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Editor / Kenneth Bagriet
Associate Editor / David Matherci
Art Director / Margaret Stewart
Editorial Production / Judy Fokken
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A COUNTRY'S CANVAS

The images are as infinite as the nation

BY ARNOLD EDINBOROUGH

For some people Canadian art begins with Cornelius Krieghoff and comes to full flowering in the Group of Seven. But Krieghoff's merits habitants frollicking in the snow and the Group of Seven's bright red maples by dark green lakes are not even the half of it. The visual arts in Canada consist of thousands of objects that men of talent and genius have created during the years for all of us to admire, to use, to worship, and to enjoy. They may have been carved from stone or wood, woven from grass or fibre, painted on canvas or paper, beaten out of metal or, latterly, shaped out of plastic. And where does the tradition begin? Hundreds of years ago with Inuit carving.
we have seen a glowing multitude of works which, in their continuity, strength, and modern revival have always been parallel in any other country — works that both in galleries and auction rooms command prices that reflect not mere acceptance, but keen competition for their ownership. One of Kenojuak’s Enchanted Owl prints sold at Winter’s in Toronto for $15,500 last April — more than 200 times its original price 15 years ago. A traditional Micmac ceremonial dress, dating from the 19th century, was recently “reappraised” to Canada from a private collection at auction as a cost of $59,500. And a Norval Morrisseau, still dumped from the eave, may cost you not a penny less than $10,000.

The man who yet thinks, though, that Canadian art begins with Krieghoff is a grain of truth in his view. By the beginning of the 19th century the church was no longer the sole patron of the arts. The tight oligarchy of church and state gave way to a diffused autonomy of wealth. Now wealthy Canadians were given the opportunity, and imagines for posterity, and wealthy British families wanted souvenirs of the country beyond the sea in which their sons served as officers of the Imperial forces or traveled in the way of education or trade.

The first and most popular of the artists who supplied this exotic souvenir trade was George Heriot. He was for 16 years, beginning in 1836, the postmaster-general for British North America. It was his job to visit all the post offices from Halifax to modern Detroit, and in doing so he made hundreds of pen-and-wash sketches in the way he had been taught at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, where all artillery officers had to learn to sketch, a panorama made on the spot being more useful for military purposes than most maps of the time. More than 600 of these sketches have now found their way into the McCord Museum in Montreal, but many more went back to England in the mid-19th century with officers returning home. Other such early and illuminating works by James Cockburn and, of course, by Krieghoff, followed the same route.

Throughout the 19th century immigrant painters, whether army officers or organized partially trained or professional artists fully trained, continued to concentrate on the land. This was partly because of their own awe at such sights as Niagara Falls or the Rockies, partly because the sublime in nature was what sold at a time when European civilization was up to its cultural neck in the romantic works of de Musset, de Vigny, and Lamartine in France, Wordsworth, Byron, and Coleridge in England, Wuthering Heights in Germany.

So the subtleties of Canada were painted, their natural greatness engulfed in atmospheric clouds, stylized trees, vivid sunsets, or misty sunrises. From Montmorency Falls in Quebec, through the Niagara Falls to the Kakabeka Falls near Thunder Bay, such artists as Lucius O’Brien, John Francis Paul Kane, and Cornelius Krieghoff sought the mystical wonder of nature in a new and uninhabited land, his imagination filled, as Joseph Addison said it should be, “with the prospects of an open champagne country, a vast untraveled desert, huge heaps of mountains, high rocks, and precipices, or a wide expanse of water.

All were present in Canada, plus the “noble savages” Rousseau had written so sentimentally. These children of nature become the equally sentimentalyzed inhabitants of Krieghoff’s paintings, their roguishness against the virgin white snow or the less sugary, but no less romanticized, Indians of Paul Kane on the Prairies.

For the greater part of the 19th century, then, Canadian painting was landscape painting, often romanticized, nearly always by immigrants who never ceased to be tourists looking for nature’s new marvels, whether those marvels were part of the landscape itself or the curious people who inhabited it.

Then, a hundred years ago, Canadian artists, digging equally deep within themselves, found an aesthetic. Up to now they had borrowed other people’s: the brown, over-romanticized woods of the Dutch, the feathers minuteness of the Hudson River School from the United States, the bourgeois hues of Barbizon School in France.

This was not good enough for James Wilson Morrice or for Maurice Cullen, two Canadians from Montreal who went to study in Paris. There they learned to solve painterly problems in new and engaging ways, the ways of the impressionists with their splash of color, their variety of brush work, and their constant and passionate inquiry into the composition of color itself.

Morrice and Cullen changed Canadian painting forever. No longer was it a matter of amateur skill or professional production for a definable clientele. Now there was a preoccupation with the nature of art itself, with the difficulties of conveying a totally private vision in an acceptable public fashion. As Russell Harper says in his encyclopedic work Painting in Canada, “Morrice, Cullen, and others had created a climate receptive to radical change, had brightened the artistic scene, had given it a sense of meaning, and had prepared for future developments.”

That significant future development was the Group of Seven, seven men from different backgrounds who by historical accident and mutual interest came together in the Studio Building in Toronto in 1914. Located in the Rosedale ravine near Bloor and Yonge, the Studio Building had been specifically designed for the artists’ use by an architect friend. For a while they painted there together, Thomson living in a shack behind the building, World War I then intervened, but in 1918 they reconvened, less Tom Thomson, their early inspiration, who had drowned in Algonquin Park a year earlier.

Their object was to paint Canada as Canadians. As J.E.H. MacDonald put it, they were not just painting landscapes, but the face of their own country. With stylized forms, flat, broad brush strokes, and vivid color, MacDonald, Varley, Lake, Jackson, and the rest made the Canadian Shield come alive.

Geometric critics poured scorn on their efforts. Hector Charlesworth, editor of Saturday Night, called it the bombastic school. The pictures of their first exhibition, said another, gave “the impression that the artist was out to make a sensation, did not know how to do it, and wasted considerable good pigment in a disastrous attempt.”

Yet the Group of Seven stuck to their position, continued to paint the clarity of the northland light, the shattering colors of the Algonquin falls and, as they traveled further afield, the Rockies and the northern tundra. Lawren Harris, in particular, reduced these latter areas to powerful, bleak abstractions.

The group had done its work by the outbreak of World War II. It had made art in Canada a matter of public discussion, and it had given the Canadian landscape a truly Canadian expression. The group’s impact was felt again when, post war, every railway station in the country had reproductions of its works hanging for thousands of men-at-arms.
to see as they waited for their troop trains to take them away from such scenes, often forever.

While Ontario concentrated on the rural landscape, Montreal in the thirties took on the urban landscape, with figures. Let us first paint an iceberg in the North, Prudence Heward would paint a ripe black moon in Montreal. While A.Y. Jackson got his red leaves right on a maple tree, John Lyman was getting the red dress right on a mysterious woman with haunting eyes. Phillips Sutty was painting the street scenes of Montreal, and in St. John, N.B., Miller Brittain was doing the same.

Charles Comfort, Marian Scott, Goodridge Roberts, Stanley Cosgrove, Andre Blier, Peggi Niccolato, all were painting well, sometimes brilliantly, expressing their own vibrant view of life. But it was not a nationalistic view and has been neglected in favor of the Group of Seven’s winning mix of artistic brilliance and national identity.

After 1916 came the Canadian population explosion. In 30 years we doubled our numbers from a wartime 11.5 million to a post-centennial 25 million. Hundred thousand Canadians had been abroad, seen older civilizations, and were eager to build a more sophisticated society in their own backyard.

At about the same time the centre of the world’s art scene shifted from Paris to New York, a train ride away for Canadians rather than a five-day transcontinental voyage.

By 1957 the Canada Council had come into being and artists would be paid by the state to do what they did best: create works of art. Even junior architects toted $7,000 a year. What a change from the thirties when Goodridge Roberts had lived on $150 a week, had to paint in watercolor because he could not afford oils, and sometimes had to lie down, weak from malnutrition, before he could finish a picture.

In the last 30 years we have had a richness in the visual arts that would be scarcely comprehensible to our fathers’ generation.

The has been a surrealist group in Montreal led by Paul-Emile Borduas and Jean-Paul Riopelle. There has been another surrealist group in Toronto, with such people as William Ronald, Harold Town, Jack Bush, and Peter Oulsen. There has been the Regina Five: Kenneth Lochhead, Arthur McKay, Ron Bloore, Douglas Morison, and Ted Godwin.

But there have also been numerous talents not in any group. Alfred Pelland for one, whose swirling patterns and rhythmic colors follow nobody’s ideas but his own. Jean-Paul Lemieux, whose stiff, menacing figures look even more forbidding than the flat landscapes in which he places them.

Still the landscape, though. Despite the fact that many young painters and sculptors get into, because it is easy to get to New York or London or Paris, Canadian art is still to a very large extent landscape art.

Godwin. Who Weeps for You Baby Blue, Esther Warkov

Take Harold Town, one of the young progressives who has played the role of artist to the hilt, (if once met him on an Ontario concession road pushing an old pram full of maritins, a shotgun over his shoulder, “hunting for trillium pickers.”) His best work is all inspired by landscape, perhaps his two most last single pictures being titled Dead Boat Pond (1956) and The Great Divide (1966).

In Vancouver and on the Prairies, widely different picture — and sculptors — were also taking the land as their inspiration. Gordon Smith reduced the British Columbia landscape to abstractions of blue, green, and brown: the sea, the mountains, and the cities. Takao Tanabe, sailing in the mountains at Banff as resident artist of the Banff School, did the same. Tasnei Ohly, an undistinguished paint but superb printmaker, was more local. He made pasted abstractions of the Vancouver beaches: soft blues for the sea, pale beige for the sand, dark brown for the lugs lost from the timber booms.

In Saskatchewan, Norman Perchudoff reduced the flatness of the Prairies to linear color. In the Maritimes a whole school of realism grew up inspired by the teaching of Alex Colville. Tom Forrestal and Christopher Pratt, especially, transformed the scenes of everyday life into significant works of art.

Now that is not to say that we do not have a solid body of work concerned with landscape. Both Claude Tousignant and Guido Molinari in Quebec are concerned totally with color. Their work, as Dennis Reid says in his A Concise History of Canadian Painting, “is solely on color structure” and it “removes completely any need to devise an ‘image’.” There are many individual artists whose primary visions range from the terrifying world of Mark Prent, whose construction of a man in an electric chair jolts the viewer to attention, to Esther Warkow’s strange imagination full of medieval lions, trick eggs, and Victorian fashions.

It is a telling fact that the richness of the visual arts in Canada today is enough to keep some of the top-flight galleries in business in Toronto alone. Corporations are decorating their boardroom walls with Canadian work; a tax-supported art bank in Ottawa has been buying at the rate of $1 million a year for the past five years; new public galleries from Charlottetown to Vancouver are all in the process of building representative collections. More importantly, young people setting up house are looking for prints by Canadian printmakers and will doubtless graduate from graphics to more money flows in.

The visual arts in Canada are, in this latter part of the 20th century, richer, more varied, more vibrant, and certainly more widely distributed than ever before. From beginning prints at $100 to Riopelle’s at $100,000, the quality and quantity seems infinite.

But always, lurking somewhere on the canvases, is this vast land with its distances, its still awe-inspiring sublimities, its and breathing variety of light, mood, and textures. Whether constructed by its original inhabitants or by those who have come as tourists or immigrants to its shores, the images of Canada are as infinite as Canada itself.

ARNOLD EDENBROOK is president of The Council for Business and the Arts in Canada.

During the past few years I’ve found that almost every time I go to a dinner party and the other guests discover that I’m an economist working for an oil company, the questioning becomes as predictable — and sometimes as aggressive — as that of a prosecutor in a courtroom. Of course, with all the attention given to the oil industry ever since the first big OPEC price increases in 1973, it would be surprising if I were not drawn into discus-

Given that background I welcomed the invitation of the editor to write something explaining the “size, source, and use of oil-company profits.” It will certainly force me to organize my thoughts, and then at least I’ll be ready at the next party.

Besides, as an economist I am seriously worried that widespread failure to understand what profits are all about will lead to self-interest but misguided legislation that will create...
serious problems for us all. So, the opportunity to try to clarify how the system works is too good to pass up. First, a few basics.

What is it? (surprise, to me, but many people I know who are upset about corporate profits and the like have never even a basic understanding of what profits are in our type of mixed economy. Mixed economy, note, not socialist. It's our favorite buzz-word terms that simply means we have both public and private ownership. The Smith type of capitalist system nor a centrally controlled socialist system. Rather, we have an economy where most goods and services are supplied by privately owned enterprises responding to market incentives, with governments also providing some goods and services. Governments, in addition, watch over the economy to ensure that such things as health, safety, environmental, protection laws, and the like are observed.

Profits, in our type of economy, are defined as the difference between revenue and costs or some other measure of a business's activity. These costs include all wages and salaries, payments for raw materials and other items used in the production process, and -- ever more important these days -- the obligations to the owners of the firm, such as royalties and taxes. However, in this definition (which is basically the one used by the tax authorities) costs do not include any payments to the owners of the machinery and equipment used in the firm nor is there any adjustment for the distortions caused by inflation.

While this definition is adequate for some purposes, it does not really do much to help us understand how profits contribute to the efficient working of our economic system. For that, we must broaden our viewpoint to look at the role of profits in the hands of the owner or owners of a business and a key signal to the marketplace. Both of these are needed to see how the market system is to work, and both must be understood before any judgment can be made on the "reasonableness" of any particular firm's or industry's level of profits.

By producing a product or service desired by the public, the owners of a business are hoping that the capital they have supplied will make that happen will grow. But their eventual reward, if any, will depend on another critical aspect of the market system: competition. Profit is the incentive our economic system provides to the businessman to strive to keep the costs of production as low as possible, thereby making the gap between revenues and costs as wide as possible. Of course, as all businesses try to do this, the competition that ensues helps to determine what profits are in our type of mixed economy.

The profit motive generally does well in generating the capital needed for new investment and long-term growth, but it does force businesses to compete on the cost of the form of lower prices. (Lest you think that prices are never lower, look at the effect of high profits and competition on electronic calculators and the computer industry. A decade ago both prices and profits were very high and only a few firms were in the business. Now dozens of firms compete, and prices have fallen steadily for several years.)

Without the promise of profit as a reward for supplying capital to a successful business, it would be unrealistic for anyone to give up the chance to make a profit in another business. 

Economists, when discussing the appropriate rate of profit, often use the terms after-tax earnings or after-tax profits. This is because in our type of economy, businesses are free to determine their own profit rates. But the profit rate is simply the rate that is earned on capital investments and only a few firms were in the business. The rate of return is 10 percent.

When the profit rate is low, businesses will cut back on investment, and when the profit rate is high, businesses will invest more. This is because the profit rate is the rate of return on capital investments and only a few firms were in the business. The rate of return is 10 percent.

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investors. The riskier industries must promise higher potential returns than the more secure businesses. Yet the after-tax rate of return on capital employed has not been substantially different between total manufacturing and the oil and gas industry during the past decade.

In 1978, for example, the after-tax profit rate on capital employed averaged 6.8 percent for total manufacturing. The comparable figure was 6.7 percent. For the nine years from 1968 through 1976, profits as a proportion of total capital employed averaged 8.5 percent in the oil and gas industry and 7.8 percent in all manufacturing. Naturally, the rate of return in individual years can vary somewhat more, largely as a result of fluctuations in economic activity in the country as a whole.

Manufacturing tends, on average, to be far less dependent on interference, for example. As a reflection of this, in 1971 the rate of return on capital employed was 7.6 percent in petroleum and 5.4 percent in manufacturing. However, the basic point that returns in the mineral-fuel industries are far lower than out of line with those in total manufacturing when risk factors are recognized, is not the fault of the policy suppliers.

Incidentally, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that these profit levels are far from representing the achieved returns of any reasonable, remember that very few investments are safe. If you buy a share of corporate stock, for example, both the dividend you will receive and the price of which you will be able to sell the share in the future is guaranteed by anyone. And, in order to be very sound, the corporation must have a risky stock, investors have to expect that they will earn a greater total return than they would receive if they had left their money in CDs, at least on average, some people will be outright losers, while others will earn hand-

As everyone who reads the daily stock-exchange quotations knows, companies and industries also differ in their riskiness. And, in order to attract

Even at that, partners will likely be required to help assume some of the financing load and to share the risk. The promise of returns from the strategy is what will, of course, be the attraction.

In short, at this point, I have said enough to convince you of two things. First, rather than being a rip-off of the Canadian public, it is an important and part of our economic system. They are what motivate individual investors to place their money in the disposal of a business. And they lead to the investment that, in the final analysis, shapes our economy with growth and jobs. In fact, I do not think there is any major reason why, if the system is allowed to function in the way it was designed, the highest standard of living in the world will not be experienced as it is in the insofar as the oil industry is concerned, the profits earned are helping, in fact, to achieve Canadian goals of full employment and energy indepen-
dence. That is because they help directly to finance new investments and provide the incentives necessary to entice producers to supply the industry with the extra oil that will require for the huge projects necessary in the years ahead.

As I said, if I have convinced you of two of these points. Because if I have not, and if enough Canadians do not also come to the same understanding, there is a very serious danger that in the name of taxing "excess profits," we will emasculate private industry to the point where it will be unable to do the job we so badly need done.

Dr. John Kyle is manager of corporate finance for Imperial Oil and the author of The Balance of Payments in a Monetary Economy (Princeton University Press, 1970).
Our public archives and our remembered history

BY DOUG FETHERLING

The television ministries Roots has stepped up the workload at almost every public archives throughout the western world — almost every archives, but not quite all. The Public Archives of Canada has been virtually unaffected by the Roots phenomenon, which has prompted, for example, a 70 percent increase in requests for genealogical information from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The Canadian experience seems a bit odd at first, until you talk with Dr. Wilfred Smith, the Dominion archivist. "I think Canadians have always been interested in their family histories," he says, and he's probably right. For, every year, thousands of Canaadians in search of their past write or phone for information or come in person to the building on Wellington Street in Ottawa, which the archives shares, somewhat uneasily, with the National Library. As Canada's official archivist Smith oversees one of the country's most prestigious, complex, and bizarre institutions with its staff of 750 people, annual budget of more than $20 million. Although heavy with bureaucracy, short on space, and larded with mandate that keeps growing wider and wider, the archives is proud of its truly world-class status. This reputation is based in part on the fact that it is a "total archive," that, as the name suggests, it's a public and not simply a national repository. It collects material of a historical nature from all sectors of society, not just from the government and, in turn, affords all sectors more or less equal access. Therein for the archives both its glory and its problems lie.

Each month, for instance, the archives' own library, which includes about 100,000 books and pamphlets on history, genealogy, and library science, receives 100 letters from private individuals seeking obscure little bits of information, about 60 percent of them related to family history. It also fields 170 telephone inquiries. The callers range from adopted children seeking their natural parents (they're referred to Children's Aid) to one persistent Ottawa woman wanting to know the identity of a ghost she claims is haunting her house. But these information-seekers pale before those who avail themselves of the 24-hour research archives, the manuscripts division, which is the hub of the entire operation, and the public-records division, which follows it closely in frequency and importance.

On a typical day one sees a variety of scholarly activity in progress at the reading tables. There are historians researching books, graduate students preparing theses, Indian Brotherhood lawyers examining 18th-century treaties for loopholes, climatologists checking out weather patterns, epigeneticists ferreting out information about diseases, scuba divers digging for the location of sunken treasure, and one female Japanese poet whose mission is obscure, but who's been coming in regularly the past four or five years. They work away merrily, quietly, breaking now and then for a snack in the archives' cafeteria. So wrapped up are they in their private discoveries that for the most part they're probably oblivious to the distinctiveness of the archives' own office politics.

The archives was established in 1872. For some reason that no one now living can remember, it was constituted as a branch of the department of agriculture, and a generation elapsed before it was shifted to its present niche within the secretary of state's portfolio. Originally it housed only official government records, some going back to the 18th century and it occupied a single room as late as 1901. That was the year when the second Dominion archivist, Arthur G. Doughty, began his remarkable 31-year stint of office. It was Doughty, one of the cleverest politicians outside the House of Commons, who built up a great institution by bargaining for bigger and bigger budgets and acquiring more and more collections. In the latter quest, some claim, he was aided by methods that would seem rather too laissez-faire today. But by convincing to get the necessary funds he brought the archives within the grasp of the federal bureaucracy. Between one-quarter and one-third of the budget, for instance, now goes to administration. "That figure seems terribly large," says Wilfred Smith, "but I think it's justified. With this total archives approach, you need relative independence from government on one level. But you put a price for that freedom." The day is fast coming, however, when the Treasury Board will have to pay its own kind of price in the form of new and larger quarters for the archives.

When it moved into the present building in 1867, the archives was told there would be space enough for 25 years. But, in fact, the place was filled within only four or five. It has to share the premises equally with the National Library, which became a separate entity in 1953 and is considered a parvenu even though 75 percent of the visitors go to the archives. And the present collections are housed in a warehouse in a Hull industrial park. A space problem no is pressing that a large-scale "Ottawa Genealogical Society" is now stored in the first-floor men's room. Smith admits, under close questioning, that new buildings for both the library and the archives may inevitably come sometime in the late 1980s. But there's a very real question about what will be done in the interim, so rapid is the rate of growth in terms of volume and scope.

It's difficult to convey the breadth of the problem by mere statistics; one actually has to walk the long rows of shelves where boxes of papers, row after row of them, are stored. The bulkiest collections are those of manuscripts and public records. The former is most notable for the material belonging to ministers of the Crown. Here, for instance, are the originals of all the prime ministers' papers except those of R.B. Bennett and John Diefenbaker. (Those were moved to the University of New Brunswick and the University of Saskatchewan respectively, though the archives kept microfilmed copies.) Microfilm and Xerox copies are the preferred means of dissemination anyway, given the wear and tear that comes through handling. At present, two percent of the Meighen, 10 percent of the Laurier, and 20 percent of the Macdonald papers are in the restoration process, even though the entire Macdonald collection was ordered microfilmed some years ago when it was discovered that documents were being repaired with transparent tape.

Also included in the manuscripts division are the papers of many prominent Canadians in other fields. And the current emphasis is on collecting material in the cultural area. Recently it has also moved boldly into the acquisition of corporate archives. The highest profiled division, manuscripts, was also the scene of the only archives "scandal" of recent years. Although it was never made public a young archivist in the early 1960s had allegedly accepted a rumoured $20,000 to bootleg copies of MacKenzie King's Spier diaries to a Toronto newspaper, which later decided against publishing them for legal reasons.

King's diaries are famous, of course. But the manuscripts division is full of other mysteries and isolated gems. In 1971 Underhill papers there is an original draft of the CCF Regina Manifesto, for instance. And archivists, who tend to have graduate degrees in Canadian history, enjoy speculating as to what's sealed in an envelope left behind by B.C. Senior Eugene Faries with instructions that it not be opened until the year 2000. Working there, it's easy to imagine yourself in the romanze during the May 1919 raid on Laurier right as Laurier to a good press," says Peter Bowyer of manuscripts. People from the other branch whose staff members appear to walk most closely with history. Here are stored the papers of each government as a government, apart from the individuals in the Cabinet ministers, Privy Council, etc. Most documents are closed for a period of 50 years, but federal departments can extend the time limit almost indefinitely if they choose. The material of each government department (or defense or external affairs, which retain a lot of their own archives) is stored in special low-iin-the-ground, large-walled, unplugged endless network of shelves. Each is given its own number and letter retrieval code, the microfilm or xerographic copies of the archives itself, for instance, are classified as RG-37; they are, as one would expect, a model of completeness and order.

Like the other branches, public records is in the process of transferring printed material to other forms, such...
as microfiche or electronic storage. But it’s finding that post-linear communica-
tion is a two-way street. “When the royal commission on bilingualism and
biculturalism was finished its work we got hundreds of hours of tape
recordings,” says Jerry O’Brien of the
records department. “We had a half
of a time figuring out who was talking
to who.” The problem will only
become more acute as the federal
government moves, slowly but surely,
swallow words and other futuristic office methods.
Past experience has shown that each new
wave of technology brings in new
waves of paper for them to store, not fewer.
“We get documents at the end of
their life cycle,” says events of the
public records department, mean-
ning that the agencies and departments
that deposit them have already weeded
through them pretty closely. It’s esti-
mated, in fact, that only from three to five percent of the documents wind up in the archives. But even so, the volume is staggering, and such is the
chaos that the bulb is growing
at an alarming rate.

Strolling down the long aisles, for instance, one can see how
easily the federal paperwork was doing,
say, Macdonald’s first government, where
the public inventory was only about three million — and
how the nation’s business has become incandescent.
Running
the government up to the time
of World War II was not extremely com-
plicated, at all. “It was excep-
tively clear,” he says.
This is with the exception of the time around
World War I, where the system was inadequately
inadequate in that the archives are
in the form of what’s now called “paper
bureaucracy, there’s no substantial differ-
ence between a Liberal and a
Conservative government. According
To Smith, the amount of government
documents coming into the archives in
the next decade will be as great as that
where which has accumulated between
1867 and the present.

“Government archives’ picture
of our public life it is even possible
for a video to document the means by which the
bureaucracy exists and is com-
prised in public records, for instance, is the first government ever
reported to have used microfilm from
1880. One can then trace the
duration of time needed for the revolu-
tions in the archives. For instance, the
first trade and commerce
department became the first to use
up-to-date as a matter of routine. From
that point on the machines
became almost ubiquitous, though
as late as 1910 some parts of the govern-
ment still clung tenaciously to the
old scarce-lens copying system.
The rule which seals most govern-
ment documents for a period of 50
years involves parts of the archives with
an air of secrecy and intrigue. In fact,
though, most of the papers are deci-
dedly noncontroversial, since hot docu-
ments are held back by the
departments or destroyed by the
owners. “Eventually, everything has
research value,” says Jerry O’Brien,
“though for the first few years its ad-
ministrative value is probably
higher.” Even so, the archives, because
of space limitations, encourages
departments to keep mere house-
keeping records. There’s no doubt
they are some good staff.

Of course, there are some sensitive
documents in the archives. It’s because
of these that all public-records archi-

Dorothy Ahligen and Thomas Nagy: planning new beginnings for old documents

Maps and posters and paintings and films as benchmarks of the past
(below left) Gertrude Morris, the archives’ senior print and drawing conservator

(housing, among other things, Louis
Riel’s Greek-language Bible with his
handwritten notes, in English) can be
opened with a single key and then
left in an open, otherwise empty file
drawer immediately outside the door.
Thus, in the last analysis, the archives is not really designed as the
perpetual resting place of state secrets.
The stuff is understandably much
more concerned with the question of
protecting individual privacy than
with that of disclosing classified
information. Housed within the archives walls, for
instance, are files on some five mil-

ion individual Canadians. These
include the records of most everyone
who’s served in the armed forces and
virtually complete dossiers on all
terriﬁc civil servants. Since 1955 the
archives has been receiving periodic
directives on how to treat this informa-
tion, given the provisions of the
Human Rights Act. But the situation
is far from clear and the future looks
cloak the news still. If a strong freedom of
information law is enacted, the
archives will be thrown into a stir.
“...if we look at the U.S. example,” says
Smith, “we would need a huge infra-
structure, as this law would be a great
incentive for departments to transfer
records to us. We’re concerned whether
we would be given extra resources to
handle the rush.”

And yet in its very nature the archives continues to expand in scope
despite the demands on its resources. Maintaining old programs while
beginning new ones amounts to a con-
stant balancing act. There are perma-
nent staff in London and Paris, for
instance, reproducing documents
bearing on Canada’s colonial days.
And the archives has ended up with
responsibility for running Laurier
House (where Laurier and Mackenzie
King resided) as a museum. All this
must be juggled with the institution’s
role as a clearing house of government
information on the one hand and, on
the other, its function as a collector of
material in other media. The only way
the institution can manage is by a pro-
cess of cell-division.

Beginning in the early days, for
instance, the archives found itself
with a lot of visual material. In time,
this formed the nucleus of the picture divi-
sion which, says its acting director,
Auguste Vachon, “is not interested in
the history of art, like the National
Gallery, but only in the subject con-
tent.” It now has 3,000 paintings,
14,000 drawings, and 85,000 prints, not
to mention 8,000 medals and devotion
to the parvis of the medals
collection in the War Museum. The
picture division also collects, because
nobody else can, early presented storage problems until Vachon
discovered that ordinary ring
boxes, the kind used in jewelry stores,
fits the bill.

Special storage is an even more
imperative concern of the photography
division, which again is not interested
in aesthetics (as is the National Film
Board) but only the documentary aspect
of the pictures. There are
upwards of 6.5 million individual
photographs in the collection, and
they must be kept at between 40 per-
cent and 50 percent relative humidity
and at 28 degrees Celsius. Even so,
color prints continue to fade: “But
as with printed materials,” says Andrew
Birrell of the photography division,
“we find that the older the thing is,
the better it will last.”
The newest division is the National
Film Archives. Says its director,
Sam Kula: “Our job is to acquire and con-
serve moving images and recorded
sound — but not music, only oral his-
tory and radio broadcasts both public
and private.” But, in fact, the depart-
ment does more than that. It came into
being in 1969, two years after a
warehouse fire in Beaconsfield, outside
Montreal, destroyed the official World
War II arms films being kept by the
NFB. With this disaster already
in mind, the new division went all out for
conservation and preservation, espe-
cially as regards films on the highly
inflammable nitrate stock used until the
early 1950s. “It’s difficult to say
how big the tragedy is,” says Kula,
but the collection probably totals over
70,000 metres of film, about two-
thirds of its documentary and news
footage, including old newscasts and
the various programs, which it preserves
at the rate of 60 per week.

It’s in this department that one
is clearly able to find the best mixture of
the official and the decidedly unofficial
elements that so characterize the pub-
ic archives as a whole. For instance,
Kula’s department (most of which
is located in the basement) is where
the recorded proceedings of House-debates
end their days. But it also has one-half
(all those which are now known to
exist) of the 90 or so Canadian feature
films made between 1891 and 1959, to
say nothing of the amateur home
movies of the Diefenbaker, Pearson,
and Trudeau families. It’s also there
that film is shot on the most complete
collection extant of Canadian erotic
literature, all catalogued with loving,
scholarly exactitude.

But then there’s something about
working in the Public Archives of
Canada that goes beyond a sense of
nurturing and a curious feeling of duty.
In his office, surrounded by shelves
of books and memorabilia of Canada’s past, Wilfred Smith talks about that
sense of duty. “The degree to which a
particular type of work is preserved
depends not only on the archives but
on the general awareness and coopera-
tion of Canadians.” And, as an exam-
ple, he tells about a telephone call he
received several years ago from a woman who was on the lookout for a
friend. On the radio that day, the
poem In Flanders Field was being reviewed. She asked if the archives could
get a copy of it for her. When the
woman suddenly noticed that in a pile
of papers were some letters signed by
a Colonel John McCrae whose poem
might well be the only one that she
heard. The archives sent them to the
same John McCrae whose poem was
being aired, and phoned Wilfred
Smith.

“They were, indeed,” enthuses
Smith, “the very first letter that I
received from the front lines shortly before the poet-soldier was killed. They
were an inspiration.”

Not everyone, perhaps, can make
history, but listening to Smith talk
about the Public Archives of Canada can play a role in preserving it.
Looking back, you might think that Leduc was merely a series of fortuitous accidents. And, if Imperial had guessed wrong at any of several steps along the way, Canada might have remained oil poor and energy dependent for years. You might think that some of the calls that led to Leduc were close enough to curl an estimator's hair. Yet a history of Leduc that dealt only with the happenstance of the country's most significant oil discovery would ignore the optimism and devotion and sheer courage of scores of Imperial employees.

Still, a lot of potential land mines did lie along the road to Leduc. By 1946 Imperial had drilled 133 consecutive dry holes across the Prairies and had almost run out of geological ideas and the inclination to spend more money on exploration. So in January, 1949, a concerned board of directors met to consider petroleum possibilities in western Canada. They decided that with the dwindling crude reserves in Alberta's Turner Valley - the only substantial field on the Prairies - and with no other prospects in sight, Imperial should get into the gas-synthesis business. But the company's enormous losses in oil exploration, the board members recommended, and instead manufacture gasoline from the encouraging natural-gas supplies in the Viking, Kleskun area, 130 kilometres southeast of Edmonton. About the same time the board was considering a company study which, if implemented, would have resulted in a profoundly different Canadian oil industry. The study concluded that Sarnia had no future as a refining area. Instead, the company would have to depend on offshore crude-oil supplies and, as a result, refining capacity in Montreal would have to be greatly expanded.

You could hardly blame the board members. In half a century and about $200 million worth of exploration, the Canadian oil industry had drilled perhaps a thousand wells in the West and found reserves of only about 45 million barrels. Since Imperial started exploring there in 1912, the company had spent $23 million looking for oil. It had conducted half the industry's geological studies on the Prairies, a third of the seismograph work, and a quarter of the drilling. And for its efforts it had one field in the far, unexploited reaches of Norman Wells, N.W.T., and a share of the shrinking Turner Valley production (down to 6.4 million barrels a year from its 1942 high of 10 million barrels).
Saskatchewan (where Imperial’s geologists, looking for oil, found the province’s first potash deposits), the company had recognized a promising formation in the Middle area in 1941, but pulled out when the provincial government talked of expropriation. It also defined an oil-bearing structure around the Weyburn-Steeleman-Wynyard field, but couldn’t test it because Saskatchewan government refused the company’s application for an oil lease in the region. In the next decade, after Leduc: both Middle Steeple and Weyburn would come in as sizable oil discoveries.

In April, 1946, a group of technical people attended an important meeting.

The exports were Bill Rollif, senior geologist for eastern Canada; geologist and engineer Don Mackenzie, a veteran of Turner Valley who was then working in the Toronto headquarters; Oliver Hopkins, a company director responsible for exploration; Fred McKinnon, a senior geologist in the West; Lorne Falconer, a geologist with the Canol project, the joint American-Canadian oil-pipeline project between Norman Wells and Whitehorse; Gus Beck, a geophysicist then in management; and Dr. Ted Link.

Link was a brilliant and aggressive geologist who had explored the Arctic and in 1920 found the Norman Wells field for the company in the Northwest Territories. In Alberta he discovered some of the world’s largest natural-gas wells. Now he was Imperial’s chief geologist, and the doyenne amongst the company’s third generation of outstanding geologists.

He was talking to marketing and refining people at that time: recall Doug Layer, a Calgary geologist who worked for Imperial and who “and they were not inclined to take risks. So he had to work pretty hard.”

In 1944 Link had suggested drilling tests be made of a belt of oil and gas in central northwest of Edmonton and continued south of the city, through Leduc, and beyond.

Two years later, at the meeting, the technical men recommended that this area be explored for both gas and oil. “This is considered the most important portion of the most promising or prospective area in Canada for immediate attention,” they said in a report. “It is the opinion of this commission that the Leduc district is ready to be explored vigorously, by all means available in this area…”

Their bold recommendation to management was bolstered the following month by the results of a questionnaire that Ted Link had circutized to Imperial’s 32 geologists. Among other questions, it asked: “Do you think commercially exploitable oil or gas can be discovered in Canada?” They did. If so, Link asked his men in the field, where in the West did they believe the oil was? “And if you think of an area, 10 of the geologists gave their first choice and six their second choice as the same central Alberta plains. In Turner Valley, Leduc, and Gascoigne were convinced. There would be one final flurry of petroleum testing before the company admitted defeat and built a gas-synthesis plant. It was a courageous decision for the time. Few other companies were continuing to spend much money on dirty mud and delightful light crude oil.

Within the company the word went out. Walker Taylor, the western producing manager, radioed the news to drilling superintendent Charles (Cork) and operations manager Vern Taylor, who were at a well northwest of Hinton, Alta. Taylor, who retired as a senior vice-president and director of Imperial, recalls the excitement: “We hightailed it back. It was the most encouragement we’d had outside Turner Valley. None of the southern wells had performed this nicely as this well could. By then the news had leaked outside the company. On February 5, Calgary and Edmonton newspapers carried rumors of “a strike of major importance.” Lease holds—buyers and sellers of mineral rights—began to converge on the area, bargaining for any leases still available. The pot was boiling. Imperial’s public-relations department convinced management to take an audacious step: to name a specific date and invite the press and public to view the wildcat well actually come into production. Management’s plan shook topspin Vern Hunter, whose job it was to supervise drilling operations in the field: “The two Taylor boys, Walker and Vern [not brother], asked me to name the day—which I did under protest. So many things can happen when you’re fouling with temperamental oil wells. But I wanted to see the formation. We were hoping that the companies would find enough money so we could keep doing what we wanted to do.” As for the companies, Imperial’s initial position was that Leduc would be anything but just another dry hole.

Hunter recalls that Leduc had the company’s plans for the first wildcat well, funds for every project, and nothing else—the formations were defined. From “the beginning,” said George McCollinston, who was another geologist at the site who always felt our way along as carefully as amorous porcupines.”

Almost from the start they were working with a feeling that their hard-earned hopes were more than mere-hope. Leduc No. 1 seemed different. The crew began seeing encouraging signs that this was (in the words of George McCollinston) “to ordinary tastes, an oil field.”

As Vern Hunter tells it: “We were doing an awful lot of coring and testing. All the way down from the first 2,000 feet (610 metres) or so we started to pick up a little gas and signs of oil in the Cretaceous. The whole thing was alive. And when we got down to the D2 [into a layer of Devonian rock], when’s when the whole thing started for western Canada.”

Early in the new year, late one chilly afternoon, geologist Steve Coburn was at the site when drilling reached the 1,532-metre level. Looking at samples of dolomite limestone from the well, he noticed that they had a distinct yellowish streak of pitch. As the core was html, Vern Hunter took the core to his office and hammer in Leduc to have the limestone tested. The results suggested a healthy reservoir of gas and oil. The drilling crew then did drill-stem tests — further sampling of the rock’s contents — and on February 3, at a depth of 1,541 metres, a geyser shot from the drill pipe and showered roughneck Al (Frenchi) Desnoyers with...
like a lariat over his head, and tossed it, lighting the flare line. Flames immediately soared 15 metres. Inky smoke climbed many metres higher. As Hunter described the scene, "The world's most beautiful smoke ring went floating skyward."

The flare died as uncharted water cut it off, but pressure rose about 5 p.m. and the well was alive once more. At 11:10 the flow was switched to the separator and Nathan Tanner, Alberta's lands and mines minister, turned a valve to move the oil into storage tanks.

Edmonton radio station CJCA was at the site, recording the noise of the oil as it ran into the sump pit. That sizzling sound you just heard," the announcer said, "was the Imperial Oil Limited's No. 1 well at Leduc, Alberta, coming into production. The oil started flowing under its own pressure at 4 o'clock this afternoon."

Thursday, February 13, in what may be a momentous occasion in the oil world.

"Hundreds of people have been waiting here most of the day for this event to happen, and they were certainly not disappointed. Suddenly, as they drew the swab out of the 5,000-foot (1,524-metre) hole, there was a burst of sound and a great gush of oil and water climbed almost halfway up the derrick."

"I'm going to ask Mr. Walker Taylor, the western manager of the production department of Imperial Oil Limited, who is at my side at the moment, to give you a few comments now that the well is in production. Mr. Taylor, would you care to comment on the well's possibilities and the possible size of the field now that this new baby has been born?"

"It is much too early in the life of the well to make any statement of its productive ability," Taylor replied in a measured tone that had probably fitted him to reading from a prepared statement. "But from the way it is now acting, it would appear to have definite possibilities. Several holes will have to be drilled in an attempt to establish the limits of the productive area. Our company is most optimistic regarding possibilities of the area and, if this well stands up as the test hole, we will probably have several more rigs operating shortly."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Taylor. We might tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that In past 10 years Imperial Oil Limited has drilled 114 holes in western Canada. This is the best-looking prospect so far. The well, to date, has cost approximately $90,000 and is now in production."

Everyone posed for photographs, with Vern Hunter in galoshes, wetsuit and snorkel, as the oil marked the spot where the well had snapped down. That evening Imperial threw a party in Edmonton; the weary Hunter was invited, but went to bed instead. Later that night, in a Model T Ford, he drove up to the derrick, jumped out of his car, and breathlessly asked the remaining crew what time the well had exploded."

There were officials who knew exactly what was happening. Carl Nickle, who chronicles the fledgling industry in his Daily Oil Bulletin, was among the crowd that watched the trip of liquid gold in. As he wrote the next day in his mimeographed newsletter: "In the small hours of this morning I shoved into a raw wind while my hand on the flow pipe recorded the steady pulsating of oil heading for the storage tanks and gas heading for the flare... This writer is more impressed by Leduc's performance than by any other Western Canadian Oil Discovery in the past decade...

Fruits of the Imperial efforts have been small to date. Leduc may be the beginning of a different story for Imperial, and a brightened future for the industry, which benefits from the discoveries of all."

What even such seasoned observers as Nickle didn't know was that courage and luck had played more than their usual roles in Leduc. No. 1. If the technical experts meeting in Toronto hadn't decided to explore the Leduc area, if the majority of company geologists hadn't agreed on the prospects of Alberta's central plains, if the board of directors hadn't allowed one final study of oil possibilities before committing themselves to gas synthesis, then Imperial would never have come to Leduc.

And if the first east-west line the seismic party tested had been a kilometre south, the crew wouldn't have found the "one-point high" that prompted drilling. If a geophysicist hadn't suggested drilling that fairly insignificant anomaly, the company might have ignored the Leduc area entirely. And if the technical experts hadn't recommended going far below the usual Cretaceous level, No. 1 would have been only a noncommercial gas well.

Lucky played as large a part in Leduc No. 2, the well that indicated to Imperial just how enormous a reservoir of oil lay in the deep Devonian rock. At its site, 2.4 kilometres southwest of the original well, No. 2 — studied in the day before No. 1 came in — hit nothing at first but gas and water. While Toronto management was actively considering the possibility of pulling the rig off the site, the Calgary office told the drillers to keep working. And at 1,837 metres they struck a reef of oil that would become the Leduc field."

The Edmonton Bulletin of May 18, 1947, reported on its front page: "A surging, angry voice from the depths of the earth Thursday at 1:30 p.m. announced to the world that the Leduc area may become one of the most prolific producers of petroleum in the West..."

It was an accurate prophecy. Leduc was all the encouragement the Canadian oil industry needed. By year's end there were 28 producing wells in the field; in early 1948 Imperial was announcing a $20-million plan to expand exploration and development in Alberta that would employ 1,500 workers in Edmonton alone. That year the roughnecks left their skid shacks that had been parked on the Leduc sports grounds and moved to the new town of Devon, which Imperial had built nearby.

Other companies joined Imperial's search for oil, with exploration crews scattering across the Prairies by plane, canoe, and train. In one triumph, entire seismographic camps were hauled by trucks across the snowy wilds of northern Alberta. And they found much more crude in the Prairie provinces, in fields like Pembina and Redwater. For years Canada would be self-sufficient in oil.
Mayor Jack Volrth says of the experience: "Gastown turned out to be a very successful experiment. It was a rare example of cooperation between merchants, owners, and the city, sharing the costs of upgrading an area. As a result, part of an old skid-road area is now a world-famous tourist attraction." Energetic young property owners and merchants took the initiative in the mid-1960s, cleaning up and renovating their buildings. Impressed by the results, the city of Vancouver joined in rebuilding the area. This is in keeping with the history of Gastown (and later Vancouver), which was founded on old-fashioned, entrepreneurial spirit.

September 30, 1867, was a typical rainy west-coast day as John Deighton, riverboat captain, gold prospector, and saloon keeper, piddled around the tip of what is now Stanley Park. With him he had his Indian wife, her mother and cousin, a dog, two chickens, a keg of whiskey, and $6. In the heavy drizzle he landed the overloaded dingy, canoes at Luck-Lucky, at the edge of Stanley's Mill property. Living up to his sobriquet "Gassy Jack," Deighton piddled around the whiskey to the mill workers and talked them into supplying material and men for a shack. Within 24 hours the Globe Saloon was up, and soon Gassy Jack was serving drinks in a bar consisting of a plank across two barrels. It was the first business, other than the hotel, and it evolved into Vancouver.

Almost immediately others came to start grocery stores and saloons in shacks in Gassy's Town or Gastown. The town, which grew rapidly, was surveyed by the Royal Engineers in 1870 and renamed Granville. The name never caught on and a new town, built on a new town, built on the north, with saloon, billiard room, guest rooms, and a wide veranda. But in 1875, at the age of 44, Gassy Jack, the illegitimate son of a Yorkshire draper, died in his bed. On April 6 of that year, it was officially renamed Vancouver. On June 13, sparks from a brush-clearing fire blew into the shanty-town and within minutes it was nothing but ashes. The first city named Vancouver had lasted only nine weeks.

While destroying the old town, the great fire of 1886 spurred the biggest building boom in west-coast history. It was an early example of invovlary urban renewal. With financial aid from Ottawa and Victoria and supervision from city hall (operating from a tent), new buildings sprang up. This time, instead of wood, they were made of more substantial concrete and brick.

Three days after the fire a clothing store, three-storey hotel, another small hotel, public hall, hardware store, saloon, real-estate office, six shops, auction house, and a butcher were open for business. By the end of the year $900,000 of construction was completed with another $900,000 dated for the year ahead.

Early Vancouver was a tough, frontier town of gamblers, prostitutes, and hard-drinking loggers, mill workers, woodsmen, and sea-men. But it prospered. In 1887 the first transcontinental passenger train arrived on the new extension from New Westminster. By 1906 streets were running down Cordova Street. The last five years of the century saw the development of the port and railway, and the establishment of forest industries, factories, ship canneries, and service mines in the British Columbia interior.

The decline of Gastown started early in the century, less than a quarter of a century after the fire. It was, as if the city, in search of respectability, was trying to move away from the ribald Gastown area. Development shifted west and south, to the west end and Kitsilano. Gastown became Old Vancouver and began a long, slow slide into economic decline.

A Vancouver city planning department economic study of Gastown from 1965 to 1974 notes that, what had previously been the centre of the city began to deteriorate into "skid road." The deteriora- tion was due to the physical condition continued until the last 1960s, resulting in extensive social and economic costs. By 1967 Gassy Jack's town was an area of desert, abandoned warehouses, rundown hotels, and dismal, dangerous streets. Many considered it a blight on the city, fit only to be torn down.

Increasing awareness of Canada's heritage in our centennial year helped save the old town from the eyes of the experts. A consortium of large department stores and real-estate companies proposed tearing the old buildings down for a massive residential and commercial development.

But a small group of Gastown property owners had already started rallying their buildings and had launched a clean-up campaign in that part of the city. They were joined in the campaign to save the area by an unusual coalition of "urban rebels" — young business-men and professionals, even younger street-corner entrepreneurs who sold crafts from stalls, academics, the community arts council, architects, planners, and university professors, the Chinese community, and various citizen's groups concerned with Vancouver's heritage. This alliance of business and environmentalist interests (not always on the same side) still gives Gastown much of its appeal.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were exciting, heady times in Gastown as interest and activity increased. On February 2, 1971, at the urging of city hall, the provincial government and neighboring Chinatown a heritage area. The old buildings were saved from the wreck.

The following year saw the city joined in the beautification of Gastown. Since 1972 it has spent a little more than $1 million on capital improvements in three stages: in 1972 work began on Maple Tree Square, in 1973 on Blood Alley Square, and in 1975 on Water Street. The federal government has contributed $175,000, the provincial government $54,000, the utility companies nearly $500,000, and the property owners about $1 million on these three projects.

The city's money was well spent. Utility wires were put underground. Brick sidewalks were installed to encourage pedestrians to use the streets. Bollards and chains were installed elsewhere to separate pedestrians and cars. Trees were planted and fancy street lights were put in. (Using an early picture as a model and an old casting for the original street lights, the city made new, slightly modified versions.)

Vancouver city planner for Gastown Jon Giff-Elis points out that this was the first time in North America that a city tore up good streets to rebuild them in the old style. The city has been very successful in the initiatives of private developer-conservators. At Gastown's Maple Tree Square, this is a deceptively simple form: a subdued molded brick pavement spreading in one unbroken surface from building wall to building wall...ornamental cast iron bollards separate people and cars. No curbs, just a smooth, curved alley section pavement. Jay-walking is unobtrusively controlled by chains across the tracks. How good to find in Vancouver the happy consonance of public and private world cultures...planners for the past three years. Gift-Elis has often been visited by planners from cities such as Seattle, Atlanta, Winnipeg, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and San Bernardino, eager to know what went right with Gastown.

When Gastown threw a party on September 19, 1980, to celebrate the reopening of Water Street, 200,000 people showed up. They danced in the street to the jazz and folk bands on makeshift stages, drank in the outdoor wine and beer gardens (now allowed on public streets in modern Vancouver), gambled in the city's only casino, browsed at the weekend stalls that supplemented the crowded restaurants. Amid flowers, beads, and balloons the and they watched ethnic dancers, an old-fashioned parade, jugglers, street musicians, and mime artists. It was a big party; the biggest in Vancouver's history.

Now, with six festivals a year, Gastown is bringing back the idea (heretical to most North Americans) that streets are for people, not just cars. Local merchants sponsor Gastown Days, Dominion Day, Mardi Gras, the Rain Festival (during which it has never rained), featuring a flanublers' bathtub race and a bicycle race, where top international competitors bump along the cobble streets. Vancouver radio broadcaster Gary

A town attuned to the need to save its heritage
For property owners, too, recy- cling old buildings instead of tearing them down and constructing new ones is a sound business proposition. As Toronto developer David Walsh noted in Heritage Canada magazine: "Because of the price of building materials today, developers see old buildings as ready-made packages of mass and costs. Even after knocking out walls, installing new wiring and plumbing, and meeting the tough new fire codes, recycling a structure can cost 25 percent to 30 percent less than building a new one ... Renovation of a heritage property can be completed more quickly than construction of a new building — nine months for an older property com- pared to 18 months for a new structure."

Gastown is also a magnet for attracting tourists. About 80 percent of the enquiries at the city's tourist information centre concern the old area, and some merchants report that on U.S. holiday weekends, as much as 75 percent of the money they take in is in U.S. dollars. But Gastown gives the city something that can't be measured by cash register receipts: an increased awareness of the city's history and a downtown area that is both an impersonal concrete and glass. The redevelopment has also led to a sharp reduction of crime in the area, where muggings were once common.

This human side of Gastown counts more than the bricks, fancy lights, or ringing cash registers. Safe again, the streets are being used. A characteristic of all great cities such as New York or London is their tolerance, even affection, for the eccentrics characters they attract. In its short history the rejuvenated Gastown has been a centre for the offbeat and for offbeat behavior in the normally conservative.

Loquacious Ace Aaen, one of the long-time residents who lived in the area when it was little more than warehouses and rooming houses, claimed to be the unofficial mayor of Gastown. So the merchants bought him a formal suit, Beaver top hat, a silver-headed cane and provided a room in the Hotel Europe in Maple Tree Square. For years Mayor "Ace," in his top hat and tails, held court in the streets, restaurants, and bars, as much a part of the commu- nity as the merchants and property owners. For a time there were claim- ants to the titles of ambassador and admirals of the nonexistent fleet.

These unofficial officials are now gone from the Gastown scene, but the entertainers remain, from jazz bands to kirmeguists to the Rhinestone Cowboy. The Rhine- stone Cowboy, Louis Gimpel, is the most colourful character to use Vancouver's streets as a personal stage. Louie, in his glittering drug- store cowboy suit, is a self- proclaimed eccentric who carries a tape recorder amplifier, singing along with Glen Campbell or Elvis Presley tapes. He always turns up at the festivals, where he can be sure of an audience.

The street festivals bring out the offbeat behavior of the whole city. During the April Rain Festival west-coast Indians open ceremonies by doing a rain dance — to keep off the rain. And a feeling of excitement runs up and down Water Street as spectators gather early to cheer their mayors on in the landlubbers' bath- tub race.

Normally staid mayors from British Columbia and Washington leave their chairs of office and three-piece suits at home, don sail- ors' caps, bright juggling sacks, hard hats or helmets, and climb into bathub on wheels. Athletic young racers push the mayors the length of the bumpy street, from the steam clock to the Gassy Jack statue (appropriately, the two symbols of Gastown), before TV and still cam- eras and hundreds of cheering spect- tors lining the road. After the race the mayors get together in the Town Pump to discuss the latest advances in bathtub technology. Even TV crew get into the act. Cameramen have climbed into a spare tub to be pushed along by reporters behind the mayors, chasing after action footage.

Gastown, however, is more than music, fun, and games. It was founded by small businessmen and is still an entrepreneur's town, still a sort of challenging frontier. Speaking from his unofficial, after-hours office in Gastown's favorite meeting place, the Town Pump, Giff-Ellis explains: "This is a community of young businessmen. You don't find too many middle-aged entrepreneurs here because the risks are greater. The rewards are higher, too. A lot of businesses fail, but those who suc- ceed do very well."

This, according to Giff-Ellis, helps set Gastown out as a special place. "People take more chances here, and this is true to the spirit of Gassy Jack. He was always ready to try something different. He often failed, but he always came up with new ideas. Gastown is full of new ideas."

(Giff-Ellis is responsible for the most visible of the new ideas, the steam clock. He suggested the clock to metal sculptor and amateur horolo- gist Ray Saunders as a good way to cover a steam vent on Water Street. It had never been done before, and many claimed it was impossible. They nearly proved right. But today tourists come from as far away as Japan to see this mechanical wonder root out its Westminster chimes every 15 minutes.)

And, like early Gastown, the area continues to change, to work out its identity. Giff-Ellis and the Gastown merchants would like to see some of the empty spaces in the renovated century-old buildings used as middle-level accommodation, to pro- vide for a permanent community.

Others suggest that a movie or live theatre would bring people down to Gastown in the evenings.

Others would also like to see a greater mix of businesses in Gastown, particularly those less dependent on seasonal tourism. But this is already happening. Glamorous models mime along the cobble sidewalks to the Blanche MacDonald modeling school or one of the commercial photography studios. Lawyers, many of whom have offices in Gastown, just a few blocks from the law courts, congregate in the many restaurants to argue legal niceties. Advertising copywriters seek inspiration in their tastefully deco- rated Gastown offices. A Gastown telephone book prepared by the merchants indicates the diversity of businesses there: music promoters, antique stores, advertising agencies, art galleries, architects, geologists, a marine diving company, travel agen- cies, retail stores, and an interna- tional array of ethnic restaurants — Indian, Greek, French, Italian, Irish, eastern European, German, and Chinese.

On warm summer evenings the many discs, cabarets, nightclubs, bars, and restaurants can draw people to the area. In the early evenings, revelers make their way along the highly lit streets. Well- dressed couples, on their way to an evening of elegant dancing, pause before the shops and restaurants. Courteses linger over after-dinner coffee.

Gassy Jack would be proud of the old neighborhood.
BACKYARD BANDITS

These city raccoons are tough as weeds. And charming as well

BY DICK BROWN

There are at least five raccoons in the group, though there may be as many as seven or eight, and they come up to our house in Toronto from the Humber River, about half a kilometre away. To reach us they have to cross an asphalt street, with its concrete sidewalks, and they have to make their way through backyards flooded by the lights of other houses and inhabited by an assortment of dogs and cats. But still they come, nearly every night during the warmer weather, hoping with persistent optimism that we'll forget to lock away some tasty bit of garbage. They're a special breed of raccoon — the urban raccoon, street wise and full of boldness and with the skill and resourcefulness of Houdini, able to open lids and latches and catch with incredible ease. Most important of all they have a unique charm: in the midst of a world that seems mostly paved, the urban raccoon is the city dweller's link with the woods and streams and meadows that lie beyond the suburbs.

And the urban raccoon, like all raccoons, is flourishing. He may be bold and highly visible, and he may look as though he'd be an easy catch, but he's elusive and quick and clever. He's also very, very cute. Who could harm even a whacker on a face like that? A friend of mine is a fanatic about fresh corn on the cob (off the stalk and right into the pot), and he's been trying for years to grow a few ears of corn in the backyard of his city home. This year was typical: the corn was doing fine, until the night it was wrecked by raccoons. My friend was upset, but not enough to try and catch them or even to drive them away. "Why not let the little guys have it?" he says.

Ah, yes, those little guys. They've forced us to build a giant box to hold our garbage cans (and to reinforce its corners with metal and to install increasingly sophisticated latches to hold the lid closed), and they've scared the wits out of our cat and walked all over the hoods of our cars whenever we've had them washed, and they've tramped on the flowers. But they've also delighted our kids and they've amazed us, time and again, with their brash determination. They hang from rafters in the garage, watching upside down as we drive in. They climb inside the big garbage box whenever we forget to lock it, and they lift the lids of the garbage cans with no trouble at all. When we try to shoo them away they retreat only briefly, and then all stop the back fence and watch us; the moment we come indoors they're back, bouding about the porch or on the top of the garbage box, wrestling with the catch or maybe just fooling around, showing one another.

It's inaccurate, of course, to attribute human qualities to animals, to take a sort of Walt Disney approach to them. But it's obvious, nevertheless, that this gang is full of personalities. They seem to have a kind of rascal approach to life, especially on weekends (maybe it's because the quality of our garbage generally improves on Saturdays), and we picture them passing around a bottle before they leave their homes down by the river to head out on an evening's adventure. We figure they may be a little tipsy when they reach our home, otherwise where would they get all that nerve? (We also suspect that their language is on the foul side, though we've never actually heard one of them swear.)

We used to think this bunch was something of an exception, then we began noticing stories in the newspapers about other raccoons in Toronto. When I checked with the Toronto Humane Society I learned that the urban raccoon seems to be on a notable increase. In just one year the number of calls concerning raccoons in the City of Toronto jumped by nearly 30 percent. And they're thriving in other cities, too. "We have an awful lot of them," says an inspector with the Montreal branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. "There are a lot on Mount Royal [in the centre of the city] and a lot in the Rivière des Prairies area. They come down from the mountain into the downtown area. There's a bunch of them living around McGill University."

And an SPCA inspector in Vancouver says: "There seem to be more and more of them because of the expansion of the city. New houses push the raccoons out of their homes and they don't necessarily go out into the country. Some of them move into the built-up areas. We have a lot of raccoons in the Kerrisdale area and Point Grey. They go right up onto the verandas and eat the food that's in the dogs' dishes. And, of course, there are a lot of kind ladies who feed them."

Of course there are: As a veterinarian in Ottawa once put it: "Next to baby seals, the raccoon is probably the cutest animal we've got. If they looked like crocodiles most people wouldn't be concerned with saving them."

We generally hear the raccoons around our house beginning about 10:30 or 11 p.m.; they don't seem to give a darn about making noise. They roll into the neighborhood, raising hell, banging garbage cans. When we hear them we go to the windows at the rear...
they’re return. Today they don’t bother back off; they barely look up when we turn the light on.

The noises we hear most often are made by the raccoons trying to get into the garbage box. There’s not enough space to go into the series of latches they’ve managed to master. We thought we finally had them beaten with the idea of putting a piece of chicken that looks like they won’t eat it. And, in fact, they cannot open it. We watched them try many times, passing it from the garbage box, then at the latch, and at each other, probably planning strategy. Or, they’ve spent think an hour or more at a stretch trying to un latch it.

Then, in the end, they found another way, on the garbage box. The raccoon at one end of the box or (so it’s handy to the house), and the raccoons managed to open the opposite end, pushing it up just enough to climb inside. They’d roll the box, holding on with their front paws, which are more like hands, then they’d stand with their heads. And in they’d go.

We’ve watched them so we now know how they go about it. It always goes on an awful jolt the first time one of them got inside while the latch was still latched. My wife went to get a bag on the garbage box into the box and she unlatched it, lifted the lid, and there were two of them. One had its head stuck out and scoured off, but not far very. The truth is that if we really wanted to keep them out, at least trying to keep them out, I’m sure we could come up with some way of doing it. But I figure we can do it, so we’re putting our efforts on, because the coons provide so much entertainment. A mother was up a few nights ago with three babies trailing behind her, bouncing around, more awful than any pug. She sat in a window box and crushed my petunia’s pots, but that’s it.

Actually, we’ve been very lucky with our gang of urban raccoons, not just because they coexist and entertain us, but because they haven’t done any serious damage. And often they do. There are plenty stories about raccoons on the rampage, tearing up gardens, rolling back newly tilled soil, leaving wrecks under, tearing roofs, plucking chimneys. . . [The best (most humane) way to get rid of them is to use humane organizations for the protection of animals rent these traps to you for small charges. The Toronto Humane Society, for instance, supplies traps free for the first week—though it sends you a $52 deposit for each trap and $5 for a week after that. Salmon makes good bait; so do eggs.

Sometimes it’s tough to get a raccoon into a trap, or (even tougher) a family of them, out of a chimney. One of the most effective ways of doing it is by setting a pan of naphtha flakles in the empty fireplace. The smell drives them out. But even with the smoke, when you should put a piece of wire mesh across the top of it so they can’t climb back in. But—like any trap, it’s a deal — before you apply the mesh, you should suspend your roof with water that contains a bit of chloroform, just to leave a hint of odor to keep them away. “The raccoons are liable to get very upset when they find they can’t get back into the chimney,” says Rick Cann of the Toronto Humane Society. “And if you haven’t used solution on the roof, they may decide to tear up the last bit of the box.”

If you catch a raccoon in a trap, take him out into the country and let him go in a spot where there are both trees and water. Don’t try to make a pot of a raccoon. Marcia Darling, who’s also with the Toronto Humane Society, points out that there are books that speak of the joys of keeping raccoons as pets (the books often tell you how to care for raccoons), but she says that, in general, is bad advice. Mark T. Sullivan, biologist with the Toronto Wildlife Centre, says that raccoons are kept for entertainment with the society, explains that you run into problems if you try to raise raccoons, because they easily become cantankerous when they grow up, so it’s pretty certain that you’ll have to find a mother raccoon that is a raccoon that has grown up in captivity has a hard time surviving in the wild; it’s too trusting and in

and runs away.

Some experts place raccoons just below monkeys in intelligence, and in putting their intelligence at the top of all animals with whom they compare them to, Polly Redford says: “Their rate of learning is similar to that of man and the rate at which they are very attentive and their memories are so good that a year later they can still remember from 40 percent of the psychologist’s puzzles.” And they’re inventive. Redford tells of a friend who spotted a raccoon in the bushes near his house. In her book Raccoons and Eagles, American writer Polly Redford says: “Recently, when I was out in the woods, I noticed a raccoon reaching for something. She got hold of it, held it over her head, and then let it go. It was a dead mouse, and the raccoon ate it.”

Raccoons are little cats, have no sense of smell, and are completely harmless to humans. They eat grapes and gooseberries, oats and wheat, pears and plums, grasses and celery leaves, mice and moles, cockroaches and crickets, and just about everything in between, even in a garbage can, and they’re both greedy and extremely wasteful. Says Polly Redford: “It is the wastefulness that enrages the farmer more than anything else — acres of corn pulled down, the ears still on streets, also in the city’s centre; they’ve been spotted time and again on rooftops eating garbage, and many residents have been awakened by the fare’s noise of a raccoon who is not another. They’ve been spotted from trees and off fire escapes and out of windows, into garbage, through windows, in the middle of the night; last spring, the Toronto Humane Society was called after a raccoon was dropped from a tree and landed on a Coca-Cola truck — before they got there he had snapped open two cans of Coke. “They’re certainly cute,” says Milan Novak. “But you have to sympathize with people whose roofs are ruined by raccoons or who spend three years nursing along and are just at harvest to their first grapes and then the raccoons get there first.”

Well of course you do, until you find at a mother sitting there looking back at you, with a face full of curiosity and not really ready for that sitting beside her. Then you have to agree with my friend. Why not let the little guys have them? 28

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In Closing

One evening last week, quite early, in a town I often visit, I was sitting all alone in a restaurant that is really one room — with tables and chairs, a bar in one corner, and walls that are fading green in color — when suddenly a woman seated near me, who had her blond hair in a bun and wore earrings that looked as if they were made of pewter, got up and walked rather briskly between the tables to the pay telephone on the wall beside the bar. She was a tall, good-looking woman, her hair being her most striking feature, and she stood there a moment like a novice actress waiting for silence, and then, quite forcefully, she began to dial. The room, it seemed, became instantly hushed — even the waiters seemed to speak more softly — as if the sound of her dialing, which was really rather loud, was a command that everyone accepted. There was a hint of a wait while the phone rang several times at the other end, and then, turning so that her back was toward us all, she began to speak clearly and coldly: "Is he there?"

There was a pause — the kind of pause in which we are left wondering if explanations are being made or excuses being created — and then, her voice dropping slightly, she spoke again. "I'm waiting," she said, "I'm still waiting. I've been here 20 minutes already." Then, without a word, she simply hung up, swept the room with her glance, and came back to her table where she sat alone, and resumed her waiting. She was in her middle forties and her hair, which was almost shining, and her skin, which was clear and white, seemed to illumine the drabness of her table and set it above the common and the ordinary.

Her waiter, a tall man with narrow shoulders whose name is John, and who has worked there for years, approached her, a bit warily, and asked if, while she was waiting, she might care for another martini. She glanced at him, saying no, she would simply wait a while, and then, as he turned and wandered back to his place in the corner beside the bar, her eyes fixed on him as he went, in a look that was not intended to follow him but to dismiss him. Just as there are those whose look tells us they grant acceptance to all they see, the lady at the table looked merely to refuse, to reject the waiters who had been there so long, and to exclude the people sitting in the comfort and contentment of a room that was so familiar.

Then, just when I was opening my menu to choose my dinner, there was a stir at the front as the door opened. A man came in, and quickly, without even removing his coat — a big, leather coat that brought all the cold weather with it — he swept by John, who was waiting for him, and made his way to the lady's table, rubbing his large, bare hands together and huffing as he came. She did not look up as he arrived — like a large truck finally pulling up at its destination, and having thrown his bulky coat over the back of the chair, slumped in the seat across from hers. He was a big man in his fifties, thickset and square shouldered, and his hair was almost red and done in an Afro style.

He was wearing a gray wool sweater and a pair of jeans that were new and still dark blue in color. He looked tired. Once, I am sure, he had been a young man of high optimism, but now all his early hopes seem to have died in his anxious blue eyes.

He did not speak until John, the waiter, came, and even then he did not speak so much as mumble, so that John had to ask him to repeat his order, which he did with utter weariness, saying that she would have a scotch and water and he would have nothing, nothing at all. Then he picked up the menu, opened it, and handed it to her in silence. She held it in both hands, right in front of his — almost the way you would hold the steering wheel of your car — and began to read from it, loudly but diffidently, the way you might read the directions on a can of paint. And, of course, she read in the same way she looked, not to notice, but to dismiss: "The chef said it's probably been lying around here for three weeks; who needs it. The french onion soup is probably straight out of a can; they can keep it. The smoked salmon, I had it here last time; I could smell it coming; forget it." She went on in this way, her voice an even and deliberate monotone, until at last she had gone through the entire menu, disposed of everything that was in it, and set it aside saying — while she looked past him to something in the distance that she had not as yet observed — that she would have nothing, for there was nothing that caught her fancy.

He did not seem surprised that she would deny him the companionship of the meal, but when he opened the menu to make his own choice, he did so quickly and halfheartedly and, when he closed it a moment later, there was something very sad and resigned in the way he did it, as if he were closing a door that he wished he had never opened. John came and took the order and then the man, who was now leaning forward with his hands clasped on the table before him, his eyes seeking the courage to look at her, began to ask her about her day in the city. Had she been very busy? Had there been any problems? It was a mistake. She said no, she had not been busy, and no, there had been no problems, none but the man in the next office who came in and talked to her incessantly while she was trying to finish a report; none but the girl who had just been hired and could not get her messages straight; none but the secretaries in the place who wouldn't so much as bring her coffee in the morning. As she spoke, her appearance, which earlier had been so striking — with her strong features and her gleaming hair — seemed to decline as it, in reducing everyone and everything she had touched that day to the same distainful level, she had, unavoidably, diminished herself. He looked at her quietly, and there was in his face a look of endless patience. His eyes, trying to hide their own weariness, were also trying to tell her that no matter how defeated he had been by his own day, he was at least able to listen, if listening was what she wanted.

I had to leave a few minutes later, and I doubt that I shall ever see those two people again. But looking back I think that one of them was stronger than I at first supposed, trying his best to rise from whatever it was that impoverished him, to be for the other something of a redeemer.