MADE IN CANADA

Imperial shops at home

BY JAMES DINGWALL

It was a few days before Christmas, and Aubrey Peterson, manager of Imperial Oil's purchasing department, was checking over his shopping list. Columns of industrial commodities were listed in ranking order and cross-referenced against the various Imperial operations: refining, exploration and production, chemicals. The report showed what items would be needed where in the company and, more importantly, when they would need to be delivered.

Clearly it was a list that had little to do with the season at hand. But it had much to do with Imperial's investment in the energy future of Canada and, curiously enough, in the welfare of thousands of Canadian manufacturers. Peterson's "shopping list," as he calls it, was the first draft of a detailed summary of commodities the company needs to bring in more than $20-billion worth of energy-related projects on stream in the 1980s.

At the hub of that spending is an Imperial policy that reaches deep into Canada's manufacturing life. Last year Imperial purchased $1.3 billion of materials and services; Peterson expects that amount to rise steadily to $2 billion by 1985. Almost half of that money is for materials and finds its way directly to small and large manufacturers across the country. AAT at Imperial, says Peterson, about 85 to 90 percent of the manufactured goods purchased by the company carry a predominant Canadian content, although he admits that in some cases there is no way to determine the exact content because the company's suppliers don't necessarily make a detailed study of where their raw materials and components come from. Canadian content would be even higher, except that some commodities needed in the company's operations are not available in Canada.

Assessing what is truly "Canadian-made" is no easy task. Still, it's important and, in some cases, required. For example, the federal Northern Pipeline Act, which governs the Alaska highway pipeline, affects the purchasing policies of companies working on that project. Moreover, many resource-rich provinces — Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Alberta and Newfoundland — are setting guidelines to encourage purchasing of goods and services within their boundaries. Clearly federal and provincial guidelines will only serve to put more pressure on companies to establish and monitor their Canadian or regional content. All things being equal (quality, service and price), Imperial's purchasing policy is "to give preference to Canadian suppliers, contractors and consultants and to those conducting business in the province or area of the company's needs. Firms are further encouraged to manufacture these materials in Canada." It's a policy that has been in writing for at least 40 years and as a day-to-day principle has guided the company for longer still. "I never fail to be amazed by the intensity of this conviction across the company," says Peterson.

One day back in 1950 two Imperial men came calling on Bruce Nodwell, a partner in the Calgary-based firm of Nodwell Brothers Ltd. They wanted his little company to help design and build something called an "all-terrain vehicle." At that point the company was a major builder of mobile camps for Imperial's seismic crews. But it had no knowledge of this kind of off-
the-road vehicle. "Nevertheless," says Nedwell, "Frank Spragins, Imperial's geophysicist, was very much taken with it, but the time was intriguing by the idea. And it didn't take long for B C L to convince Spragins and the exploration enthusiasts. Gerry Rempel was Spragins' partner, and as he remembers it, until that time we had found out that our geophysical crews could be working round year if we could only figure out how to travel over the muskeg."  

Unfortunately, Nedwell's first proposals, built on the same idea, didn't get off the ground. The second effort and the third met with similar results. But in 1955 Imperial came through with a $2,000 grant to fit it with a 100-centimetre-wide track on the vehicle. "It doesn't sound like much now," concedes Nedwell, "but it was all we needed to tip the scale in our favor." The wider, more stable, and more maneuverable track, along with a new steering mechanism, kept the vehicle from bogging down when it was maneuvered. The Nedwell vehicle proved its success first in Alaska and later in the northern fields of British Columbia, Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

By the mid-1960s Bruce Nedwell and his two sons had designed and had built, together in their new company, Foremost Development Ltd., making and selling a whole new line of all-terrain vehicles. In 1968 the Soviet minister of the oil industry was visiting Canada and expressed interest in the transport problems in its frontier oil fields. His host, Imperial Oil Ltd., broached the subject of a possible 50/50 joint venture to aid in transportation problems. Two years later, Nedwell recalls, the company received its first order from Russia. Since then the company, now called Canadian Foremost, has sold $40 million worth of its vehicles to its U.S.S.R. customer. In 1968, Foremost sold 70% of its production to exports 75% of its products. This year, Foremost is competing against some of the world's leading manufacturers of such vehicles. The company is marketing a line of all-terrain vehicles, called the Foremost, which is competitive with the world's leading manufacturers. The Foremost is a compact, lightweight, and versatile vehicle that is designed for a wide range of applications, such as resource exploration, mineral exploration, and forest management. The Foremost is built to withstand harsh conditions and can operate in a variety of environments, including extreme temperatures and rough terrain. The Foremost is also designed to be easy to operate and maintain, making it ideal for use by many different industries.
LABORS OF LOVE

BY GERALD LEVITCH

If you look around and try to find something that's been made by hand, you'll find it's almost impossible today. Virtually everything we handle, wear, use, work with or play with is the product of machines and factories, mass production and assembly lines. We've reached a point in history where practically the only handmade objects left tend to fall into the realm of fine arts. In fact, we've got to go to a museum to rediscover the kind of everyday craftsmanship that our grandparents look for granted.

Of course, there's no denying the practical benefits of mass production and modern technology, which offer us a vast array of readily available consumer products at affordable prices. But we miss something, too. It's a sense of human involvement that's gone astray, a feeling of personal contact between consumer and manufacturer that's been irretrievably damaged. We no longer know who makes our furniture or our clothes, our appliances or our household tools. The multinational brand name has replaced the local craftsman, while 'no-name' suppliers of proprietary brands take us even farther away from the original source of the goods.

And yet the honorable craftsman who still makes his products by hand isn't altogether lost; he's just become hard to find. In this country there are still a few practitioners of the old trades (and at least one unlikely new one) who take orders directly from customers they meet face-to-face and who make-to-measure ordinary functional objects with their own hands. The best-known of these goods — custom-tailored suits and handmade shoes — have now become luxuries. But that's not surprising. Anything made by hand takes longer to make and naturally costs more.

For example, you can buy a shotgun anywhere in Canada for less than $500, and it will dispatch rabbits just as effectively as a gun that Frank Malin can make for you that costs $10,000. The principal difference is that Frank Malin's shotgun is also a work of art, a collector's item and an investment. As well as being an excellent shotgun.

Excellence of the product is a necessary mark of a true craftsman. One frequently hears the complaint that excellence as a standard of workmanship has disappeared from contemporary life, but that has to be measured against the demand for excellence, which may also be diminishing. When that demand exists, though, the supply will be created and the craftsman's customers will find him, wherever he may live.

And that could be in Melbourne, Ont., where Frank Malin keeps his shop. Or it might be in High River, Alta., where the master silversmith and saddlemaker Jim Olson works with his son and daughter, fashioning his much prized silver buckles and making the occasional silver-inlaid parade saddle on demand.

Similarly, when the directors of the Kings Landing Historical Settlement wanted to build a full-scale reproduction of an 18-tonne, 1835 Saint John River wood-boat, they turned to Gerard Friolet, who lives in Bas Caraquet, N.B. As Darryl Butler of Kings Landing says, "Friolet can bend wood in mysterious ways." Nobody knows quite how he does it, but if you want it done, he's the man to do it.

In much the same way, university music departments discovered and sought the services of Toronto's Saul Wolfman. His handmade amplifiers and sound systems filled a need for products that weren't commercially available. Wolfman built special equipment for a special purpose to specifications that were determined by unique conditions. And so he proved that vacuum tubes and transistors can be a craftsman's raw materials, as much as wood and steel, leather and silver.

But if there's one element that's common to every craftsman — no matter what his trade may be — it's a lengthy apprenticeship spread over many years, learning a skill, gaining experience and refining his knowledge. All of this takes time. In Frank Malin's case, his formal apprenticeship lasted seven years, as long as it takes to become a doctor. Born in Birmingham, home of England's gun industry, Malin left school at 15. "I was taken literally by the scruff of the neck and started before him, well back into the Victorian era. Indeed, there were gunmakers in the last three generations of Frank's family and the last two generations of his wife's family. Malin has lately arranged for his own son to go back to England for his apprenticeship, returning home afterward to join his father. Already, in anticipation, the sign over the Melbourne shop door reads: Frank E. Malin & Son, Gunmakers.

But now the fine gunmaking business in England is shrinking. One of the biggest reasons, Malin says, is the pay for apprentices. As recently as 1975, upon finishing his apprenticeship a young master gunmaker might expect to make $120 a week from one of the major English firms. But now, says Malin, "it's a pittance — $40 or $50 a week." As a gun a year, "I didn't know if I wanted to continue in gunmaking in this country. I didn't know what the market was going to be." Meanwhile, to make ends meet, he worked for a local rust-proofing shop for two years. In 1979 he took a chance and opened his present shop. Shortly afterward he purchased a small advertisement in The Shotgun News, a U.S. collectors' journal, offering one of his finished guns. Within days the inquiries started flooding in, and a gentleman from Michigan arrived on Frank's doorstep to place an order for a matched pair of shotguns. He was followed by another American, who knocked on Malin's door and offered to represent him for further sales in the United States.

To Malin's surprise, it appeared that he was the only maker of high-grade sidelock shotguns in North America, and his necessarily high prices were no deterrent to business. Within a few months he found himself enviably booked up, and he now has a two-year waiting list for his guns. He's currently working on 30 commissions, including another matched pair for a millionaire in Houston and two special gold-inlaid models for a customer from Saudi Arabia. The price for that pair is $25,000. The fine engraving and gold inlays constitute an art in work the following Monday." His father worked at BSA (British Small Arms), and he had arranged for Frank to begin his apprenticeship at Webley and Scott, a sporting arms firm. Did Frank have any choice in the matter of his future? "Nope," he replies laconically. He adds that when he asked his father why, he was told simply, "because that's the way things are." Frank's father had started working in the gun trade when he was 12 years old, and so had his father result, fewer young men each year enter the trade; even Malin himself might have abandoned it if he hadn't discovered a substantial market for his skills in North America. Frank visited Canada several times during the 1970s. Two of his brothers had already settled here and were prospering, so Frank decided to move his family to Canada in 1976. The first couple of years were a bit rough. He worked at home, repairing a few guns and making at least one
themselves, and Frank has since sent for an old English friend, master engraver Ron Collings, to join him in the Melbourne shop. Collings, who is 32, has spent the last 17 years learning his craft, and Malin speaks in awe of him. "He can take a photograph of your face and engrave it on steel or inlay it in gold." In addition to Collings and Malin's own son, Frank expects his business to grow to a six- to eight-man shop over the next few years. As he says, it doesn't matter where he lives, his customers will come to him. And already, as he observes, "Ninety per cent of our business comes from the United States."

Almost 1,000 hours go into making one of Malin's shotguns, and in his 22 years in the business he estimates that he's made between 600 and 700 guns. At full speed now, he says, "I could probably turn out about 18 guns a year." All of that time and care account for the high value collectors place on his guns. Malin himself calculates that at least 90 percent are bought as an investment or as collectors' items and only perhaps 10 percent for personal shooting. "They're buying the skill and the art of the gunmaker," he says. However, the actual processes of important techniques have not been lost, since they exist in written, detailed descriptions; but translating a complicated procedure from paper into reality can be quite a different matter. Malin points to the example of Damascus steel gun barrels made from plaited and twisted steel rods. "There's nobody about now who's got the nearest train station. Friolet built his first boat in 1940. But before that, from the age of 16, he worked with his father, a carpenter and boatbuilder. "It was a trade," he says, "like any other trade." But later, as he speaks with pride of the vessels he's built, he says, "Boatbuilding is in my blood." In fact, for the Acadians in that part of the country, boatbuilding was as necessary a craft as providing shelter for their families by building their own houses. Years ago a fisherman would build a boat and sail it out to sea. But like everywhere else, some men found that they were better at some things than others. And while the community as a whole was largely self-sufficient, men like Friolet and his father might well spend their lives hiring out their services to build boats and houses locally. "The first boat that I built was done through a contractor," Friolet recalls. "Later I had to grope my own way and try to learn through experience." He grins shyly and admits that the first time he went out on a boat to test its seaworthiness, he became violently seasick. And maybe, he adds, this was a factor that kept him on dry land, "building more boats so I wouldn't have to sail them or fish for a living."

And they're betting that that skill and art will be even more highly prized in the years to come. While doubters might question the linking of art and gunmaking in the same breath, it poses no doubt for anyone who's handled a classic Victorian-era gun and marvelled at its rich patina and the remarkable grain of its wood. The secret of that grain is one of the paradoxes of fine craftsmanship: that it can, at the same time, be both well-known and lost before they approached Friolet and asked him if he could build such a boat. "It's only a boat," he said and made one for them. At 64, Friolet is a short, stocky man with scarred and lumpy hands that look like well-worn tools. He's used them for nearly 40 years of building wooden fishing vessels for his fishermen neighbours in Caraquet, N.B., a French-speaking village of approximately 4,400 located 60 kilometres from Bathurst, New techniques and modern mechanization have inevitably changed the kinds of fishing boats being built in that area today. With his decades of experience, Friolet knows many tricks of the trade that a modern boatbuilder might hesitate to attempt. But he quickly disclaims any knowledge of special secrets. "It depends on whether a guy has the nerve to try to do it. It requires self-confidence." And like Frank Malin, Friolet explains that the problem may you find out is by experience." That same kind of experience makes Gerard Friolet one of the last of the master boatbuilders, a man who can take a broad axe and an axlet, a sure eye and a ruler, and make an 11-metre long wooden boat. The staff at Kings Landing had searched for nearly three years in Nova Scotia and the United States for the tools of his trade: the honorable craftsman isn't lost — just hard to find.
not be the loss of trade secrets so much as the loss of experience. What makes a good craftsman is a combination of both knowledge and experience. And in effect, the experience is the secret. For he cannot be learned from books. Friole's trade is dying, he admits. The old skills have been so effectively replaced that they are forgotten. And yet Friole himself is not sentimental about his status as a kind of endangered species. "As for myself, I chose to build boats because I loved building boats. I loved it because it was a hard trade."

Love of one's craft bespeaks a special kind of dedication. There are certainly easier ways to earn a living and plenty of ways to make more money, and words like "love" and "dedication" have very little to do with the average person's job. But then, to be a craftsman in our culture is to be a kind of nonconformist.

Certainly a man like Jim Olson doesn't conform to the common image of a Saskatchewan farmer. But on the other hand, he doesn't look like the stereotyped model of an artist, either. Like Friole and Malin, he has worked all his life with his hands, as a farmer until he was 40 years ago; then as a saddlemaker and silversmith. Today, at 53, those same big hands create delicate, finely finished and engraved silver buckles for rodeo stars and western cattlemen who value his idea of jewelry as having intellectual and utilitarian: a buckle holds your belt together, and a saddle --- even if it's got $5,000 worth of silver mounted on it --- is something to ride on.

Olson got interested in leatherworking, he says, because "it's something to do in the long winters." And after he made his first saddle, "I carried on from there. I was self-taught until I came out to Felmer Eamor's (a High River saddlemaker) in 1968." He worked there for nine years, while his interest in jewelry started in 1962: "That was pretty well self-taught, too." He learned a few basic techniques at a class in Calgary. Then, in that same year, he won his first public recognition, a silver medal for design at the Pacific National Exhibition in Vancouver. That clearly pleased him, but at the time he had to confine his work to only a few buckles and rings. Eventually, in 1967, he took a job with another saddler in Calgary. But after about eight months he chanced on the opportunity to buy out the silversmith who was then producing the buckles for the rodeo association. Olson took over the business, the accounts, and moved back to High River.

But even as the business grew, a tragedy occurred; in 1970 a infection cost Olson his sight in one eye. But he continued working with the help of his son, Rod, and later his daughter, Denise. "You can overcome things if you really get your mind set on something," Olson explains. "Of course, you've also got to make a living." By working long hours, Olson does manage a decent living. But as he says, "It's a long, hard struggle. Anyone starting up today --- especially with the prices of metal --- would have a hard time of it." Olson figures that it took him 10 years before he felt sure of himself and his work. "I'm still not satisfied," he says, "but I feel I'm turning out a pretty good product." Then he adds, "It's a lot of hard work, of course." As he chuckles at the thought of anyone imagining that there might be a fast buck to be made in his line of work. It's not surprising that he lacks any real competitors, and as a result, Olson's business is growing. When he started, he says, he made about 250 buckles a year. But this year, with the help of his children, he expects to produce nearly 1,200. Olson's buckles start at $70 for a nickel and brass model, and his silver buckles average $275 apiece, while special orders can vary considerably. He did one last summer for $1,400, "If you get into diamonds and precious stones, then there's no end to what the price could be."

As Olson explains, "We base our price generally on the weight of the metal used." The actual working time it takes to make a buckle depends upon a number of factors, and Olson says that sometimes he simply doesn't count the hours, especially if he gets interested in a particular job.

Jim Olson has made buckles for Prince Andrew and Prince Charles, for skater Karen Magnusson and banking corporate executives and officials. "Every Calgary Stampede parade marshal's got one of our buckles," he adds, "and there's quite a few of them. His work is already so well-known among prospective customers that he doesn't have to advertise his service. "We really should keep it quiet," he jokes. "The work just picks up. As long as you do good work, I think word of mouth is the best advertisement."

Word of mouth is the only way you're likely to find out about Paul Wolfman, too. Among certain Toronto hi-fi aficionados, Wolfman's handmade amplifiers and other equipment bring nothing but praise. But then, there's a certain astonishment that anyone would devote himself to building consumer electronic equipment by hand in these days, when giant Japanese factories churn out millions of pieces of stereo gear like so many high-tech sardine tins. No one expects to buy a handmade 35mm camera or a custom-built pocket calculator. The products of high technology are supposed to be mass-produced, but none of this is news to Wolfman or particularly distresses him.

Over the last 30 odd years, he's built hundreds of amplifiers for his customers. "When I was a kid," he recalls, "I used to build crystal sets for all the kids on the street --- custom-made crystal sets," he laughs. He even remembers the price --- 75 cents apiece. "Probably those were the first solid state units on the market." Then he adds, with obvious pride, "I can remember making a crystal set work so efficiently that it would drive a speaker and fill a room with sound." He was only 13 then, but from those small crystals, a career grew.

He went on to study electrical engineering and worked as a radio installer around Toronto. "I always dabbled on the side," he says, "I was doing it for love, not money." Then, in 1949, he contracted polio. "I got crippled up pretty badly, and this really put a damper on everything. I wound up in the hospital for almost a year."

Deeply depressed, he started and then had to give up building a television set because it was too heavy for him to handle from the wheelchair, and besides, one of his arms was weakened. After he got well enough to move about, he found a job as a service manager for a new Toronto television manufacturer. But he discovered those three years had taught him a lot. As his wife, Eve, recalls, "He came home one day and said, 'I have to work for myself'. We sold our home and built this place. That was in 1963."

Several years later, Wolfman heard that the Royal Conservatory of Music was looking for listening equipment specifically designed for telephone use. No such equipment existed commercially at that time. Wolfman decided to do it as a hobby, a roomful of his amplifiers. His reputation spread among institutions, and he eventually took jobs for the Universities of Toronto, Western Ontario, Guelph, Queen's, McMaster, York, and as a house builder in Brandon, Man. "I won't say they were giant contracts. They were modest, but they kept me going."

At the same time, he found himself engaged in making and installing custom hi-fi equipment in prominent local families. One early supporter was Peter Munk, who helped found Clairtone. Wolfman's equipment was solidly made; if he competed at all against the huge commercial giants it was in terms of quality and reliability. Even now he marvels that he's taking orders from all over Canada and a dozen of customers, the children of parents who are still using the equipment he built 15 to 20 years ago.

His handicap, and what he calls his lack of business sense, may have been responsible for his becoming an electronics craftsman. But at the same time, he relishes his freedom and the pleasure of working for himself. And if his chosen field isn't one that's commonly recognized as a traditional craft, Wolfman is a craftsman nonetheless. It's a matter of attitude more than anything else. He might have expanded or gone into commercial production. Other electronic tinkerers have done so but have managed to lose the marketing possibilities of a few good designs. But for the tinkerer and the perfectionist, the pleasure of making things with his own hands and the pride of making each object better than the last is its own reward. He overcame the other, crasser possibilities. Or maybe it's simply in his blood. And like his amplifier before him, he wants to fit every customer to his needs. Perhaps the craftsman survives because he's the last he's wanted. And equally important, he knows who wants him.\n\nimg src="image.jpg" alt="image" style="width:100%;"/>
Summer After Summer

Celebrating 50 Years of Couchiching

BY GORDON DONALDSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNTLEY BROWN

Geneva Park, Lake Couchiching, August 1980. The president of the
50th annual conference leans back in his lawn chair, under a weeping willow
by the edge of the sunny, but very chilly, Ontario lake, and wonders why people
still come, summer after summer, when there are so many more
exciting or relaxing things to do.

"I suppose," John D. Harbom says, "the person who could define why the
Couchiching Conference continues to exist would be a behavioralist, totally
detached, who could take all the talk and memories and analyses and put
them all together. But then he might just throw up his hands and say, 'I don't
know.'"

Harbom is a journalist, now the foreign affairs analyst of Thomson
Newspapers. Fifteen years ago he covered the conference and wrote it off
as a dying institution. Thirty years before that, editorial writers were
denouncing it as a waste of summer
days. It has never reached a consensus,
passed a resolution or lobbied
to change Canadian or world society. London economist Robert McKenzie,
who was taken there as a boy in 1936 and returned as a speaker last year,
describes it as "a quinquennially Canadian affair, with an air of per-
pleased concern." To others it is the
intellectual Grey Cup of Canad.

It is unique: a kids's summer camp
for grown-ups at a YMCA park near
Orillia which, through its inter-
national reputation, attracts world
figures, then cuts them down to size
by making them line up for non-
gourmet meals, scrounge drinks and,
for many years, wait to use the
unplumbed facilities in the bunks.
Leisure Pearson, Pierre Trudeau and
Rene Levesque cut their debating
teeth there before any of them entered
politics. John Diefenbaker watched
them as a backbench MP serving on
the Couchiching committee. United
Nations negotiator Ralph Bunche
was one of the few dignitaries who
did not catch the wily Couch-
iching bash. British Labor Party
leader Hugh Gaitskell square-danced,
although historian Arthur Schlesin-
gger Jr. asked why he did it when he
had no sense of rhythm and there were
no British votes to be found in Cana-
dian English wir Malcolm Muger-
ridge horrified the locals by changing
into his swimsuit on the beach,
English-style, rather than in his room.
Chinese author Han Suvin gained
an appreciative audience for her early
morning outdoor yoga exercises, and
Henry Kissinger talked all night
about what he was going to do (and
later did) for the Jews in the Middle

This year, from July 29 to August 3,
Couchiching is celebrating its 50th
anniversary. As Harbom cheerfully
admits, it still has no organization, no
particular structure and no fixed pur-
pose. But the camp now has indoor
plumbing, fresh paper still come,
and the old "Couch" hands still
welcome one another with hugs and
kisses. It is, like many Canadian insti-
tutions, valuable in some undefined
way but constantly underestimated.
Its founder, Dick Davis, who's now
86 but looks 20 years younger, recalls
difficult birth. The idea of a forum
on public affairs was pretty radical 50
years ago, and people who analyzed
society or agitated too loudly about it
were labeled "radicals," a nasy word
in many quarters.

"It wasn't as commonplace to sit
around and chew the rag," he
remembers. "You had to be careful." The
theory was learned this way: as a
YMCA worker in Montreal, he
organized the Young Men's Forum.
When he invited a French American
professor to speak to the group, an
influential public figure demanded
the Y bar be "communist free" from
its forum. Davis resigned but with-
drew his resignation when his oppo-
nent was persuaded to relent and the
professor spoke. In 1929 he moved to
the YMCA national council in
Toronto and ran staff training at
a summer school on the shores of
Lake Couchiching.

"It seemed to me that what the staff
needed was not more job training but
something that would broaden its
view of the world," he says. So with
the Y's blessing, he asked the head
of Upping Canada College, Dr. William
L. Grant, to head up a committee to
prepare a conference program.

The first conference of the Cana-
dian Institute in Economics and
Politics opened in the summer of
1932, with Dr. Grant as chairman and
Dick Davis as secretary. Important
leaders were welcomed, and within a
year they greatly outnumbered the
YMCA traysees. They were professors,
schoolteachers, social workers and
various kinds of professionals -
roughly the same mix and about the
same number, around 500, who attend today.
There were few businessmen, and The
Toronto Evening Telegram raged
against the radical goings-on by the
lake. The editor of The Orillia Packet
saw a host of communists a few
miles from his town, the model for
Stephen Leacock's Mariposa.

Couch-
iching speakers were causing
upheavals as early as 1934, Professor
Frank Underhill created a furor at the
University of Toronto over statements
he made at the conference. He urged
Canada to tell Britain we would not
support her in the next war in Europe,
which he foresaw would happen
within a decade. On the other side
of the political scale Nicholas Ignatoff,
from a noble Russian family, made a
scathing attack on Stalinism.

The conference was still very much
under the influence of the vigorous
Christianity of the Y, which paid for
it, and the other religious organiza-
tions that supported it including
the United Church, the Church of En-
gland in Canada and the Student
Christian Movement. (The Trades
and Labor Council of Toronto was
another supporter.) The days began
with worship. Liquor was not avail-
able, but tea was served "in the English
manner," according to a 1934 report.

Delegates doubtless in cabins or
cottages. Dick Davis chose the room-
mates and recalls one appalling mis-
ake. "We didn't have many French
Canadians at the time, so when I saw
a Jean-Marie Beaulieu registered,
that sounded like a woman in me. So when
Agnes Macphail (the militant farmer-
take leader) arrived in her little two-
bed cottage, she found Professor
Beaulieu, a man, in the other bed."

Davis left the conference soon after
the war but was invited to the 1949
reunion, which marked the start of the
CBC's involvement. Murray Ross,
who succeeded him as secretary, had
persuaded the CBC to carry the even-
ing sessions live by radio and, in
return, pay for imported speakers.

The opening broadcast was impor-
tant. At the beginning, the chairman
introduced Davis as the "father" of
Couchiching. He was then to intro-
duce the first speaker, Douglas
Abbott, a federal cabinet minister.

"Not knowing I was on the air I said
this 'father' business reminded me of a
woman who was dying for divorce.
The judge asked her why. She said 'I
don't think my husband is faithful to
me, Your Honor. I don't believe he is
the father of my child.' That caused a
nexus you wouldn't believe," Dick
Davis chuckles. "Neil Morrison, who
was in charge of public affairs at the
CBC, was furious. He had arranged
this elaborate broadcast deal, and the
first thing to go on the air was a dirty
story. After the meeting Diefenbaker
said to Dick, I didn't hear a word
Douglas Abbott said. I sat there chuck-
ling over your story and picturing an
old couple in Prince Albert or for
who're very serious about this kind
of conference and would be glued to
the YMCA women what they're say-
ning. Nothing I did in my life attracted
more attention than that story.

Two changed along the blushing
forties. Dr. Ross, now president emer-
it of York University, hosted parties
in his cottage after the evening ses-
ions. Drinks were discreetly poured.
As for the speech, Diefenbaker remem-
bered her first invitation to partake of
the 'official' Couchiching bottle.

The dry days came on as seven chairs
under a naked light bulb and seven paper cups
and seven drops of whiskey poured into
such that was enough you could always drink with the peons,
who had unlimited, unwashed supply.

Murray Ross gave a distinguished
Dutch visitor and his beautiful young
wife to the camp's best room. He looked
around, opened up cubbies, then
Be present at our table, Lord. Be here and everywhere adored. These mercies bless and grant that we may feast in paradise with thee.

Then we’d pass the beans. We’d all beco to camps and boarding schools and knew that the thing was to grab enough.
The conference stayed well abreast and often ahead of the times in its choice of topics. Delegates were talking of war long before war came and peace long before the war ended. It dealt extensively with China in the years Canada was considering recognition of Mao’s state, and it brought personalities from the Third World when the winds of change were still light breezes. In recent years conference topics have read like a calendar of current concerns: inflation, disarmament, the consumer society, the aging society and, in its 50th year, the interdependence of the industrial and developing worlds.

Discussions were intense. As delegates were cooped up together for up to a week there was what York University’s president Ian Macdonald calls a kind of shipboard situation. “At the broad daylight sessions you couldn’t cough, move or lean back in your squasky chair. It was hot and stuffy. So when it was over there was a tendency for high jinks. I think in a real sense the conference took place in large night discussions in the cottages.”
The speakers talked on into the night. Sometimes they took part in midnight swims. They were dragooned into performing in unheated play-readings and were lampooned in skits.

Couchiching tried and failed to converse with the counterculture of the sixties. Groups of teenagers were brought into conferences on the revolt of youth and the new morality, but the hoped-for communication never happened. The generation gap loomed wider, and no amount of high thinking could bridge it. And there was a shortage of French Canadians. The Trudeau, Levêques and Daniel Johnsons had gone on to other things.

As Ian Macdonald pointed out, it was becoming once more a southern Ontario rather than a Canadian conference. The old couch hands were getting older. Frank Peers, then a CBC executive, now professor of political science at the University of Toronto, noted that the hard core of “mostly concerned and partly informed citizens” was dwindling. At the end of the sixties the CBC decided to withdraw. The conference was costing the corporation a mere $4,000 to $5,000 a year in speakers’ costs — plus its own costs in providing housing, radio and television broadcasting — but the CBC was being permitted to generate opinions on its own rather than getting them secondhand. A new era in broadcasting had begun, and Couch was considered old hat.

The CBC’s Eric Koch was given the job of extracting the corporation. He was a little unhappy with the situation, though he conceded that at that time it was difficult to make exciting sessions out of the Couchiching Conference. He remains a Couch loyalist and was chairman last year and will be again this year. “The CBC lent a professionalism to the conference that it needed. It’s now all hand-to-mouth and dependent upon donations and volunteer labor, except for courses of the executive director.”

Conferences, in the thirties, are now a big business. Celebrity speakers command huge fees (though some will waive the payment). Henry Kissinger, who came for peanuts and plates of beans in the sixties, now charges $15,000 and up for a speech and is hooked up for years in advance. Koch believes Couch can carry on as it’s going but would be greatly improved by a new injection of money and professionalism from the broadcast media. Now retired, he urges the CBC to renew its link — the cost would be relatively tiny — or failing that, the cable-TV empires should pick up the torch. They would gain prestige by carrying the kind of long, live shows best suited for cable.

Couchiching could never anywhere but in Canada or anywhere but on Lake Couchiching. They say that in Ojibwa means the Place of Big Winds.
GREECE is one of the few places you can visit where life is different than the life you just left—in Toronto or Montreal or Winnipeg. I don't mean things like drachmas instead of dollars or olive oil on your tomatoes or wine flavored with pine resin. I mean that the mainstream of daily life seems to have lingered lovingly around a lot of things you thought had gone forever.

You'll be walking along a street in Athens and get a whiff of cake, candy, chocolate and coffee that makes you head through an open doorway in a kind of trance, as if you'd heard the sound of a Viscrola coming from an ice-cream parlour on a July morning in, say, 1929. There's a place called Dionysos Zonar's on Venizelou Street near Constitution Square, a rich and mellow old groito with a mezzanine and upholstered wooden chairs, where women, dressed for downtown, and their daughters and business men with open attaché cases sit in a very relaxed mood amid mirrors and polished wood and big glass jars, looking out at the morning sunlight, writing letters, talking quietly, drinking lemonade or capuccino, a gentle breeze coming in the door. It's one of the world's great sitting places.

In the evening a strange, magical mood settles over the streets. Families promenade downtown, the kids holding their parents' hands, pure white shorts and socks and dresses gleaming in the dusk. Everyone is strolling in shadow, yet there's still a trace of gold in that light that lights up the girls' bare legs, and their faces seem caught in the glow of a vague promise, which indeed they are. A breeze makes the plane trees wave, and there's a faint fragrance of perfume on the air from hundreds of women dressed up for the evening.

Music seems a natural part of the daily life of Greeks. Sometimes you hear singing rise above the roar of traffic, taxi horns, shouts of lottery-ticket sellers, cops' whistles, and turn around from peering in at the shadowy stones, candles and shining brass of an ancient church and perhaps we four girls going down an alley of potoles, crumbling sidewalks, harem of olives, hand carts of bananas, their arms around one another's shoulders, all singing the melody of some pretty, light, bouncy, plaintive song, as if headed back through time to some sacred grove. One cold day at the shrine of Poseidon on the windswept headland of Sounion, I saw a group of teenage girls on a school excursion standing in a circle facing one another, holding hands and singing while they waited for their bus and I remember another time hearing pretty music coming from a kind of cluttered bin in an old market and seeing a gray-haired man, sitting on the ground beside a display of coins and leather belts, head bowed, concentrating on the strings of an instrument like a tiny guitar, making small, sweet, private sounds, as if talking to himself in music, perhaps about some sad memory.

You often sense the tremendous age of this civilization. Sometimes, in a dreamy, ancient village, such as Pythagorion on the island of Samos near the Turkish shore, a kind of after-
was the ancestor of the universities of the western world (Simon Fraser and McGill, for instance) — is a hot, dry, weedy, empty lot in a squalid, crumbling, dusty part of town, with some excavated marble coffins lying out in the open. Sometime in its long history the region was a burial ground. When I was there somebody had thrown a toilet bowl over the wire fence onto the ancient site. You reach this historic region called Kerameikos through such awful traffic, dust, delapidation and exhaust fumes that you begin to feel as if someone had directed you to, say, a concrete block factory as a practical joke. But if you keep going you find a sunny, peaceful valley, the site of the ancient Dipylon and Sacred Gates, once a busy spot — like Avenue Road and Bloor in Toronto — the entrance to the ancient city for parades and troops, traders and travelers, the way to the Academy and the Eleusian mysteries of fertility and rebirth, and to Piraeus, which was and still is the port of Athens. A weedy little stream, the Erindos, still leads its secret, quiet life here, looking as if it has frogs in it and blue darning needles hovering over it. It’s a pleasant place to spend a sunny morning, sitting on a warm block of marble listening to a bird make whispering sounds in a nearby thicket.

The most unlikely location of all, in its way, is the site of Aristotle’s Lyceum. The gardens and grounds of the man whose works fill whole sections of shelves in today’s libraries and university bookstores lie somewhere near or under the hundreds of outdoor tables, the airline offices and luxury hotels of Constitution Square. A circle of stones, probably part of the Lyceum gym, lies in a secluded corner of a nearby park amid pine needles, tires and wrappers — Canada Dry, Suntripe Orange, Carnation Milk, Sinalco Cola, Karella Cigarettes. A weather-worn slab of stone stands on a high pedestal opposite the King George Hotel beside three telephoto booths, where a girl on the phone, making a date for the evening, can look ably at its barely discernible inscription: “Boundary of the Garden of the Muse.” (Waiter told me it gave the distance to places like Salamina.)

We made a trip to the site of Kомнос on the island of Crete, an archaeological project sponsored by the University of Toronto and the Royal Ontario Museum and directed by Joseph Shaw, a professor in the department of fine arts at the University of Toronto. It’s on the south shore of Crete, reached from the city of Herakleion by bus through beautiful countryside — dashing mountain vineyards that, when you look down on them from the mountain roads, give you the feeling that you’re looking into a big salad bowl. It would be hard for anyone who hasn’t seen this part of the world to imagine how remote and drowsy it is. In the village of Plisiata, near the site, you’ll look down a narrow street and not see a soul, except perhaps a pale, tall young student on vacation from England, sitting at a slanting table reading and having a beer, or you’ll see four village men sitting on kitchen chairs in the shadow along the front of a café, as if they’ve been pranged by some comic ray that spared only the chicken that’s pecking beneath a dusty olive tree; or a young man and woman sitting at a table beneath some vines having lunch, looking as if they’ve been having lunch for two years, preserved in some delightful invisible ash that stops the progress of time. A rooster crows. A sheep gives a harsh, honking sound. The surrounding fields and hills are empty and still.

Kомнос is on a beautiful, uninhabited stretch of shoreline that makes a sweeping curve to the north. The area that has been cleared from the archaeological site forms a huge mound on the beach. In one place the diggers struck roof tiles beneath nearly two meters of sand. I climbed up the bank through prickly shrubs and sat at the top, with the wind in my ears and the lovely, lonely, rhythmical sound of the waves that formed a delicate fringe on the sea, like lace stretching along the shoreline toward some hazy, almost invisible mountains. I sat close to an excavated wall of a harbor community that thrived and bustled 5,000 years ago, in Minoan times, ancient to the ancient Greeks. I wondered who was the last person, at the end of this great, long civilization, to lean against those stones or rest his or her hand on that stone right there — perhaps after supper, before going to bed. You wonder if the noisy kids, for instance, playing basketball in an outdoor court beneath your hotel balcony, are direct descendants of the people who lived within those walls.

A similar thought had come to me about the youngsters on Samos one soft night when I listened to them playing beneath the stars, their voices coming out of the dark: “Ela! Ela!” (“Come on! Come on!”) — and also in Athens, where city life has gone unbroken for more than 5,000 years.

You sometimes feel this continuity as you watch scenes of city life today: a meticulously groomed woman in a flowing white blouse picking her way past the worn marble steps to a murky cellar like a bandits’ cave, along a broken, narrow sidewalk, through junk, truckloads of garlic, falling plaster, crates, snarled traffic and spilled water, looking calm and thoughtful; or two young lovers in the National Gardens whispering to one another on a bench in a warm patch of sunlight between the eucalyptus trees, watched by a calico cat lying with her front feet folded under her chest; or an old man sitting with his elbows on his knees, looking at the ground in Constitution Square when the setting sun is gleaming brilliantly through the geraniums.

It may have been a sense of the generations of men and women who have lived here — worried, loved, quarreled, drunk, read, laughed, ached, wondered, worked — that kept me awake on my last night. I had wandered and taken a last look inside the church of Lykodimou, which was built around the year 1,000 and the name of which may be a continuation of that of Aristotle’s school, the Lyceum. It was all gilt and crystal and burning candles, and a man and woman sat beside their picture on the steps having something to eat. I got up at two in the morning and leaned out my window, looking down on Nikis Street. A man stood all by himself in the light from a street lamp. His shadow was exactly the same length as he was, like the sides of one of Pythagorean triangles. I watched a thin procession of young wanderers with all their gear on their backs walk silently past along the opposite sidewalk, like Plato’s illustration of the shadows on the wall of the cave — the phenomenon projected by the eternal reality — and a drunken heading for home or trouble, and wondering where we all headed. I went to bed.
THE LAST GOOD-BYE

Closing the door on the family home

BY MARTIN O’MALEY

T

he October wind scattered the leaves of the elms and birches of 1980, and
pushed a cold rain at me as I walked up the sidewalk to the
together, slightly lopsided two-and-a-
half storey house. It was that sort of
a good day for a funeral, for long
months, that sort of a good day for
fackling sad but necessary things, I had
returned to dispose of the family home.

I felt like an executioner. No, not
exactly; I felt like the man whose duty
it was to wake up Old Shep, the dog,
and take him behind the barn and put
him out of his misery. No, not even
that; it is one of those half-formed
analogies, for I had never had to do
something like that before. Someday I
will be called upon to perform some
sad but necessary duty, and then I
will be able to say it is like returning
to dispose of the family home.

This was our house. This was
where I learned to walk and talk,
where my father and mother, my three
sisters and I all had our secrets and our
codes, where we all sat every night at
the big oak table in the dining room,
where we listened to Suspense and
Lux Theatre, where we watched Ed
Sullivan and Jackie Gleason, where
we rode out the first storms of body
and mind, where we left on dreadful,
nighttime races to the hospital, where
we learned our loves and fears and
hates and where the four of us man-
gaged, somehow, to grow up and
leave.

One by one we all left McMillan
Avenue, an ordinary block of ordinar-
y houses in southwest Winnipeg,
though mostly I remember it as lush
and incredibly evenful. Pat, my old-
est sister, left in her mid-20s, when she
got married. It felt like a wheel had
fallen off. It thought things would
never be the same; and, of course, they
never were.

Kathleen left next, then I left, then
Margaret left, then some years later
Dad died, and left, and then only Mom
remained. I think she stayed on out of
a sense of duty, as a custodian or cura-
tor, to keep the house in the family.
She knew we treasured the place. She
knew we all reached back for it no
matter where we were. The times I
visited I’d pour myself a rum and
Coke (my “usual” only in Winnipeg)
and sit on the screened-in veranda
and look out at the street through the lilac
bushes. Soon enough in my mind’s
ear I’d hear us kids playing under the
eaves, yelling: “Red Rover, Red Rover,
We call Marthe over!” And I’d see
the long-legged Protestant girl in the
abbreviated Kelvin High tunic walk-
ning by, peering sideways at the house,
holding her books to her chest.

It was a Thursday afternoon. I had,
at most, five days to do the job, to clear
out 42 years of family home and relo-
ate Mom one-and-a-half blocks away
in a one-bedroom apartment across
from the church. My sister Margaret
would arrive on Saturday from Tac-
son, Ariz. The job meant the physical
moving, going through family re-
cords, saving what should be saved,
throwing out what should be thrown
out and selling what could be sold —
in five days. God may have made a
world in six days, but He didn’t have
to stop at old photographs and cope
with that melancholy paralysis of
nostalgia.

“Where do we begin?” I asked
Mom, who was sitting in the living
room across from me on that twice-
reupholstered sofa Dad bought for
$100 fifty years ago. I sat in the faded
green art deco chair in a corner of the
living room, under the Olde English
Hunting Scene.

She said she didn’t know where to
begin.

It was time for an inventory, so I
walked down the wooden stairs to the
basement, which looks and smells as a
basement should: brick and dust. No
ping-pong table down here. My dad’s
records were in old file boxes on his
workbench, the same workbench
where he once labored for days to
make a red wagon for me. There were
photographs of him when he was my
age, 41, but he looked much more
severe, much more — competent. He
came to Winnipeg from Regina in
1922 to work as a reporter, but he
always was The Editor to me. Tough,
demanding. An old newspaper clip-
ing fell out of a folder, a clipping of a
column pasted on a sheet of copy
dapers. It was signed: “To one of my
best friends, Fred O’Malley, with
many thanks. Ralph Allen.” It was
Ralph Allen’s last column for The
Winnipeg Tribune, the famous “Dear
Father Underwood” column he wrote
before he moved to Toronto to write
for The Globe and Mail. It began:

“While you, my seminarian repor-
tee, were still a dark blob over a thousand
feet below the ground in the Iron
Range and a goony mass of rubber sap
halway up a tree in Sumatra, it was
written that all things must end. So it
tried surprise neither of us unshodly
that today our long association is
over.”

I noticed other things in the detri-
tus: an old Manitoba licence plate,
Z8861. It was the licence plate for my
first automobile, a metallic green 1956
Mercury. I remember the digits as easily
as the old five-digit telephone number
for 1035 McMillan Avenue: 44-532.
Astonishing how even dust can evoke
nostalgia.

Before I walked upstairs I looked up
at a raft in the middle of the base-
ment and saw the chin-up bar Dad
installed when I was 13. Once I
worked up 20 chin-ups, the best I’ve
ever done. I did chin-ups every night
before I loaded coal into the hopper
and removed the “clinkers” from the
furnace, and even today my arms have
a tone and strength because of it. That
night I reached up, curled my hands
around the chin-up bar, hoisted

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BIANBA

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myself from the floor: and one, two, three, four, five . . .

"Mom was calling from the kitchen — six, seven, eight . . ."

"Reina, Reina, it's your mom . . ." nine . . . ten . . . eleven . .

"What were you doing down there, Reina?"

"Chin-ups."

On Friday I woke up early, and it was still blowing and raining. Time to get down to the real work of moving. No fooling around. Call the movers, find out one charge $45 an hour. Call another, find out it's $27.50 an hour. Call the lawyer, a bright young man named Frank Cvikovich, who went to the same parochial school my sisters and I attended. We used to call him Frank Spitt-in-the-dirt, because he's got such a . . .
call. Claude, the real estate agent who sold the house to a young couple for $56,000. At first I couldn't believe it. The same house in Calgary or Toronto easily could fetch, oh, $100,000! I had it double-checked and eventually was satisfied that $56,000 was the going price for a house like this in winnipeg, which is longer in the Chicago of the North. Claude said the young couple, married only 18 months, was splitting up, not your mom's problem, he said. "It's in her name, and now she'll have to sell it."

So, after 42 years of O'Malleys, of 1055 McMillan Avenue now probably will turn over again, as they have for 42 years. Everything moves faster these days. Such a hell-bent urgency. Claude dropped by later with a letter and some fliers and sandwiches at the big oak table in the dining room in the house that he said he, too, was splitting up, after being married only four years.

"Oh, Claude," Mom said with a sigh. "I can't imagine what she could say and all she had to say.

The rest of the day I transported carcasses of pictures, curley, glasses, books, cushions, chairs, end tables, blankets, pillows, lamps, cups, records, and the apartment block and a half-way. At the end of the day and I sat on two green lawns with gray rocks in the lawns and still bare and unwatered. We listened to the buses rolling by outside, a new sound for us. In the shade the street lights threw strange shadows on the walls. "The poor kids," Mom said finally, meaning the young people. "They have to support real estate agents splitting up all over the place. "It's okay, Mom," I told her. "It's not your problem."

Woke up Saturday morning in the front bedroom on the west side of the house — Pat's room. When Pat left, Katiok took over and then published from the rear room to the east. Margaret slept in the rear room to the west.

"The wrong side of the bed room I could still see the curious configuration of greggs on the hydro line that managed to spell for me; "Ha Ah." How many mornings in the dead of winter or in the brilliance of a July day I'd first see from my pillow; "Ha Ah?" My sister Margaret always saw an Egyptian hieroglyphic of magical design in a flower in the wood of her dresser.

When we were driving to the airport to pick up Margaret, Mom told me that that morning she had found a lost gold chain in the garbage in the kitchen and was looking for it for weeks and I decided to take one last look through the garbage, and there it was. "I only need to have it made $5 donation to St. Jude."

"I thought it was St. Anthony who found lost items," I said.

"Oh, he does," Mom said, "but St. Jude's my friend." The apartment on the way back, and as Mom was getting out of the passenger side she helped the center stroller out of the car and my sister inadvertently shut the door on her hand. I heard the door click against her hand.

"M-my hand," Mom gasped.

I held her hand and could see a tear across her finger and figured for sure it was a trip to the hospital.

"No, no — No!" she resisted. "I'm fine!"

Margaret took her inside the apartment, and I drove to the Salvation Army for her. In the parking lot I experimented, putting my hand in the door and closing it to see if perhaps a pair of padded or cushioned flip-flops to protect one's fingers. Even when the door was a foot from being closed I couldn't close it. I put across the hijinx, across the supermarket was St. Ignatius Church, our parish church, and I heard a sound, like a gong, when all the doors around the house, and wild violets. We used to catch butterflies in hollyhocks and keep ourselves impressed in jam jars. The lig
lacks broke out in late May, as if a mae

When Mom leaves, the oldest con

In late May I moved to the house on the

After a friend of a friend named Dan dropped by with his wife and a young woman studying home economics at the University of Manitoba. They bought the beds, dresser and bureau from Pat's old bedroom, also a broken wicker chair and a fern stand, a round wooden table and the telephone desk in the downstairs den. I'm not really involved in it. Dan said he would be back Monday with a trailer to help us move the heavy stuff, which meant a saving of the $27.50 an hour the professional movers were going to charge. He also ended up buying three more beds, three chairs, another bureau, some assorted odds and ends and the old mahogany Winton piano that hadn't been tuned in 30 years or so and I had been moving that along. The house was emptying.

On Sunday we spent a lot of time around the big oak table in the dining room, reminiscing. Everyone seemed to start with, "Reina, remember . . ." That was some family across the street. "I'll never forget calling her one day," Margaret said, "and the fluid said, I'm sorry, but Miss Barbara is digesting her lunch." And there was that boy from Saskatchewan who got the crampy game, with all the streets of Atlantic City changed to streets of Regina. And there was that very memorable and incredible as it seems, was big enough for a game of softball. Margaret used to climb the tree and the garbage cans to read a book on a summer day, and a neigh-

Small! Funny how the past seems so immense. How did I manage world wars on the living room rug? How did I manage to get everybody in there at Christmas? "Mom, what am I going to do? Toronto must be half as big as 1035 McMillan Avenue, but I know I will never believe it."

Monday was all work. Dan arrived early, and we began carrying out furniture, stacking it on the boulevard, piling it into the trailer. Then we would go to the end of the block, turn up the back lane and drive the block and a half to the new apartment. I became merciless. Persecution cuts right through melancholy, and if there was any doubt, I threw it out. Who could feel sorry for me — who cares? A 1957 Maclean's magazine — so what? We keep so many things that we don't need anything else. Is there any memory which only serve to cluster items that really do matter. (When?) Remembering the old hammers and the major housecleaning project, throwing out bags of junk I once thought I lost forever. I will never forget that Reminded me of F.E. White's essay "Good-bye to Forty-eighth Street," in which he wrote: "A home is like a reservoir equipped with a check valve: the valve permits influx but prevents outflow. Accumulation goes on night and day — smoothly, slowly, imperceptibly."

And, when he writes of trying to "keep things," I was impressed by the reluctance of one's worldly goods to go out again into the world. During September I kept hoping that some morning, as by magic, all books, pictures, records, chairs, books, cups, cushions, tables and utensils, keepsakes would drain away from around my feet, like the outgoing tide, leaving me standing silent on a bare beach.

While we were moving the heavy furniture and getting it up in the apartment, Mom cooked a Thanksgiving turkey in the oven of the family home. At Christmas, the day, we carried the turkey to the apartment and celebrated Christmas there. She sold the old house, to deny it that last Thanksgiving dinner, but at the time it was oddly appropriate, and the kitchen light flicked off on its own, as if to tell us, 'G'wan, it's okay."

Two days after Mom announced she was selling the house news came that The Winnipeg Tribune had a 70th anniversary celebration where he worked for 43 years, and the one that published my first by-line. The selling of the house and the celebration of the Tribbing coming so suddenly, were like the rash, reckless — but perhaps necessary, because it looked like a slate-board and in an instant obliterating all that was on it. I gave up the house and stepped in front of it, then worked upward the courage to go inside one more time. The world of which I was a part, and hardly a trace of us was left. oh
DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE

A short history of occupational medicine

BY ANTHONY TILLY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER CROYDON

The principles established in 1947 by Imperial's first medical director, Dr. Russell Birrell, are still followed today.

In a corporate medical department, the nurse may also be an administrator, as in the case of Irene Robertson.

Occupational medicine is not a static discipline, says Imperial's medical director, Henry Shevchuk.

O NEC it was simple. Philosophers thought that air, fire, water and earth were the fundamental elements. Physicians concluded that blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile were the corresponding "humors" or body elements. When illness struck, the doctor's job was to concoct a remedy to restore the natural balances of the humors.

Ancient Greek science seems quaint and childlike today. Now chemists work with more than a hundred elements plus many more natural and man-made compounds. And physicians use knowledge as far removed from the four humors as modern chemistry is from the four elements.

Despite our many medical advances, however, some real challenges remain. In fact, our technological advances have themselves created new challenges. Today Canadian workers must be protected from dust, noise, toxic chemicals, severe stress — all of them possible by-products of modern industrial processes.

In this century Canadian businesses and physicians have attacked these challenges through a new discipline known as occupational medicine. Their shared goals are, according to Dr. Jack Fowler, a retired director of Imperial Oil's medical department, clear cut: "The purpose of occupational medicine is to preserve the health of employees and prevent damage to it." Adds the current medical director, Dr. Henry Shevchuk: "It's far from being a static discipline. It evolves to take into account new issues in industry and new needs among employees."

Looking back from the 1980s we can see three stages in the history of Canadian occupational medicine. Each stage has brought the professional closer to the preventive goal that Fowler describes.

The pioneering stage spanned the first half of this century, during which a small number of Canadian companies decided that new employees should be given medical examinations to detect any past or potential problems; they arranged for local general practitioners to...
Today — 20 years after his retirement — Birrell still keeps in his Toronto home his notes on the early years of Imperial's medical program. At Imperial there are now 18 physicians serving the company's employees, eight of them full-time, plus 28 registered nurses and a number of technicians and hygienists. There are regional health centres — which include diagnostic and examination facilities — in six Imperial locations and smaller ones in a number of other company offices, refineries and plants. All told, there are about 80 persons engaged, full- or part-time, in the company's medical work.

Obviously employees who visit an Imperial medical centre for either a minor ailment that occurs during the working day or something more serious are assured of sound advice and, almost as important, trust and confidentiality. Back in 1947 when he became medical director, Dr. Russell Birrell realized that occupational medicine had to respect the age-old medical code of confidentiality.

Trust was essential; for the new medical program was designed not just to monitor physical health. Imperial chose physicians who were not only skilled and experienced practitioners, but also people who could offer a willing ear to emotional problems without any threat of relayed reports. One of these Full-time medical departments were the best answer

physicians was Douglas Warren, who took charge of Imperial's Sarnia medical office and later went on to other roles in occupational medicine, including teaching at the University of Toronto and acting as a medical services consultant to business organizations. A year later, in 1948, that team was announced in The Imperial Oil Review. The magazine's October issue carried: "A feature article that explained and pictured the new department's services for employees. Thematic was senior Alberta employee who had served Imperial for roughly a quarter of a century — reached retirement age, and his management announced his successor. Russell Birrell was named director of the expanded medical program. "

Full-time medical departments were the best answer

resulted in a more efficient production. The company's medical program, too, was spreading its influence to other industries. Dr. Warren's words, makes sure "nothing is simply overlooked." Yet for all that thoroughness, a physician at Imperial — or any other corporation — is not intended to replace the family physician. He or she is there to help maintain the level of good health in the company by giving attention to both the individual and the working environment. At Imperial, for example, the medical department is an enthusiastic advocate and supporter of the company's plan whereby employees receive financial help to cover the costs of fitness programs, provided their programs meet approved standards. But Imperial physicians have never been there to intrude on the work of other medical doctors. "We're there to supplement your own doctor's work," Henry Shewchuk, today's medical director, will tell employees. "When it comes to an ongoing medical issue, your own doctor — who knows your medical history — is the person who should treat you." But the company physician can offer an important supplementary service, explains Dr. William Hogg, medical services director in Sarnia. "A large part of our work is health education, and most of this is done on a one-to-one basis between the doctor and nurse and employees as they go through the course of medical examinations or health-centre visits. We have time to answer any questions. We can relieve a lot of worry just by making information available."

Over a quarter-century ago Imperial was the first private corporation in Canada to take a deliberate step toward more expertise in industrial hygiene. In 1953 the company hired a professional industrial hygienist. John Johnston. His role was a large one: to monitor noise, dust and other potential hazards in all of Imperial's locations across the country. Regional physicians, registered nurses, an industrial hygienist — these, then, were some of the health professionals who made up Imperial's medical team when occupational medicine developed dramatically in the years just after the war. One occupational physician who recalls that period well is Dr. Walter Prendergast. Years ago Prendergast had an amusing connection with Imperial's medical department. When Birrell was director, Prendergast was a medical student. One day in the late forties he was ushered around the department's offices by his father, who was then Imperial's assistant to the president on public relations. Prendergast chuckled over his tour. "I think," he says, "Dr. Birrell might have been wondering whether he was going to have me thrust upon him."

That didn't happen. Prendergast gained experience with several companies and today is company medical officer for Eaton's. His office is a study in contrasts: an old rolltop desk (reputedly Timothy Eaton's) sits in Toronto's modern Eaton Centre. From that vantage point Prendergast looks back on the development of health services in a company quite different from the one in which his father worked. Eaton's medical services have long been designed with the business's special requirements in mind. For example, because the company's stores are visited by thousands of people every working day, the medical department has to be responsive to the needs of customers as well as employees. In the years while Imperial, Eaton's, Bell Canada and other Canadian companies developed medical programs suited to their businesses, occupational physicians regularly gathered to discuss shared concerns. The physicians were concentrated in Quebec and Ontario, so they held their annual conferences in those two provinces in alternating years. Today over a hundred men and women practice as full-time occupational physicians, working in every province. Now, when they meet once a year they come from all over Canada, bringing with them the concerns of almost every business known to Canadians. Says Imperial medical director Henry Shewchuk: "This kind of cooperation among occupational physicians has been crucial to the development of the field in Canada."

One of the major issues facing occupational physicians was the growing concern that long-term exposure to certain substances could be dangerous. But how long an exposure? At what level? What were the consequences? When would they appear? Corporates medical departments already had some means for monitoring these concerns. The regular examinations at Imperial — every year for those over 45 — and other companies provided one such
control mechanism. They were designed, as Henry Shewhuk says, partly as an early warning system. "We hoped to identify the earliest indications of a problem even before the individual recognized it."

But these examinations could not reveal consequences that could be delayed for years or even generations. So occupational medicine undertook mortality studies that would try to untangle the many variables — including type and degree of exposure, smoking habits, family history and ethnic group — that could all account for higher rates of cancer, heart disease and other potentially fatal diseases. These studies required the skills of doctors, hygienists, statisticians and computer programmers. They also required laborious and difficult follow-up on former employees in order to relate numbers and causes of death to the suspected variables.

Numerous companies in almost every industry have begun to carry out such intricate and delicate testing. The proliferation in testing is only one of the many indications of the huge amount of research being done in occupational medicine. Another is the number of publications in the field. The library in the Ontario ministry of labor now receives more than 200 journals and newsletters dealing with occupational health and safety.

That surge of concern about health in the workplace occurred when there was still little legislation in the field. Since then Canadian governments have moved occupational medicine into its third stage: an era of extensive legislation and regulation.

An era of extensive legislation was beginning

medical services for Quebec, agrees that staying abreast of developments in occupational medicine is a problem. As past-president of the Quebec Industrial Medical Association, he has been involved in setting up courses for associating members in cooperation with Quebec universities.

Couture's initiative is not unique. To the surprise of some skeptics, physicians at Imperial are far from being deskbound. In 1977, when Arnold Katz left seven years of private practice to join Imperial, there were a few former colleagues who wondered if he might find the work too routine and perhaps too restrictive. But, says Katz, it hasn't been that way. During the spring of 1979 he joined the crew of an Imperial tanker, the St. Clair, to get a feel of life aboard and a sense of the demands that marine work places on Imperial's men at sea. Then, late last year, he took part in a give-and-take session with a council of the marine group in Dartmouth, hearing their concerns and giving his answers about health upon the seas.

The system that Russell Birrell established in 1947 assures, according to Arnold Katz, that "we can act very independently of other considerations to make sure our handling of the employee is of the highest calibre." Nor is the work routine. In fact according to Katz, the challenge to anticipate problems before they occur is "the most stimulating type of work I've ever been involved with." For example, back in October 1978, with the support of the medical department, Katz set up sessions to help head-office people stop smoking.

In an effort to go beyond the counseling services that many physicians have long provided, some corporations are moving toward a new method of helping employees to cope with social and emotional problems. Imperial is one of them. Last year it created a pilot project called the Employee Assistance Program. When Dr. Sam Klareich came to Imperial to carry out this pilot project, he became one of the first clinical psychologists to work in a Canadian corporation's medical department. He expected to develop his role gradually — lecturing on stress, writing articles for company publications, slowly building the trust and exposure that would bring employees to him for counseling.

But the program hasn't had that gradual buildup, it's been active right from the start. Klareich goes on to explain his role: "People — because they're people and they're living in this often troubled world — have problems mainly related to living, styles of living, relationships and breakdowns in relationships. More and more, such people are grateful to have someone who'll give them the professional help they need.

Is this help just a fringe benefit, a needless extension of the idea of company good will? Medical executives say it doesn't think so. He argues that "some people refer to it as a must" and that adds that the employer benefits when the employee does. If the clinical psychologists can help reduce absenteeism and other costly symptoms of social and emotional problems, such benefits are substantial. Klareich's program is still in its pilot stage, so it is only natural that he has spent some time in its first year evaluating his accomplishments and suggesting new directions. But it is worth noting that occupational physicians, at Imperial and elsewhere have also recently reviewed their progress, made changes or planned for new developments in the future.

As 1981 began Dr. Douglas Warren, now Canadian medical director of Occidental Life Insurance Company, continued to work on behalf of the Canadian Board of Occupational Medicine, developing proposals to overseas qualifications in the field. In the same month, Dr. Walter Prendergast was considering Eaton's plans for more than 25 new stores that could be built over the next five years, considering the medical aspects of the proposed stores, including lighting, heat and air quality. January 1981 also saw changes in Imperial Oil's medical department. Dr. Henry Shewhuk announced a shift that gave Dr. Arnold Katz administrative responsibility for the department's activities in the Ontario region, while Dr. Diane Dahman took up the same position in the West. Elsewhere in the department, the industrial hygienists were adjusting to other changes. Neil Murray and his colleagues were assimilating the latest regulations from provincial and federal jurisdictions.

Meanwhile, in his Toronto home Dr. Russell Birrell was reading the latest issue of Pusle, an employee newsletter about Imperial's medical department. In the two decades since his retirement in 1961 much had changed. The names were different; Shewhuk, Katz and Saunders were all new in Birrell's terms. The department had grown considerably. But despite these changes the underlying continuity was clear. In 1947, when Canadian occupational medicine was still a very new branch of modern medicine, Russell Birrell had developed specific principles and objectives. They are still followed today. (T)
Every year about this time, just a bit past the middle of May, I remember a spring afternoon almost 30 years ago, when I arrived by train from the Maritimes in a village near the centre of Saskatchewan, called Crooked River. It had once been a lumbering town, but by the time I got there it was a dreary, quiet place where people recalled the days, as late as the forties, when the mill was booming and the street filled with lumberjacks from all over Canada. Now it was lying in the pale prairie sun, dusty street and the frame buildings that lined it like snapshots from an old family album that would have had much to say if they could only speak.

I stood on the platform as my train and suitcase were taken off the baggage wagon and then started idly as the men in the mail car swung the canvas bags down into the back of an ancient black pickup truck, so ancient its wheels had narrow tires with spokes on which the mud had caked and dripped. The drivers, an elderly man and the only other person on the platform, observed this ritual, then stood back wordlessly as the train left him to the prairie stillness. Then, for the first time, he looked at me.

He was a slight man — perhaps 70 years old — with strands of thin white hair, bright grey eyes and a mouth that seemed set in a permanent smile. He was wearing a short jacket, khaki trousers and a pair of knee-high boots. He closed the door on his truck and approached me.

“Are you the minister?” he asked.

I said yes, I was, for I had come to Crooked River, like hundreds of other young Maritimers, to hundreds of other prairie villages, as the student minister. While we were not ordained — and were therefore not expected or permitted to give the sacraments or perform marriage — we were assigned for the summer months, once classes ended, to tiny, usually scattered congregations that could not support a full-time minister but which were grateful to have a student who could take services, visit the people, keep the church open a few months.

“You’re a day early,” he said.

“I thought you were coming tomorrow.”

I was about to reply — though I had no idea what explanation to offer — when he shook my hand warmly and gave his name. He was, it turned out, the man who, summer after summer, had welcomed countless student ministers to Crooked River and became for all of them a kind of mentor, who saw them through their early days, who shared their uncertainty with a combination of patience, humor and, most of all, common sense. He gave his name as Mr. Green, and that was the only way I ever addressed him.

Together we heaved my belongings into the back of his little truck, dropped off the mailbags at the post office and then lunched along the place that was to be my home for the next few months. It was a one-room cabin, standing on cement blocks and set amid alders just behind the small church in which, each Sunday, I would conduct the service before heading off by bicycle for the afternoon service in an even smaller church, which, depending on the wind and mud, might take an hour or two to reach.

We put my trunk in the cabin — in which there were a table and chairs, a cookie tin, a sink, a bed and two hanging light bulbs — and then, smoothing his few strands of hair, Mr. Green said that he should leave everything and go along to have supper with him and Mrs. Green. “Come along,” he said and then added a phrase I was to hear many times during that summer in Saskatchewan. “Come along and make a meal.”

For a youth from the Maritimes who had never been beyond them, the meals with Saskatchewan families were, it seems to me now, the most enduring memories of the summer and in some ways perhaps the most revealing ritual. There, seated at the massive tables laden with six bowls of vegetables, seven different kinds of pie and surrounded by men, women and children whose names were not Scottish but usually Polish or Ukrainian, a young man could really come to realize the diversity of Canada. Until then my world — physically and emotionally — had been the Maritimes and the heart of that world Cape Breton, so that no matter where I went, someone had been to my hometown. In many cases, knew someone that I knew — someone named MacInnis or MacDonell or MacIntyre. No one knew anyone I knew. The familiar symbols were gone, and I had to find my way among new ones. Once, a man who had come from the Ukraine years before to homestead, and whose hands were as large as his goodwill, was told I came from the Maritimes and said that because of that he had a question he wanted to ask me: Had I ever seen Don Messer? (I had to confess I had not, but tried to recover by saying I had a friend who had once been in the same room with Hank Snow.)

Almost every afternoon, after I had spent the morning working on the sermon for next Sunday or talking politics in the frost yard of Mr. Green (who told me many times that the greatest of our statesmen was Mackenzie King), I would climb on my bicycle and begin making my rounds. It was a practice that seems a bit old-fashioned today, visiting the members of the congregation. Sometimes they were farmers out in the fields, sometimes young people who were drifting through the summer and whom I enlisted to paint the community hall, or the people who appreciated it most of all, the very old, who, sick or well, seemed to feel that a call from “the student,” whoever he happened to be, was an event on their summer calendar so he looked forward to with honest pleasure or just plain curiosity.

One day at noon, along about early August, I was sitting at the table in my cabin, the hot, dry breeze barely stirring the curtain, when I heard a knock at the door. It was a man I had never met before, medium height, about 30, quite dark, with a look I took for charm but now, so many years after, am more inclined to describe as cunning.

“Father,” he began. “I have a small problem. I’m passing through town on my way to a job, and I’ve lost my wallet. Every cent I could borrow just three dollars, I’ll pay you back next week with my first pay.”

Immediately I handed him three dollars, whereupon, with the timing of a true professional, he smiled and said, “Father, I was actually going to ask you for six.”

So I gave him another three.

I told Mr. Green about it that afternoon. I’ve always been glad that he did not laugh. He simply

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smoothed his strands of hair in that familiar way he had when he was about to make a point and said:

“It’s a good thing to care about this world, but it’s also a good thing to be wise to it. Next time one of those fellas asks for money ask him to send a couple of hours chopping some wood for you. If he chops the wood, then you send him to me and I’ll pay him.”

He spoke with the confidence that came from knowing he would never have to pay.

In the last week of August, in the same truck in which he had met me, Mr. Green took me to the station and I left Crooked River, though in some ways I like to think I have never left it at all. There must be thousands of us in Canada who, as I did in youth, from the East to the West, each to some Crooked River of his own, and felt something of newness and vastness, and something of what it is to pass from being a youth to becoming a man. Now, as the country faces large questions about East and West, I find myself remembering Crooked River again, not just because it was so much a part of my maturing years, but because it gave me, for the rest of my life, a gallery of unforgettable characters.