His statement illustrates one of the most controversial aspects of tax incentives: determining the extent to which they actually persuade a business to undertake a certain type of investment. This is because a large number of factors must be considered in every decision to invest.

John Lutley, president of Johnson Matthey Limited of
Toronto, says that changes in the tax law — in particular, a time-limited 30-percent reduction in federal sales tax on production and pollution-control equipment — helped greatly in his company's decision to build a $6-million pyrometallurgical plant in Brampton, Ont. The plant created more than 50 high-technology jobs that might otherwise have gone to the United States, where construction costs would have been substantially lower. As well, the scrap processed in the Brampton operation crosses the U.S./Canadian border duty free.

The kind of "scrap" that Lutley refers to would make most eyes light up, because Johnson Matthey is in the business of producing coins, walkers, and bars of silver and gold, as well as platinum utters for laboratory work and fine chemicals for research. When these products reach the end of their useful lives, many of their component parts can be recycled. (Although the term recycling has only recently settled into the public consciousness, it's been a fact of life for those who deal in gold for centuries. It's been estimated that 99 percent of the gold ever mined is still in circulation.)

For Lutley and his company, however, this precious inventory spells trouble during inflationary times because of the way that inventory profits are treated under the Canadian taxation system. Lutley estimates that the real tax rate for his company has been about 72 percent in recent years, compared to a real rate of 42 percent paid by his U.S. competitors. Incredible as it may seem, the entire reason for this difference is that the two countries use different accounting systems for evaluating inventories.

During the past 40 years, the United States has allowed companies to use a LIFO (last-in, first-out) method of inventory valuation. This method acknowledges that profits resulting from the increased value of the inventories a company holds are largely illusory, since they will normally have to be used to replace these inventories at higher cost. If part of this inventory profit is taxed away, as it is under the FIFO (first-in, first-out) system that is the rule in Canada, then companies will have to turn to other methods, like borrowing, to replace their inventories. This, in turn, reduces their ability to finance other types of expenditure.

Admittedly, not all companies are affected as severely as Johnson Matthey Limited. But a 1977 report by the OTA committee on inflation accounting estimated that the reported profits of 279 large Canadian companies would have been reduced by 58 percent if the effects of inflation had been accounted for. These distorted profits, said the report, produced a "revenue windfall" for governments that amounted to about $1.5 billion between 1971 and 1975. (The committee suggested a system for inflation adjustment that would have reduced imperial's reported earnings in 1977 from $289 million to $137 million, nearly a 50 percent reduction.)

It's very likely that John Lutley could engage in a lively debate with P. S. Rubinflof about the effectiveness of recent tax measures in reducing the impact of inflation. However, the government has introduced new tax measures — such as indexing personal deductions for income tax purposes and a three-percent inventory credit for business — that clearly recognize this problem.

"There is no doubt," says Rubinflof, "that business profitability has been affected by the price/cost squeeze of recent years. And since companies have the ability to invest in other countries, returns on investment must be competitive. We want to ensure a tax system that allows businesses to keep a reasonable return on their investments and that creates a broad climate for future investment.

One area in which the federal government has identified the need for a high level of future investment is energy development. This investment is especially needed to develop new domestic sources of oil, which is being imported in increasing quantities to make up for the shortfall in Canadian supplies caused by declining productivity in existing deposits in western Canada. Specifically, the federal government has set a goal of not allowing oil imports to rise above 800,000 barrels a day or one-third of the country's total demand, whichever is less.

Over the long term there are basically two potential domestic sources for the oil this country will require: the heavy-oil deposits of western Canada and conventional oil from frontier areas. Developing new supplies from either of these sources, however, will require large commitments of capital. The federal government has acknowledged this through taxation measures that it hopes will encourage industry to make the investments needed to reach its targets.

In the frontier regions the government has established tax provisions that enable explorers to earn a higher level of deductions from other sources of income when they undertake an exploration well that costs more than $5 million. (The cost of a single exploration well can be measured in the tens of millions of dollars.) In effect, the government is deferring its taxes on the other income sources (for example, revenue from conventional oil or gas production) in the hope that drilling these high-cost frontier wells will result in discoveries that could reduce Canadian dependence on imported energy.

The heavy-oil resources of western Canada are also a vast potential source of future energy, but to develop them will require investments totalling billions of dollars. To encourage these huge investments and thus help reach its objectives regarding production from the heavy-oil deposits (one million barrels a day by 1980), the federal government has introduced a number of tax incentives within the past year.

One key factor in increasing heavy-oil output will be the extent to which production can be developed from deeply buried deposits of unconventional heavy oil, which constitute nearly 90 percent of Canada's total bitumen resources. (The plants of a typical oil sands deposit, such as the Great Canadian Oil Sands Limited in the Athabasca region draw upon reserves that are close to the surface.) For that reason, Imperial's proposed Cold Lake project, which involves the recovery of bitumen from deposits buried about one-hundred kilometre beneath the surface, would represent a major breakthrough in meeting government objectives. The output of the proposed project — as much as 141,000 barrels a day — would be a substantial addition to Canadian oil supply during the mid-1980s. The estimated cost — nearly $5 billion by the time the entire complex is completed — makes it a gigantic undertaking, but one that could have a crucial effect on the Canadian energy supply and the economy in years to come. Recognizing this, the federal government has instituted tax measures that enhance the prospects of companies being able to proceed with ventures of this nature.

In the federal budget of April, 1979, measures were introduced that would increase the extent to which Imperial could earn deductions from its other resource income (an important consideration in a huge, capital-intensive project like this) through its investments in the Cold Lake project. As well, the facilities required to upgrade the recovered bitumen into crude oil will be classified as manufacturing and processing equipment, which will allow them to qualify for accelerated write-offs and other provisions available to manufacturers.

In energy, as in manufacturing and other sectors of the economy, tax incentives are like directional signs posted by the government to indicate paths that it hopes taxpayers will follow. Of course, the response of taxpayers will depend to a large extent on how attractive the destination appears. However, there can be little doubt that any mechanism for making investment more attractive — for individuals, small businesses, and large corporations — also has the potential for strengthening our economy in years to come. For the government, providing incentives on a diverse range of items could reduce requirements for future expenditures (for example, larger retirement savings by individuals) and at the same time widen the tax base (small businesses prosper and turn into large ones). That, in turn, could provide an environment in which government moves toward lower taxes and reduced participation in the economy could be carried out. If it works, it could be a good deal for everybody.
Max, Emily, and Me
and other cats I've known

by B.F. Cameron; Illustrations by Joe Weissmann

My senior cat, Max, is orange and white. The colors alternate in a perfect circular stripe around his tail and mark a sharply defined M on his forehead. In between, he is an arrangement of harmonious lines and splotches, with a white belly and an orange fur ridge down his back.

Max is an auralophile, a cat-lover. I am his special human and his favorite. Max watches me every day, and when I am at home, he follows me around like a puppy. He is also my constant companion and my best friend.

Max is a bit of a character. He is smart and loves to play. He often does tricks for his treats. He also loves to cuddle and snuggle on the couch.

Max has a lot of stories to tell. He has been with me for many years and has witnessed many changes in my life. He has been a constant source of comfort and joy.

Max is a reminder of how much I love cats and how much they love me. He is a true companion and a true friend.

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I would like to make a distinction between Cat Bores and Cat Crazies. I am the first, but not the second. I do not like the animals that make up their cats. They are frilly, overweight ladies who call their cats by names that end in -lie, and all of whom are for them, and they feed them nothing but top-soil, mine, and indeed, perhaps a chicken on top. The cats who my neighbors reared would seem to have looked up a good thing, but I have met of a few of them being led along the street by their darling little hussies. They are not cats. They are imitation children. They know this and, as might be expected, they rear their Crazies, and they hate them totally.

Cat Bores, on the other hand, treat cats as cats. And they keep the ultimate cat book, by their bedside: Muriel Sloat’s The Cat. Beadle is a writer who lives in Chicago, and her book is the authoritative description of the evolution, biology, sexual, psychology, and utility of the domestic feline (F. catus). When one Cat Bore who knows Beadle has a new cat, Beadle is the first to know, and the second to pay a visit. Beadle is the one who reads the book and knows what it says. In other words, she reads the book and knows what it says.

Beadle cites a German scientist named Paul Leyhausen, who argues that the cat’s canine teeth have been evolved in a precise and (to a Cat Bore) exquisite way. Leyhausen says that these teeth are exactly shaped to slip into the spaces between a mouse’s vertebrae — the tiny bones along a mouse’s spine — in an efficient manner. Let’s see how this works. The cat’s teeth cannot help sharpening the mouse’s vertebrae, because the mouse’s vertebrae are stuck to the ground. The teeth sharpen in such a way that they tear up the ground, and the ground is torn up. The teeth are designed to tear up the ground.

I am not sure whether or not I should call Beadle a Cat Bore, since his cats are cats of a very grand order. Valiere runs a pet store in Toronto, and he also keeps exotic cats — big cats — that for one reason or another have been given up by their former owners. Valiere is a slim man with a bad back, and as such he is just about the 12-pound leopard jumped on him. It was his own leopard, and it thought Valiere was the only person that it could attack. It was to knock him down and keep him down, before anyone else did. A man’s life is still a pet trade.

When I visited Valiere at his pet store one morning recently, he hadn’t gone downtown to the cages to see the cats yet. Every other minute I could hear a rumbling, momentous cough from someone who was falling off the floor. The leopard wanted attention.

“I went into the pet business back in, oh, 1967,” says Valiere, peering at me through a monitor. “The place I worked in sold exotic — alligators, snakes, ocelots, cheetahs — and after a while I began to think that the animals weren’t living very long after they left the store. So I just quit, and I opened my own business to sell kittens, budgies, canaries, and things like that. And I started to campaign against the sale of exotic animals.

“I was mostly upset then about reptiles — their survival rate into adulthood is one percent — but I was talking about big cats, too. I started to get a reputation as a person who knew about them, and they just started running up on my doorstep. I mean, I would get a call from some guy in Vancouver saying he couldn’t find this leopard or whatever anymore, and I would say, well, maybe I could take him six months from now. The next day I would get a call from the Toronto airport saying, ‘You better get out here fast, because you have this crane waiting for you.

“So I take them and keep them for as long as I can, and I farm them on a piece of land that’s just outside the city, and there I have a couple of acres of trees. I keep them there, and I keep them there for the rest of their lives. I’ve had cats for over 20 years, and I’ve had cats ever since I’ve been a cat.

“I don’t do that because I love cats, or because I think they’re great animals, or because I think they’re wonderful animals. I do it because I think they’re wonderful animals. I do it because I think they’re wonderful animals.

“Some young kids, you know, want to be vets because they think they can get away from people that way — just deal with the kittens and the doggies. You can’t get away from people. Sometimes you wish you could.

“The orange cat in the top-left-hand cage seems to know that something is up. Strange place, strange smell, the noise of my footsteps. He turns right to get away from me.

“The targets are a young salesman and his fiancee. They move from one cage to another, dabbling at cats with fingers pushed through the mesh. The orange cat is ready for them.

“Look how big the girl Big orange runs his flat hand against the bars and makes a sound like a sports car shifting into a tight corner.

“They move, slightly, as if to pass on to the next cage. Big orange coughs. A tiny, tremulous, “Meow.”

“He looks like an Alfred,” says the salesman.

“Then,” says the girl. “Oh, Gene, that’s cute. Alfred does nosedives against the wires.

“Alfred,” says the girl. “How are you, Alfred?”

“Gotcha.”

“Want you a little action?” says Harris, standing in front of his cages. “I have Rose Perkins here. Rose Perkins is an action.

“Harriss calls his patients by their own given names and by the surnames of their owners. It’s a little bit strange to hear cats referred to so formally, but it helps with the bookkeeping.

“Rose Perkins is a small woman with a total, active, murderous loathing of veterinarians. Harris means to give her an X-ray. She refuses to be-alive while there is an ounce of cat left in her.

“I would stand well back for this,” says Harris, drawing on his steel-mesh gloves.

“Rose Perkins watches the cage door open. Her fur springs up until she is twice or three times her normal size. She begins to moan, then scream, then grunt — an eerily, primordially threatening sound. My own biology kicks overdrive; the hairs on the back of my neck begin to bristle. Harris makes a grab for Rose Perkins. Rose Perkins becomes a vortex of fur, teeth, and talons. The sound rises to a shriek. It’s like two metal plates being ground together at high speed. I begin to see what the witch-hunters must have seen hundreds of years ago — if anything looks like a servant of the devil, Rose Perkins does.”
The outdoor mural of the guitar player appeared overnight on the white plaster chimney of the student common room. Six college students had created the portrait — without permission — and a couple of days later the administration had it covered with a fresh coat of paint. Some student observers were angry that the mural was obliterated, while others were disturbed that it had been painted in the first place. Obviously the issue would have to be debated at a village meeting. The next morning almost all the 200 teenage students and the 27 staff of the Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific attended an assembly in their auditorium.

At first glance the meeting might have been a general session of the United Nations. There were representatives of 37 countries, with complexions of black, blonde, olive, and coffee paralleling accents that ran a gamut from guttural German to lyrical Spanish.

The chairman was Jack Manthress, the college director, who began by acknowledging that the mural had been a serious work, not a prank. The delegate from Ireland who'd organized the painting explained that his intentions had been purely artistic and, anyway, he'd heard no complaints from teachers.

An Australian delegate protested that the absence of faculty criticism was irrelevant. "I like to think that the students here have influence on other students," she said. A representative from Germany argued that the artists should have called a village meeting.

"Anybody who's offended by a painting can turn his head," a Canadian suggested, to a chorus of "No, No!" As a Papuan, New Guinea, delegate remarked, "I cannot see myself walking backwards to the common room."

As in many UN sessions nothing was settled, although the Irishman did volunteer that he'd be thoughtless in painting the mural without student or faculty permission. But again the importance of the village meeting had been demonstrated — at best as a forum for ideas, at worst as a safety valve — and the students of Pearson College went back to work.

The entire incident was unremarkable at this remarkable coeducational school, set dramatically amid icy Douglas fir on the southern seashore of Vancouver Island. It's one of three United World Colleges that enroll students from most nations, all races, and every religious and political leaning, who study together and try to learn to live together. The premise of Pearson College was described well by its founder, the late Canadian prime minister, long before the school opened in 1974; in his Nobel Peace Prize lecture of 1957, Lester (Mike) Pearson said: "How can there be peace without people understanding each other, and how can this be if they don't know each other?"

Yet while any analogy between the college and the UN is inevitable and easy, what the students say and what the village meeting confirmed is that the participants are learning more about personal relationships than political ones. Anne Collette of Montreal, who graduated last year, says that the school is supposed to foster international understanding, "but you learn personal understanding there. It isn't a United Nations meeting. You just get to know that people are all basically the same."

Collette comes from a middle-income family. Pearson was not designed as a college for rich kids. Although the cost for room, board, and education is about $7,500, everyone attends on scholarship. And while most students are middle class, a few come from wealthy homes, a good 10 percent are so poor that they arrive without a penny. They've included UN Palestinian refugees, Canadian Indians and Inuit, and African students. One boy came from a village in New Guinea where money has never been used.

Pearson, not surprisingly, has high academic standards. At the end of the two-year program, the 16- to 18-year-olds earn an international baccalaureate diploma — the rough equivalent of first-year college in Canada — which is recognized by virtually every major university in the world. In the latest graduating class 90 percent gained their full baccalaureate, which means successful completion of six courses: a set menu of two languages along with a smorgasbord of sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and options such as art and music.

Students are exposed to subjects seldom encountered in conventional high schools: philosophy, for example, and Chinese. Everyone is encour...
aged to attend interdisciplinary lectures on specialized topics, such as physics teacher Jean Godin's lucid discussion of black holes in the cosmos. Yet the young men and women accepted by the college must be more than just bookworms. They have to involve themselves in extracurricular activities; choral singing, folk dancing, music lessons, printmaking, weaving, acting, or film-making. And they have to undertake social services that run from the romance of cave and mountain rescue techniques to the sadder reality of caring for the mentally handicapped and terminally ill in nearby hospitals. Less dramatic is the forestry service where, along with building natural resource and learning fire-fighting skills, the students plant trees for local municipalities and chop wood for peninsulars. Those who take sea rescue two afternoons a week make their own wet suits, build high-speed pilot-driven fiberglass boats, and learn scuba diving, navigation, and rescue methods.

The college overlooks the Juan de Fuca, separating British Columbia from Washington, and occasionally the Canadian Coast Guard uses Pearson students to help rescue sailors adrift in the Pacific. Recently a lighthouse keeper brought in by them to save a family of four, whose four-metre motor boat was being swept out to sea by the tide.

If it all sounds like a cross between the rigors of an outdoor-adventure course and the educational credo of a British public school, there's a good reason. The first United World College was founded by K.5. Osmundson, the German educator who inspired both the Outward Bound movement and Gordonstoun School in Scotland. The College of the Atlantic opened at St. Donas, Wales, in 1962. Mike Pearson, after retiring as principal in 1968, visited the college and was enormously impressed. His president, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, a British wartime commander — encouraged him to start a second interna-
tional school in Canada. (A third has since opened in Singapore and a fourth is planned for Italy by 1980.)

Pearson's wife, Maryan, also prided him, and he had become honorary chairman of a committee to build the Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific. Capital contributions came from Canadian and foreign governments, foundations, individuals, and corporations, among them Imperial Oil, which has also helped fund three years of the college's marine-science program.

One member of the committee seeking a director for Pearson was Jack Matthews, who holds the 40-year-old headmaster of Lakefield College School, a private boys' institution in Ontario. Matthews had spent a sabbatical at Gordonstoun — he was skiing weekend ends with students, including one named Charles, now the president of the World Colleges — and his own son had attended the College of the Atlantic. The search committee finally realized that within its own ranks it had just the man needed to run Pearson College — Jack Matthews.

The school opened in 1974 on a 75-acre slice of majestic seacoast forest on Pedder Island, near Victoria. The greenness of the land belies the fact that only 70 cm of rain falls there each year. The economic, administrative, and student buildings, a 310-seat theater, dining hall, infirmary, and five residences, are designed to blend with the wooded landscape of the West Coast.

International selection committees have found that good students with interests outside the classroom. Wealth was not to be a factor, because Pearson — unlike other two-world colleges — offers fully paid scholarships and even pocket money for needy students. Al-Though the average of the enrollment is foreign, and there's a population-based quota system for each province of Canada, to the nearest 1,000 Canadians who apply each year. Last year a communist country was represented for the first time when Poland sent three students to Pearson.

The teaching staff is as cosmopolitan as the student body. Wei-Chung Tan of Shanghai, who teaches chemistry and biology, has degrees in physics, biochemistry, and microbiology and is an Anglican priest. Maria Maldonado (Spanish language, literature, and art), who taught high school in the United States and in her homeland of Uruguay, is a talented flutist. Marks McAvire (mathematics and marine studies) graduated in engineering physics and studied divers for 15 years with the Canadian Armed Forces. Brad Myers (social sciences) was a singer with the Ontario folk group the Town Criers, Richard Liu (Spanish, Italian, and German), who studied in Asia, Italy, and Spain, is a novelist.

The fruits of this cultural cross-pollination surface daily in the classroom. In Myers' anthropology class, a Norwegian boy mentioned a recent discovery in Thailand of a civilization predating Egypt's, when the teacher asked for more information, an Italian girl says she has an article on the find in an Italian journal. Later a German girl gives Myers a precise translation of a German anthropological term.

Because classes are small and the mood is informal — teachers are called by their first name and often hold classes in their living rooms — students feel free to discuss and debate. When English teacher Tom McEggilgoff quoted a description D.H. Lawrence as the greatest English novelist of the century, Pat Michalski of Ottawa yelled: "Peut-être! I'm sorry, there has to be someone better..." Michalski read Lawrence in Brauille; she was the first blind person to attend Pearson.

Disagreeing vocally with teachers is permitted, even encouraged, by students at a village meeting is not. There are few other rules. No smoking outdoors, no recreational drugs, sex is frowned on. Occasional supervised social drinking is acceptable. Any accident with a college vehicle has a student from further driving. Both sexes share residences, but on different floors; visiting between floors, is allowed until 10:30 p.m. In the beginning Jack Matthews had decided there'd be no visiting back and forth at any time at a village meeting both staff and students convinced him that he was being unnecessarily rigid (especially since a teacher lives in each residence).

Matthews' personal style is relaxed and informal. His usual dress includes a cap-toe dress shirt, ascot and loafers; he keeps himself trim, and his lean face is reddened by the wind. He has revised defining philosophy for the college. "I'm worried that people will etch it in stone," he says, "and turn the college into a stabilized institution, with all the implications of that word. I don't like institutions. This place has to eb and flow. With half the students leaving every year, it has to be continuously adjusting.

Almost everyone is overcome by initial jolliness and shyness by Blandina Makkik of Igboh, a remote village in the Northwest Territories, visited much of southern Canada before she came to the college, yet she was unprepared for the strangeness she experienced. Even the landscape bothered her. "I felt inhibited by the bug trees," she says. "I felt hemmed in." Makkik, an Inuit unaccustomed to southern formality, soon learned that she had to sit on the floor in the common room and to ask permission before borrowing something. Her first weeks were marked by her day she sat weeping on the shore and a Danish boy comforted her and said, "Hey, we all have these.

Some students have problems with language. Although everyone is supposed to speak and read English, a few don't. And Jack Matthews has asked the South-American director of English to insist on a basic familiari-
ty with the language. History teacher Eddie Stock, who has the advantage of foreign students pick up each other's linguistic errors and are often taught by instructors for whom English is a second language. English-speaking Canadians, meanwhile, must take at least one regular mathematics or physics — in French.

Despite such problems, Pearson College appears to have two of the most important roles, as confirmed in conversations with Canadian students. Quaide Persad, who graduated last year, says that with four to each room a few national cliques are formed, as a result of prejudice, he says: "You find there are some people you can't get along with but it's not because of nationality, it's because of the person." Erica Hoffman of Naramata, B.C., says that she had a slight case of "reverse culture shock" when she returned to Canada until she found herself rooming with one. "Now I've been able to accept differences, it's more important to me than the academic education," she says. And Annemarie who was concerned that she had not learned a lesson about her own province while at the college: "I was automobiles," she says, "I was so accustomed to the atmosphere and a particular way of thinking that I saw the greater things just from the Quebec side. Then I saw all those people around Victoria and Vancouver who were compelled to see the Qaarbeckers and we were almost scared of us."

Mike Pearson hoped that the World Colleges would become "a revolutionary force in international education." Pearson College, which is already beginning, is working on that hope. Brad Myers, the young anthropology teacher, expressed it nicely: "It's not 'Utopia here, as many outsiders think. But it's so far ahead of anything else that we sometimes think it is."
Those first, heady, power-wielding days may now be ending, but a creative role remains for

The Consumer

by Jeff Carruthers

The late sixties were heady days for consumerism in Canada. A decade ago consumers were celebrating the establishment of a federal department of consumer affairs, the first of its kind in the world, under the ministerial direction of a rising young politician named John Napier Turner. The “people’s portfolio,” he called it. Along with it, the government formed the consumer council of Canada, a citizens’ advisory committee designed to have a direct and influential voice in new laws governing the relationship of consumers and business.

Today, after a turbulent and unhappy history, the consumer council as originally formed is long gone. The exhilarating era of Beryl Plumtree is over, and a former president of the Consumers’ Association of Canada (CAC) has wondered publicly “whether the losses of antiprotection have not more than kept up with [consumer-protection] developments and whether the individual Canadian consumer has really improved his relative position.” In the United States, as one economic critic remarked recently, Ralph Nader, the consumer champion of champions, may not yet have dropped out of the race, but he is certainly breathing heavily.

Furthermore, in Canada today some of those who were prominent in the consumerism movement of the sixties
are now talking of a "conservor society," a concept that, at least at first glance, would seem to be the very antithesis of consumerism. Indeed, a growing number of observers speak of consumerism as a passing fad, spawned by the affluence of another time and essentially irrelevant to the more stringent ethic of a society increasingly turned off by materialism.

Are they right? The answer is important because the status and future of consumerism in this country are of more than academic interest. Government and business have a large stake in the fate of the movement and can certainly benefit from a better understanding of its mechanism. It may be timely, therefore, to review the evolution of consumerism in Canada and to evaluate its future.

The organized consumer movement began in 1947 with the formation of a volunteer group, then called the Canadian Association of Consumers, but now incorporated as the Consumers' Association of Canada. The association describes its own genesis thus: "An outgrowth of the Women's Section of the Winnipeg Prices and Trade Board, it was formed at a time when thousands of Canadians had been organized to assist in the war effort during the Second World War. The effectiveness of a massive corps of volunteers, working with the WPTB in monitoring price ceilings and rationing and in assisting all Canadians to achieve maximum use and value from scarce consumer goods, brought about a consciousness of the need for a permanent consumer organization. The war ended, 16 major women's organizations met and organized a voluntary, independent, and nonprofit organization."

The new association addressed itself to what have come to be called "the traditional consumer concerns," such areas as product testing and product safety, standardized sizing, improved packaging and labeling, truth in advertising, abusive or fraudulent selling practices, and so on.

And there were some modest successes: middle-aged Canadians will perhaps remember the "great bacon-wrapper victory," which had already been used to make lattaker rashers appear temptingly straky.

From the beginning the organization placed considerable emphasis on educating consumers in the pitfalls of the marketplace, with the hope of producing a rational consumer who would be equipped to make a proper choice and who would undertake corrective action when problems were encountered.

Marvyn Brehm, a former CAC president, told a conference of agricultural and food scientists that consumers had always been prepared to pay more for better products. However, she said, the difference in quality had to be real, the difference in price between products of differing quality had not to be excessive, and consumers had to be made aware of the improvements that had been made to products.

While these qualifications placed some obligation on the seller, the underlying assumption of Brehm and her colleagues in the early years of the consumer movement was still caveat emptor — "let the buyer beware!

"Not only had the Romans made this free-marketplace brand of consumerism part of ancient history but, through the centuries, it had become entrenched in common law — in, for example, the law as it related to contracts and warranties. In effect, the two Latin words had constituted the only consumer protection for most of western history.

The CAC's position — "the consumer should be taught to discriminate" — was no more than a logical extension of caveat emptor. In the context of changing times, the essential flaw in the ancient credo was underlined by an internal federal-government study on consumerism: "The basic weakness of all consumer education programs lies in their seductive but unrealistic assumption that consumers in today's manipulative marketplace can become paragons of rational choice."

The royal commission on price spreads had seen it coming three decades earlier and had summed it up this way: "The buyer may still beware, but he no longer knows of what he must be aware." That was said in 1955.

Indeed, by the early sixties much had changed to undercut the individual consumer's ability to apply the Roman rule to determine whether he was buying appropriate goods and services or to take steps to effectively resolve problems. In an increasingly urban society, most Canadians no longer dealt with local producers and suppliers, as did their forebears. And an increase in the variety of products available had been matched by an increase in the complexity of such products. Automobile repairs could no longer be tackled with confidence by the uninstructed; processing and packaging of foods and other staples had made evaluation of such products difficult, even by well-informed consumers.

Ottawa wisely refused to assume the role of the protector of the downtrodden consumer against the Machiavelli-an salesmen of the wicked business man. "Some people," said John Turner on assuming the consumer portfolio, "would like to see me put a bax around the neck of every consumer, take them by the hand to the supermarket, and tell them what to put in their shopping basket. I don't intend to do it. Government cannot protect the consumer. All it can do is to help the consumer protect himself."

But the surge of energy that suddenly transformed consumerism in the sixties seems to have stemmed from more than the accumulated annoyances of the marketplace. Dr. David Leighton, who was the first chairman of the government's consumer council before resigning in frustration and disillusionment, sees more profound causes.

He quotes the popular book The Greening of America, which documents the decline in the cohesive forces of society — religion, national pride, respect for authority, the Crown, the family — with a resultant feeling on the part of individuals that they have lost control over their destinies.

In Leighton's view the aimlessness engendered by such developments had been one of the significant factors behind consumerism, student unrest, the Review, Number 1, 1970
racial unrest, urban unrest, and even women’s liberation.” He notes also that consumer complaints seem to come forth during periods of unprecedented prosperity and in those nations with the highest standards of living. Leighton stresses that society has to uncover and attack the root cause rather than the symptoms of such unrest. He warns that the existence of a large mass of discontented consumers, “disenfranchised and unhappy with their lot in life but not sure exactly why or where to turn,” creates a natural void for the demagogue. The glib and self-righteous activist, with a simple solution for everything, finds a ready audience among such people.

Whatever the motive or stimulus—prosperity, cumulative rage, complex rackets, asset inflation—consumer complaints over the sixties demonstrably began to wield consumer power. For the first time they formed a cohesive force, sufficient to claim the attention of business, government, and the media.

Consumer complaints columns came to rank, according to readership surveys, among the most popular of newspaper features. And Canadian consumerism achieves its most interesting achievement, of course, was the establishment in 1967 of the first federal ministry of consumer affairs in the world.

But that was more than 10 years ago, and lately the news has been so mixed that, perhaps, the movement’s critics can be forgiven for feeling that it has all fizzled out. Consumers have been bought powerless to halt steadily climbing prices, even with the assistance of such government machinery as the food price review board. Specific attempts to remedy particular situations, such as the “great meat boycott” of a decade ago, have generally been ineffective and have served more to illustrate the exasperating individualization of consumers than their capacity for concerted action. Theoretically the boycott confers enormous power on the consumer, in practice he is a member of the potentially strongest union in the world. In action, however, it has mostly proved unworkable: it was the price of coffee rather than consumers’ collective indignation that was eventually to affect sales and force prices back down to more realistic levels.

The federal department of consumer affairs decided to live up to many of the promises that accompanied its birth. Its first minister, John Tuner, was in the job for little more than a year before being promoted to a politically more important portfolio, and his successor, Ronald Barford, has also moved on to other things. How many people can even name the current minister? As for the government’s consumer council, from which much was expected, it was soon to dissolve in accordance with the usual after a brief and unhappy history.

Worse, the CAC itself has been in constant uproar, wracked by in-fighting and bickering. Two years ago the Financial Post reported: “The CAC’s membership has declined and its drift to the right, the Quebec branch threatened to separate in protest against CAC’s unilingualism.” More recent income consumer complaints claim that the CAC’s middle-class orientation neglected their concerns.

The association’s political base, with considerable structure vested in local chapters, makes it difficult for the CAC to get an adequate national policy positions quickly, particularly on those issues where regional differences can be great. And the CAC’s traditional volunteer structure, long regarded as one of the association’s chief assets, in itself intervention in policy decisions that had been established.

From this starting point, if you want to look at consumer history that way, the principal consumer decision-making based to the principle of public interest. There have been other difficulties. With the growing financial problems of the past three or four years, has become evident that new groups, which has become apparent during the past three or four years, has come about the consumer, backed by government funding, even though such funding has sometimes been less than adequate.

The recent participation by public-interest groups in the northern Canada pipeline would be one example. The pipeline, brought by two groups to the brink of bankruptcy, even with considerable government financial aid. At the same time, the northern pipeline experience demonstrated the strength of specialization on the part of various public-interest groups, who could operate independently or together, as circumstances warranted. The pipelines group could have adequately represented all consumer interests.

It may indeed be true, as has been claimed, that, in providing government funding to allow consumers to monitor and participate in the proceedings of regulatory hearings, Canada has pioneered a pattern of national economic decision-making. It is likely to become the standard for other countries. Such a pattern is, however, more of a means to an end than an end in itself. The CAC’s role in these hearings has been significant and impressive.

In the perspective of the history of the Canadian consumer movement of the last decade, many people can agree with the assessment of M. O’Grady that “a mature consumer’s organization, patterned by men and women of common sense, fair play, and good humor, does indeed have a creative role to play in our country’s affairs.”

Beryl Phynuptee: an exulting era is over, but awareness has been raised.

Some of the provinces have been quick to follow the federal government’s example in the consumer area, and a number of them have, in fact, led in consumer-protection legislation. Provincial ombudsmen are one example of such pioneering, and now, finally, all the provinces have now established their own consumer-affairs portfolios. Beyond questions of consciousness have been raised. Consumerism in Canada may have taken a different turn to that which was delineated when the movement began to gather momentum a decade ago, but its accomplishments have been less than impressive for that. In the perspective of the history of the Canadian consumer movement of the last decade, many people can agree with the assessment of M. O’Grady that “a mature consumer’s organization, patterned by men and women of common sense, fair play, and good humor, does indeed have a creative role to play in our country’s affairs.”
A fish for Richard
The happiest boy in the world

The dining room of the motel faces east, so we have a view of the sun as it begins climbing up into a clear winter morning, and we can tell, as we luck into bacon and eggs, that we've chosen a perfect day. We're going to fish through the ice of Lake Simcoe, north of Toronto, and we've rented a hut, seven kilometres from shore. At 8:30 a.m. we're to meet the fellow who owns the huts so he can run us out there, along with his other customers, in one of his Bombardiers, those big, 12-passenger snowmobiles. The waitress at the motel fills our thermos with steaming coffee, and we slip on our parkas and walk out to the car, our boots squeaking in the hard-packed snow of the driveway.

My companion is my oldest son, Richard, who's 11 years old, and who is joining me on this ice-fishing expedition, taking the day off school because he has had absolutely the worst luck that any fisherman, young or old, could possibly experience. He's fished with me a half-dozen times, in several promising spots: in northern Ontario, on summer holidays in Prince Edward Island, when we camped in New Brunswick, all over the place. And not only has he caught no fish, he has had not a single bite. He has never felt so much as a twinge on his line. So when he was asked to do an article on ice fishing — to have a look at why so many people are so keen on it — I decided to take him with me and now, as we head along a back road toward our rendezvous, he says in a tone that is an odd combination of enthusiasm and scepticism: "We'll catch some fish today, won't we?" "No question about it," I reply confidently. "Trout?"

"Maybe trout. Maybe whitefish."

It's one of those misunderstandings that people sometimes call "deep," very cold, very clear, absolutely windless and quiet. The snow is sparkling. Lou Fontaine, the fellow who rents the huts, is waiting along with a half-dozen other guys, nursing coffee in the warm kitchen of the bungalow from which he runs his business. At the back there's a workshop/storage area where these days Fontaine is working on a new sled made of wood, with runners three metres long, which he needs to transport his huts out onto the lake early in the winter when the ice gets thick enough, and back in the spring before it gets too thin to support the Bombardier that will tow the sled. Also back there is the chain saw that he uses to cut the big rectangular holes in the ice over which the fishing huts are placed.

The Bombardier is 25 years old, and it rattles as it bumps over the snow-covered ice, heading toward Lou Fontaine's 15 huts, off in the distance. We follow a line of cedar trees stuck in the ice to make a trail that a driver can follow in case a storm closes in. We slow almost to a stop a couple of times so the driver, one of Lou's helpers, can ease the big machine over a pressure crack in the ice. The Bombardier has to cross head-on, at a spot where the crack is straight: if we cross where it's jagged, a piece of ice might break off, and down we'd all go. In a book called the ABC's of Ice Fishing, there's a section dealing with "Escaping from Submerging Cars," and I think of it now. The water where Lou has his fish huts is 30 m deep.

Lou, of course, is full of encouragement concerning the fishing prospects. "They caught a lot of fish yesterday," he says, and Richard's face lights up. You pay $12 a person for your hut, and Richard and I laid out another $12 each for our fishing gear, including the ice-fishing equivalent of fishing rods: little notched sticks called tip-ups or teeters. You can fish by holding the stick in your hand, letting a lure down so it goes, say, half way to the bottom, then jigging it up and down, or you can balance your stick (your teeter) on a simple wooden stand, an upright with a notch in it, stuck on a wooden base. In this second method you attach something called a spreader to your line. It has two or three or four hooks, and it rocks, very lightly, on the bottom. It's adjusted so delicately, just right, so the line running off the end of the teeter is taut all the way to the bottom: it's kept taut by the weight of the spreader. This means that when a fish grasps the bait (generally minnows) on the spreader, he'll lift it and — up in the hut, the end of the teeter will rise. This is the signal for the fisherman to grab fast and lift so the hook is locked firmly into the mouth of the fish.

Fishing regulations vary across the country and also from region to region, but on Lake Simcoe each fisherman is allowed two lines, and in many huts the fishermen have a go with both systems: one hand-held stick and one balancing on a stand. This is what Richard and I are doing. We've put live minnows on our spreaders, and we're trying a variety of lures on our hard-lined huts, a selection of three or four marvels with interesting names such as the "Swedish Pimple" and with hints on their packages that we can expect boundless success. A study called a "Willams Junior Ice Fishing Jig" says "A Williams lure ... drives fish wild!"

Naturally we slip our lines in with the feeling that it will be only a matter of minutes before we have our first fish. The hut has a propane stove and a propane light (the fishermen go all night), and it's so warm that we take off our parkas and turn the stove down a shade. The inside is two metres by three metres and two metres high. There's a small door — you crouch low to get through it — and there are four small windows. Along each side there are wooden benches covered with pieces of foam rubber, and between them is the opening in the ice: about two metres long and one metre wide, with a sturdy piece of wood, a one-by-one, running through the centre. You could slip in, but you'd have to be pretty careless. The ice is about 30 cm thick — about a foot.

Everything is neat. Lou says he cleans up daily, picking up everything from fish guts to beer cans. He has a powerful magnet that he lowers down to the bottom to snap up any beer caps so the fish won't be frightened away by their shininess. On the walls are some scuffings, nobody's observing, just comments on how things went for previous visitors. Somebody has pencilled "Two trout, two whitefish," and someone else has added in ink, "14 lobsters." Richard sorrowfully a pen and writes: "We caught nothing." We've been at it for more than an hour — Richard and I and Erik Christensen, the photographer — and we are without a fish, without a bite. Skunked, as they say. "We stopped feeling sorry for the minnows we put on my hook," Richard says. "I just want to catch a fish."

According to the Ontario ministry of natural resources, we really should catch a fish. In fact, several: it offers surprisingly specific evidence that ice fishing is truly worthwhile. In one year at Lake Simcoe, the ministry says, summer fishermen spent 118,000 hours catching 56,000 fish; winter fishermen spent 490,000 hours catching 550,000 fish. In other words, winter fishing is probably better, according to biologists, because the fish's natural food is scattered in winter.
A sampling from some of the provincial departments across Canada that know about such things shows the popularity of ice fishing is increasing, partly because the snowmobile has made it easier to get out there on some of the vast stretches of ice and partly because we're all getting a good deal more determined to make the best of winter. In New Brunswick, ice fishing has been growing steadily for the past 10 years, perhaps, one expert suggests, because of the increase in recreation time. In Quebec, ice fishing has been popular for many years, but it's jumped recently, simply because fishing itself is so much more popular and the fatalities don't want it give up due during winter.

There's a wide variation in the types of ice fishing. In Manitoba, for instance, it's mostly open ice fishing — for fishing from huts, the fisherman simply drills the ice with a giant auger. There's a village in Quebec, St. Anne-de-la-Pérade, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, where there's an annual scramble for tommy cod, a little fish that swarms up from the Atlantic to spawn in the St. Lawrence River. For a month and a half, beginning at Christmas time, the population of the village jumps from 2,000 to about 9,000, and 2,000 or so skaters appear on the ice of the St. Lawrence. It's probably ice fishing at its peak. The huts are staffed with electric lights, toilets, garbage collection — the works. And there are times when the fishermen haul in the same cod fast as they can work their lines.

Here, on Lake Simcoe, all Richard wants is one fish.

At the moment, we've been at it for four hours now — we have no fish. Some references have been taken with such enthusiasm that we haven't seen the least sign of any. What do people see in this odd sport? We're comfortabale enough, no doubt about that, but when it comes to action...

A few days earlier I visited a fisheries research station, run by the Ontario government, on the other side of the lake, and Ron Desjardine, a biologist, had told me: "We've seen an improvement in lake trout fishing, on the other side of the lake..." I'm sure we're at the other side now. We're fishing on Lake Simcoe, where the ice fishing is good, and Ron would have wanted us here. He would have wanted us here because of the lake trout, which is a good fish for ice fishing, and the lake trout is abundant in Lake Simcoe, and it's easy to catch. And we're here, and we're fishing, and we're having a good time.

Winter Dick Brown and son, Richard: for hours it was not a happy hunt.

You may not be able to buy happiness, but on Lake Simcoe you sure can catch it.
Allan MacNab was a lively and adventurous boy of 14 living in what is now Toronto when the country came under attack from the south in the conflict that became known as the War of 1812. Despite his youth he volunteered for active duty, and within a few months was fighting beside his father. By the time he was 16, in 1814, he was in charge of his unit, an advance guard that took part in an attack on Plattsburgh, New York, a key outpost of the opposition forces. He became famous as “the boy hero.”

Today MacNab is remembered mainly for two things. One is his political career — controversial from beginning to end. He was elected to the Upper Canada Assembly in 1829, and shortly afterward was thrown into jail for refusing to testify before a select committee of the legislature. He reached the peak of his career in 1854 when he served briefly, although not terribly successfully, as joint prime minister of the United Provinces of Canada, before resigning to make way for John A. Macdonald.

But the other reason for his fame may well be the more lasting. He was passionately committed to the idea of establishing the clan MacNab in Canada, and he did so by building a great castle where he would reside with his wife and three daughters. The lands for the castle were purchased in 1832, and the building was completed in 1836. It was called Dundurn — a Gaelic word meaning the fort on the water — and it stands today, beautifully restored, overlooking Burlington Bay, near the eastern entrance to the city of Hamilton, Ont., where it is visited every year by about 90,000 people from Canada and the United States.

Naturally, most come in spring, summer, or fall. Back in June, 1987, after it was reopened following its restoration as Hamilton’s centennial project, almost a thousand people went through every day. Since then tours have been conducted daily except for Christmas and New Year’s Day. Because fewer visitors come on winter days, those who do are apt to get a more leisurely tour and a more detailed look at the castle and its furnishings.

And so, on a recent afternoon when the grounds around the castle seemed to be awaiting the snow, I dropped in, not just for a tour, but for a visit with Martin Lewis, the new director of Dundurn, and Alix Gronau, the gracious, helpful woman who has been with Dundurn since its restoration was undertaken.

“I don’t think there’s any doubt,” she told me, “but that the winter season is an ideal time to visit Dundurn, especially for people who are hoping to learn a bit more than usual about its history and furnishings. Perhaps it is the best time of the year. For one thing, because there are fewer people, the guides can afford to take more time and give more detailed answers to questions. And while all our guides — there are about 30 counting full- and part-time — are serious about their work, those who are with us throughout the winter seem especially committed to their subject.”

The subject, of course, is not merely Dundurn but the man himself, Sir Allan Napier MacNab (he was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1838) and, insofar as Dundurn is a mirror of the man, it reveals that he was few equals when it came to living in the grand manner.

The drawing room has seven doors opening onto the lawns. In the dining room there’s a chandelier with 650 crystals. The master bedroom has a three-poster bed, and in the basement MacNab had a brewery installed for his many servants.

In his political outlook MacNab was an archconservative, clinging so tenaciously to the idea that Canada should retain ties with Britain that it helped to unseat him as party leader and prime minister, when it became expedient to do so. As Marion MacKaye has noted in her book MacNab of Dundurn, “He had been advanced because it was politically advantageous to decorate the ship of state with an old colonial figurehead. When the need had passed, he was ruthlessly replaced by a newer model.”

Even his death — in August, 1862, when he was 64 years old — was surrounded in controversy, as Protestant and Catholic churchmen got into an uneasy quarrel over whether, upon his deathbed, he embraced Catholicism. The argument began in his bedroom as he lay dying, and the only moment of relief in the rather grim tableau came when the dying man, asked by his clergyman if he would answer a few questions, replied tersely: “Make it short.”

One room in the castle that seems to be almost waiting for MacNab to arrive is his library. It is on the main floor near the drawing room, and in a north-east window through which the morning sun can fall over the desk and onto one of his original possessions, a parliamentary rule book, lying open beside his chair. The draperies are in the MacNab tartan, and the book cases of black walnut contain legal volumes of the day, a reminder that along with his life as a politician MacNab was a leading lawyer, the first one to set up practice in Hamilton. Toward a corner of the room, standing in silence, is a speaker’s chair from the assembly of which MacNab was a member, a symbol that would have much to say if it could only speak.

The job of restoring Dundurn to its original style demanded a lengthy and painstaking effort, since the castle’s splendor began to fade after MacNab died penniless. It became in turn a private home and, at the beginning of the century, a museum of natural science and history. In the early sixties the city of Hamilton set about to renew it to its original state.

A furnishings consultant, Jeanne Mihorinack — who selected the furnishings for Upper Canada Village near Morrisburg, Ont. — chose the draperies and wallpapers that give Dundurn its warm authenticity. Then under her guidance a committee of Hamilton citizens began searching for thousands of items — dishes, tables, toys, books, and flat iron — that would make Dundurn, as much as possible, a replica of the days of the MacNab family. “The committee members don’t only scouted antique stores, flea markets, and junk shops,” recalls Alia Gronau, “but found themselves in attics, cellars, and tumbledowns drive sheds. When they came upon something that seemed promising — either offered for sale or as a donation — they photographed it. Then at a weekly meeting the furnishings consultant gave her opinion on whether it should be acquired for Dundurn.”

Now, as the castle enters its second decade since restoration, it is well along the way as a shining place in the country’s recollection of its past. And, as Martin Lewis the new director likes to point out, it is an example of the way in which a community can bring life to the history that lies around it. For when you enter Dundurn as I did on that gray afternoon not long ago, and move among its rooms, the chill world of the present seems to lift for a few moments to admit the light and warmth of a more romantic time.