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Man, machines and a marvelous museum 2
by R.A.J. Phillips

Working better 8
by James Dingwall

Crime scribes 13
by Jack Batten

The hard decision 17
by Ron Lebel

Path to understanding 22
by Laird O'Brien

Places of my past 26
by Robert Thomas Allen

In closing 30

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MAN, MACHINES AND A MARVELOUS MUSEUM

BY R.A. PHILLIPS

An imposing federal government sign sits in front of what was once a bakery warehouse on St. Laurent Boulevard in Ottawa's southeast side. It reads, "National Museum of Science and Technology" and it is the only indication that this unlikely building houses what has become a national treasure.

The National Museum of Science and Technology, now 18 years old, is unique in Canada. It is, in part, a science centre where visitors of every generation push buggies, turn wheels, make power and play computer games. But it is much more: it is the guardian of our scientific and technological heritage. In it you will find a charred vehicle that was once in outer space and curiosities that carried Canadians when Victoria was Queen. Next to the computers are antique printing presses, all in working order. Venerable ploughs that broke the frontier are just across an aisle from the most up-to-date life of all-baby chicks emerging from their eggs.

But the sparking former warehouse holds only about one-tenth of the museum's 51,000 objects. The rest of the $100-million collection is in hopelessly overcrowded storage in nearby buildings. Perhaps the most important ingredient of the museum, however, is its staff — men and women dedicated to discovering and recording Canada's contribution to science and technology.

Dr. William McGowan, who succeeded the museum's founding director, Dr. David Baird, a year ago, came to the job with an international reputation in atomic collision physics and biophysics, and although his career included 10 years as a research scientist and professor at several companies and 15 years as the chairman of the University of Western Ontario's physics department, his greatest interest has long been the popularization of the history of science and technology and its impact on society.

"The museum is the keeper of all Canada's scientific and technological history," McGowan explains enthusiastically. His ambition is to "bring out" more Canadians to record and study the contributions of science and technology to Canada's future, but we also talk to kids who come in to push buttons today and who we hope will support science and technology tomorrow.

Above all, he looks on it as a place that inspires Canadians to learn about their achievements.

It is typical of museum staff members to talk about the extraordinary collection already amassed and how the new buildings are open to public. The items range from a poster showing a severe security with the legend: "A ship in harbor is safe, but that's not what ships are built for.

The director's future voyages count on more involvement by industry, universities and the public. He sees the museum as a friendly lobby. "Of course we want to help make the present premises the home of Canada's future, but we also talk to kids who come in to push buttons today and who we hope will support science and technology tomorrow.

With new buildings for three of Canada's national museums (the National Gallery of Canada, the National Museum of Man and the National Aviation Museum) now rising on the capital's skyline, the 100 workers at the Museum of Science and Technology might be discouraged about the prospect of being an early replacement for the old warehouse. Not the director, though — he has already set up a fund to support the museum and watch the director's replacement.

Not the director, though — he has already set up a fund to support the museum and watch the director's replacement. The entire team, which includes consultants, will make sure that the museum's future is as bright as its past.

The landmark of the museum is the poster of the sun. "We are all sons and daughters of the sun," McGowan says.

To bring all these ideas together, McGowan has launched far-reaching studies that will examine such questions as what the museum should be trying to achieve, what its premises should be like, the types of public programs it should offer and how it should approach the difficult task of preserving Canada's industrial heritage, which involves not simply collecting artifacts and documents but ensuring the preservation of places where technology once flourished.

The entire team, which includes consultants, will make sure that the museum's future is as bright as its past.
massive 1908 lighthouse brought from Cape North, N.S. On the edge of a park it shares with several other exhibits, it towers 20 metres above craggy rocks similar to those that surrounded it on the Cape Breton coast. Nearby, an enormous Atlas rocket points skyward and an Alberta pumping unit turns endlessly to extract oil that never comes. Beyond is a railroad yard from the days of steam locomotion.

If there were no museum, the trains alone would still draw tens of thousands of visitors a year. Like so many artifacts here, they are not just to be admired from afar. Youngsters climb into an engine cab to pull handles, old railroaders look knowingly at brake lines and young couples take each other's pictures on a cowcatcher. Members of the Bytown Railroad Society often gather here to share history or lavish tender loving care on the rolling stock.

Included in the museum's railroad exhibit is a passenger car built in about 1854 by Carrick and Grangewall Railway in the lower Ottawa Valley. It is believed to be the oldest rail car in Canada. The most luxurious items in the exhibit are undoubtedly the two 1926 steeplecars, which have been restored to their former glory.

On Sundays, the Bytown railroaders spell off museum staff in running locomotive 1810 for the steam excursions. At something less than breakneck speed, it ambles through the city, crosses the Ottawa River and pulls its way through some of the most picturesque scenery in the country. It plods beside the Gatineau River, capriciously wanders across country roads and takes a deep breath before tackling hills that it has been known to miss on first try. Two-and-a-half hours later, it pulls into the historic village of Wakefield, Que. While most of the 346 passengers picnic or walk to the National Capital Commission's old grist mill, some help the train crew shift the engine onto a turntable, which they laboriously push around 180 degrees to ready the train for the return journey.

Collecting technological artifacts such as trains raises problems not known to curators of fossils or precious jewels. Most of the museum's artifacts weigh more than 200 kilograms. "Almost everything we collect is monstrous," sighs John Corby, who has been responsible for industrial technology since the museum was founded. Sometimes, attaining the prize takes a long time. In the summer of 1983, long before the museum was born, John Corby was camping with his family on a lake in Algonquin Park, Ont. Intrigued by a sound from beyond the lake's far shore, he decided to find out where it was coming from and discovered a steam-driven saw mill. In 1968, as a museum official, he returned to the saw mill and found it was powered by a diesel engine, but that the steam engine was beautifully preserved in a shed of its own. He wrote to the engine's owner, Donald MacRae, and asked about the possibility of acquiring it. He got a reply from MacRae's daughter 12 years later. The engine is now housed in the museum.

Artifacts like that not only have to queue for space on the exhibition floor, but often have to undergo a lengthy restoration process. But that in itself is an attraction, and the museum has a gallery from where the public can watch painstaking techniques bringing early artifacts back to "usable life." "Usable life" is a phrase that can spark lively debate. Should an object be fully restored to the state it was in when it left the manufacturer or should it show something of the wear, dirt and sweat that marked its life to stir viewers to reflect on the time and circumstances of its use? The museum has tended to do the latter.

The automobiles, however, had all been restored to their original style before they were acquired by the museum, and from the almost contemporary Ricklin to Seth Taylor's carriage of 1857, they look almost new. Taylor's carriage was Canada's first self-propelled vehicle, and in Quebec's Eastern Townships it once challenged trotting horses to a race. Everyone's undoubted amusement, it lost when a steam line broke. Seth Taylor, a jeweler in Stanstead, Que., was a very inventive fellow, but since he had patented his creation on a horse-drawn carriage, it had no brakes. That oversight led to a later accident that caused the vehicle to be damaged badly, but not beyond repair. Its owner in the 1940s wanted to see it preserved in a Canadian museum. Unfortunately, a museum willing to accept it was not found, so it was sold to an American automobile collector. Finally, in January, 1983, it came home. Today, the museum's technicians are fashioning a new set of wheels for it with the help of tin type photographs, one of which shows Seth Taylor standing behind it.

With limited space and budget, the selection of vehicles must be an agency of decision-making. The collection now has 84 cars, 25 of them developed and built in Canada. There was no doubt that the 1887 Delahaye—one of the oldest cars in North America — or the recently found 1932 Nash motor home should be acquired. But which 1985 models deserve a place in our national heritage? As curator of communication technology, Ernest De Coste's net covers everything from telegraphs to television and satellites. "When you start with nothing," he remarks, "everything looks good." He tries to follow every lead, like the invitation in 1978 to visit Telelobe Canada's station in Drummondville, Que., which was about to close. There he saw a nine-inch monest of glass and brass—Canada's first short-wave transmitter.

That's the kind of thing that makes life interesting," he says. There is no law giving the museum the government's technological artifacts in the way that the Public Archives of Canada gets its written records, but government offices are generally cooperative, as they were in this case. De Coste has since acquired the engineering models for several Canadian satellites, the first model of the new digital audio-disc player, early snow vehicles and a piano player that renders music with 60 tiny mechanical fingers.

The agricultural implements are absorbing even to those who have never seen a cow (for those who haven't, there's a platter one that is milked endlessly by a machine). The implements reflect an era when Canada was a world leader in farming technology, even though Canadian farmers were slow to use it.

That paradox sent Tom Brown.
A delicate model of the Rhino Mac, a three-meter Cancian aeronautic team, a precursor of the Snowbirds.

During the late fifties and early sixties, this F-86 Saber jet was used by the air force's Golden Hawks aerobatic team, a precursor of the Snowbirds.

The highlight of the "Canada in Space" exhibit is a model of the space shuttle Columbia, in which May Garvan was the first Canadian to travel in Space.

Once the head of the University of Western Ontario's physics department, Dr. William McConaughy, the museum's director, is interested in popularizing the history of science and technology.

The curator of agricultural technology, on one of his longest hours. In 1932, Massey Harris was producing a combine favored by Australian farmers (who called it a rupaiy thresher) more than a decade before a later model caught on at home. The nearest surviving model was found by the science and technology museum in New South Wales, whose dry climate had preserved several examples in excellent condition.

Old agricultural implements are also displayed in the museum's agricultural gallery at Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm. The National Museum of Man also has a keen interest in tools. For the most part, tools are patented they go to the Museum of Science and Technology, or sticks for fire-making to the Museum of Man.

The imulator, a relatively simple idea, may well be the most popular exhibit in town. Young and old stand with seemingly endless patience to watch eggs cracking open. Perhaps it is the suspense of wondering which egg will open next that fascinates people; perhaps it is a deeper symbolism that no one volunteers to explain.

The computer also rate high on the popularity scale, especially with the younger museum patrons. Two young men hardly tall enough to reach the buttons comfortably are totally absorbed in the game on the screen, while their parents' attention gradually shifts to impatience.

For a memorable lesson about human perception, old and young walk through the crazy kitchen. It is normal in every respect except that the whole structure is tilted at an angle of 10 degrees. Gradually, the abnormal becomes normal, and outside the whole world seems askew.

The National Museum of Science and Technology was a pioneer in the hands-on approach to museum display. Virtually every exhibit in the physics hall is an exercise in participation. Of course, that is not possible in the primary, but visitors can watch a master printer at work or wonder at such items as the 1865 hoe Washington press from the Huntington Gardens of the imposing boss press, which turned out newspapers in Montreal, Edmonton, and Medicine Hat, Alta., before arriving at its final resting place. The museum also has a wonderful collection of model ships. Among it is a huge one of the Titanic, which was acquired from a private museum in England.

The clock collection goes on better. Until a few months ago, the quarter hours were tolled by the clock that had once been housed in the tower of the Dominion Building in Tilbury, Ont. In said disarray, it was sent by Public Works Canada to the museum about 10 years ago, restored and put on display. Recently, a heritage-conscious Tilbury citizenry wanted its clock back in place. The museum was happy to oblige.

While visitors cannot touch the items of 19th-century timepieces at the museum, they can pick up a phone to get the precise time directly from the National Research Council. That used to be the familiar Dominion Observatory official time signal until the observatory closed in 1971. Now an observatory on the museum grounds houses its old refracting telescope, the largest in Canada. Its origins lie in a tangled web of bureaucratic and political intrigue that culminated in its installation in the Dominion Observatory in 1905 at a cost of $310,000 rather than the estimated $16,000. As the chief astronomer of the time predicted, it did "arouse public interest in astronomy and in science generally."

Ottawa stargazers still regularly use the telescope, and a Canada-wide audience shares the free monthly sky chart prepared by the museum's curator of astronomy, Mary Grey. She also tells the continuing story of the skies through her syndicated newspaper column.

But who really benefits from the museum? The answer is quite simple—all Canada. Ninety percent of the work the professional staff performs behind the scenes involves preserving, restoring and explaining our technological heritage for the benefit of Canadians who never visit the national capital. Educational programs reach right across the country through exhibits, publications, and technical information.

The other 10 percent of the staff's work has a direct bearing on the museum through whose doors, at last count, about nine million visitors had passed since it opened in 1967. That is one of the hundreds of facts visitors learn from the television screens that are scattered throughout the museum.

A major tourist attraction despite its less than central location in Ottawa, the science and technology museum welcomes about double the number of people who visit the National Gallery of Canada. That may say something about the showmanship to which technology lends itself, but it may be a sign of an awakening interest in a part of our national heritage that we have long ignored.

Of course, the main beneficiaries of the public displays are the people who live nearby. Any schoolchild in the national capital region who has not been to the museum can claim deputation and mental deprivation.

Margaret Lewis was in her fave years when the museum's opening was added to the riches of Centennial Year. "It was my first experience of a museum that really involved the visitor," she recalls. "For the first time I found science really coming alive." Now, as a teacher and a mother, she regularly takes her students and two daughters to the museum. "When I have a class project, like a recent one on pioneer living, the guides give reality to the ideas we have been discussing in class. Whatever the subject, the museum opens doors for improving minds.

The museum staff would say that, relative to future dreams, the doors are still small. Space communications and energy are two themes that have earned a high priority with planners. "Canada has been a world leader in both, but how many people realise?" the director asks with a mixture of frustration and unbounded enthusiasm. "If we don't know what we're doing in the past, how can we have confidence in the future?"

The confident future is being built impatiently in an Ottawa warehouse. Just turn left at the Cape North light-house—you can't miss it.
WORKING BETTER
Imperial builds on its past

BY JAMES DINGWALL

One winter evening, a few days before Christmas in 1983, Donald McIvor, the lean, soft-spoken chairman and chief executive officer of Imperial Oil Limited, was sitting in the study of his Toronto home, writing a memo to himself. It's a habit he picked up years ago. "I've probably written hundreds of them over the years," he says, "usually when an idea is fresh in my mind. I find writing clarifies my thinking on a subject."

This particular evening, McIvor was moved to write about one of the major challenges facing him and indeed the company he heads. While the snow swirled outside, McIvor's thoughts focused on what he had been trying to say all year about Imperial's "ethos." It's a word he chooses with care; it means the "prevailing tone or sentiment of a people or community."

He wrote: "Our ethos has held us in very good stead. It is the product

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM MUCELY
of successive ideas of many people over time. Thus, when we concern ourselves with change, we can see a history of how the system is altered in terms of what should be kept and what would benefit from change.

The unassailable strength of the company he identified as its people and the company’s ability to become a powerhouse, the company’s weakness is:

"Substitution of procedure as an end in itself rather than as a means of achievement." And he wrote of what he sees as the new direction for the company:

"I believe we should actively promote entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation and the undertaking of responsible risks, and I think we should actively discourage bureaucracy.

Breaking down the bureaucracy is having an impact on virtually every aspect of Imperial’s operations. In the West, Esso Resources Canada Limited has created exploration teams to respond better to the rigorous demands of finding new oil and gas reserves for the company. In Toronto, Esso Petroleum Canada is streamlining its decision-making processes in response to heavy competition in the field of refinery marketing. And Esso Chemical Canada, now in the market with facilities in Alberta and Ontario — valued at about $1 billion — that are internationally competitive both in terms of scale and technology, is actively forging new links between management and employees that will likely add a new chapter to its long-standing history of excellence in human and industrial relations.

What is happening throughout Imperial is a directed effort to make the company more efficient, less bureaucratic and more entrepreneurial. In the fall of 1983 and 1984, videotaped interviews with McIvor — in which he lays out the future of the company and bureaucracy and more innovations — were seen throughout the company. And through staff meetings and one-on-one discussions, senior management tried to convey the direction and importance of the changes affecting the company. "There was nothing very mysterious about the timing of the changes," says McIvor. "After the recession, we had a unique opportunity to renew the company —

"We had to cut our cloth to a completely different pattern. We had to ask ourselves what we could afford"

and procedures that made this company great and will continue to do so and that bureaucratic obstacles are standing in the way of our doing a good job in the future." In that sense, Thompson concludes, "It would be wrong to say there is a master plan to all this: rather, we’re involved in a gradual awakening." At the heart of this gradual awakening, says Donald McIvor, is the recognition that "our survival depends on people being innovative. We can no longer preserve the status quo." In many ways, what McIvor sensed is what management consultants and theorists call "a felt need to change." It has to be felt right at the top of a company — perhaps, too, at the heart. "If you want to incite an atmosphere where there is less bureaucracy, then for goodness sake don't start by forming bureaucracies to do it," says McIvor. And Imperial's top management is sticking closely to that rule. The senior management committee, which reviews the overall operations of the company and which used to comprise eight members, has been trimmed to three. And the very focus of the committee has changed — from day to day considerations to long-range planning. A large bureaucracy was not an appropriate answer, says McIvor. "Bureaucracies are expensive.

The dictionary defines bureaucracy as an organization of "rigid hierarchies and administration characterized by excessive red tape and routines." And while no one purposely sets out to create such a system, it seems that all sorts of businesses and governments have done just that. Esso Petroleum's Gordon Thomson explains how bureaucracies are created: "Systems and procedures evolve with the best of intentions because at the time each is introduced, it is appropriate.

It is ironic that financial success actually contributes to the formation of bureaucracies. The postwar economy in North America, with its established ways of doing things. Change around here means building new bureaucracies and new procedures. And the exercise we're going through now involves identifying the systems and

Bureaucracies also slow down decision-making and, according to some economists, are at the root of the productivity problem in Canada.

But the toll goes beyond economics. An unwieldy corporate management structure inevitably leads to wasted money, time and, worse, wasted human resources. "But," Thomson cautions, "the bureaucracy has taken years to evolve, and it can't be dismantled overnight. We'll have to go through the country were under way. New pump technology was in place, and the $105 million work budget was adequate to proceed. But there was a problem, one that was apparent to Roger Purdie, Esso Petroleum's vice president of marketing. His organization saw clearly that the original plan — which was to be implemented during a five-to-seven-year period — had to be stepped up. Imperial's competition in the branded motor-gasoline market was causing him concern. Unless Esso Petroleum quicker implementation. The preliminary work, such as obtaining work permits and preparing architectural drawings, is 25 percent ahead of schedule, which allowed $16 million of work budgeted for 1985 to be rescheduled for 1984. At the same time, the exploration and equipment Bauer, exploration manager in Calgary, was undergoing a positive transformation: "The organizational chart was certainly longer and more complicated than it did before the department began breaking the bureaucracies," says Wayne Patton, manager of planning and economics. "Where you find change is in our approach." About 20 exploration teams have been created, each with a particular region. A typical group consists of three geologists and two geophysicists on a full-time basis, and a land man, business analyst and geologist and geophysical specialists on a part-time basis — the part-time participants each work with several teams.

"Bill Evans, the explorations operations manager, felt we needed a fresh approach to exploration," says Patton. "He wanted to reinforce the role of support people. At the same time, individuals and teams are encouraged to search for, develop and champion new opportunities.

Now, right from the beginning at the grassroots level, the team will be asking if any money can be made from the opportunity and will be considering how to put the deal together. The aim of this approach is to get all members of the team to feel more responsible for the results of their teamwork, so, whether they come up with a dry hole or a success, they feel responsible.

Revisiting the exploration effort is just one example of the continuing effort to streamline Esso Resources, says its president, Bob Peterson. The company's response to the 1981 surplus has been two-pronged. First, the megaproject is another. The project's rebirth in about two years as a phased-development program is symbolic of a company that can move quickly when circumstances dictate.

"I got the impression it passed through the management committee," says Purdie, "in one two-hour session." Quick approval has, it seems, bred even another evolution, identifying obstacles and removing them. It's a process of standing back and asking, 'Do systems that once made sense still make sense?'

In the wake of this questioning has come renewed vigor and, perhaps, a new sense of purpose. There are goals to be set and achieved, and tasks must be accomplished as well as they were in the past, but with more personal initiative.

At Imperial, there are numerous signs that this openness to initiative is well in place. For example, 18 months ago the company was ready to embark on the biggest marketing face-lift in its history. Plans to revitalize every service station across the country were under way. New pump technology was in place, and the $105 million work budget had been adequate to proceed. But there was a problem, one that was apparent to Roger Purdie, Esso Petroleum's vice president of marketing. His organization saw clearly that the original plan — which was to be implemented during a five-to-seven-year period — had to be stepped up. Imperial's competition in the branded motor-gasoline market was causing him concern. Unless Esso Petroleum
identified a variety of activities that were no longer necessary. Today, partly as a result of the company’s Triple E program — excellence through efficiency and effectiveness — we continue to see individual initiative and innovation aimed at improving the way we do things at Esso Ressources.

By becoming less bureaucratic, the entire company is becoming more entrepreneurial. "There’s a new willingness to follow creative instincts without having to analyze them to death," says Arden Haynes. "During our growth period, we were very concerned about making the right decisions and protecting ourselves. Sometimes it was excessive — people felt they needed an answer for everything." This kind of attitude is changing and changing fast, says Esso Petroleum’s Roger Purdie. "Today, you don’t see people hesitate to say, ‘I like it because it feels right.’ We’re still looking to back up decisions with data, but it’s more okay if it’s data that’s between our ears."

It is unlikely that a company as large as Imperial can, or would even want to, adopt all the characteristics that go with entrepreneurship. "When we talk about encouraging risk-taking, for instance, we’re obviously not talking about silly risks," says Donald McIvor. "Some companies try to be consistently high risk-takers; others aim to minimize risk. Neither one should be adopted as a forever stance."

McIvor acknowledges he is trying to move decision-making authority as far down the line of command as possible and then join the individual initiative that results from that action with the strong analytical, financial and human resources of a large corporation. He is searching for the best of both worlds.

If he achieves it, the benefits will be felt by every employee of the company, for people are at the heart of the changes taking place at Imperial. "By reducing the bureaucracy, we want to get people working to their full potential," explains Gordon Thomson. "But it won’t happen unless we give them the proper tools and encouragement."

Management seminars and group planning sessions will help to provide presentation that outlines the philosophy behind the company’s determination to become, in his words, "the best chemical company in the country."

In the past three years, the division has spent nearly $900 million creating a new, fast-action fertilizer, the complex in Redwater, Alta., expanding existing facilities and building a new plant in Sarnia, Ont. "Esso Chemical has undergone a dramatic change," says Akitt. "In the nature of its business, its structure and its philosophy for growth." Now that the facilities have been completed, Akitt wants an equally efficient and productive corporate structure. To achieve this, Akitt felt he should ask the employees what they thought would help them to work more efficiently and productively. An extensive series of interviews with employees was carried out last year; and there were, says Akitt, some surprises. Employees wanted a sense that their contribution to the organization was appreciated. They wanted a greater understanding of customer needs and an environment in which initiative would be rewarded. They also wanted to work for a company that would place a value on its employees’ emotional and psychological health, not simply physical safety. Akitt is now working to achieve these ideals. "Will it work?" he asks. "You’ll have to come back in five years and I’ll tell you." But he says this with all the confidence of a man who knows he’s going in the right direction.

Imperial did not become a great company overnight, and it will not change overnight. No one expects or wants it to. "Our predecessors were great architects," says Arden Haynes. "Events have forced us into a different management style, but in changing, we must be careful not to throw away the good things they left us."

As changes take place, impediments to change will be found, but so will strengths. In the company’s history, there are many examples of its strengths and the benefits that resulted from them, the deep conviction that made the company drill one last hole at a place called Leduc in 1947, the tenacity that made the Interprovincial Pipe Line a reality; the vision that became Syncrude; and the persistence that keeps the company working in the Arctic.

These strengths don’t belong just to Imperial. They are part of Canada’s history. What does belong to the company is the will to change, to look in different directions for answers and to look a little beyond the horizon. As the company veers away from the bureaucratic systems that have built up over the years and strives to become more efficient and entrepreneurial, what seems clear is that its history is rich with precedent. "This whole experience," says Arden Haynes, "has given us an opportunity to form fresh ideas about the company and its future."

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"This experience has given us an opportunity to form fresh ideas about the company and its future."

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Crime scribes

BY JACK BATTEN

Maybe the occasion when Canadian crime fiction, struggling for respectability all these years, came irreversibly into its own took place less than a year ago, on May 5, 1981. That was the night when Eric Wright attended the annual dinner of the Crime Writers’ Association of Great Britain in a ballroom at the Merrion Hotel in London. The evening’s principal business, apart from providing 300 of Britain’s most celebrated writers, publishers, editors and reviewers of crime fiction with an opportunity to talk shop, was to hand out awards for the best crime novels of 1985. One was the John Creasey Memorial Award, which honors the “best first crime novel of the year” (the best of those by authors who hadn’t previously had a crime novel published). When the association’s chairman rose and announced the winning books — there was tie in 1985 — one came, surprisingly, from overseas. Its title was The Night the Gods Smiled; its author, Eric Wright of Toronto.

Wright is a gentle, wry man in his 40s who reaches English literature at Toronto’s Ryeview Polytechnic Institute. He looks back with a mixture of pride and amusement to the night of the award, a night that saw him take away the traditional prize of £500 and a large engraved magnifying glass. "I prepared a short acceptance speech," Wright remembers. "I had intended to say by saying that from

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Eric Wright of Toronto, who has received awards in both Britain and Canada for his book The Night the Gods Smiled, is one of several writers who have helped to gain international recognition for Canadian crime fiction.

Mystery meets the Canadian novelist

By Jack Batten

The Review, Number 1, 1985
The first I'd decided to set my book in Toronto and to make the city almost a character in the story but that every- one, from my agent to my publisher, warned me that Toronto wouldn't make a convincing setting. At that point, I had intended to hold up the check for $500 and say, "Ah, but it is rewarding." At the dimmer, though, I couldn't get my punch line out—everyone in the audience was busy saving me from this. But that's crime fiction, the perfectly appropriate setting for a crime novel. I was sorry that the timing of my joke wasn't a bit more delicate than the reaction to my remarks about Toronto being a good location for a crime novel.

Wright's experience in London reflects two crucial points about the nature of Canadian crime fiction. The first is that, with books by Wright and a host of other authors, Canada's troubled detectives, would-be amnesiacs, and legal and medical sleuths have achieved world-class status, right up there with the likes of P.D. James, John le Carré and Robert B. Parker. The second is that it's now just fine for a Canadian writer to place a cracking good murder story in a Canadian setting. Both points represent significant departures from the past.

The breakthrough for homegrown crime writing came in the late 1970s, says Derrick Murdoch, and he should know since he ranks as the dean of the country's crime reviewers. Murdoch, a man in his 70s who wears elegant overcoats and a second suit of clothes, writes a weekly crime column on the book pages of the Toronto Star and, as a freelancer, has been doing since May, 1985.

"When I began reviewing," he says, "Canadian books in my department were few and very far between. But the change occurred rather dramatically. By the end of 1984 there were 18 books that I reviewed. In 1985 there were more Canadian books in the previous two years than in all the 13 before that. The reason for this has happened since is that the number of books has increased by at least half as much again, and more important, the quality has improved to a degree that I would describe as remarkable, given what I'd been subjected to in earlier times.

The writers Murdoch has in mind when he offers his celebration of Canadian crime writing include two women from every section of the country. They constitute a varied group in background, writing style and taste in crime, and they include, as a small representative sample, such luminaries as novelist Will Deverell, a one-time British Columbia Crown attorney and defence counsel, veteran of more than 100 court cases, whose literary output numbers among it two best-selling books, Needles and High Crimes, and who has at least as adroit and gritty tales of intrigue in the drug trade on Cana- da's east and west coasts; David Gurr of Vancouver Island, an ex-navy officer turned detective writer who has written two books, Troika and A Woman Called Scylla, and is due to appear at a literary conference this summer; and Canadian, who operated out of a small southern Ontario city called Geantian, which is modeled on Engel's hometown of St. Catharines. Much of the impetus for the Cooperman books began with Engel's discovery of The Weird World of Wes Beatriz.

"I developed great admiration and affection for the book when I worked on a radio serialization of it," explains Engel, a trim, affable man in his early fifties who has served for many years as a radio producer at the CBC. "That struck me first about the Harris novel," he continues, "was that here was somebody actually using Toronto and, even more amazingly, Missouka as the location for a murder story. That was practically unheard of not so long ago. At the same time, The Weird World of Wes Beatriz was a wonderfully strange, STREETWORKS, and a beautifully thought-out puzzle that was entirely believable. In many of the cases in the book, you can get a cold, rational puzzle, but Harris' book had more to it. It had human drama." That's a quality that the Engel books also boast to an entirely winning degree. As private eyes, Benny and Cooperman come across as the most accessible of characters, and over the course of the four books, he has subtly evolved in personality and style. "Benny changes as I change," Engel says. "He's like me in that way. Other- wise, I'd be a character like P.C. Wrig- gie on the old 'Bonanza' shows— somebody who was relentlessly the same year after year. But Benny is rather the changing sort of person security agents might recognize in their friends or themselves." The acceptance of Benny Cooper- man as a character and Engel as a writer — "Mr. Engel," the New York Times noted in 1984, "has the tough, sardonic voice of a private eye... it's voiced by Chandler and Hammer, down pat" — helped to pave the way for other Canadian crime writers to present their own versions of native sleuths. In Eric Wright's two books—a model from this spring—the character at the centre of the action is a Toronto police detective named Charlie Salter, a unique fellow who can solve a murder in 15 minutes. In 1985, Ted Wood, a free-lance writer from Pickering, Ont., has published two books about one of the most appealing's sleuths of Reid Bennett, an uncompromising cop who acts as the one-man police force in a small fictionalized Georgian Bay, Ont. And there are equally idiosyncratic fictional charac- ters turning up in the pages of a variety of Canadian authors in the US. Judith Ross, a plucky young British Columbia housewife and former ski coach, is the heroine of a series of novels by Maron and friends. She's the sleuth in his mind-blowing new book, a tried and true pattern in the genre... it's a book which has been the experience of at least one author, Moncrieff Williamson, that Canada is in the vanguard of the development of Canadian publishers as downright
exotic territory. Williamson, director emeritus of Charlottetown's Confederation Centre Art Gallery and the Museum of Charlottetown, has built a pair of books around an absent-minded English art historian named Cyril Fenningham, whose adventures in the second book take him to Calgary and Montreal.

"Perhaps it's true that many Canadians still want to read about crime in Algiers and Yorkshire," Williamson says, "but I think that Americans now feel that Canada is wonderful territory. Whatever the reason, it has become the accepted thing at last to give our books Canadian locales."

With all the barriers down, Canadian crime fiction seems on the verge of a flourishing period. "In my view," says Eric Wright, speaking as both a crime writer and a teacher of literature, "Canadian crime fiction is at the stage Cam Can was in the early seventies. Back then, the writers of serious Canadian novels were just breaking out. That's exactly what's happening to us. We have mystery writers who are probably as talented as their British and American counterparts. There's only one thing they need—encouragement."

A large chunk of that necessary cheerleading is coming from within the ranks of the crime writers. They have organized themselves into a social association under the title of the Crime Writers of Canada, which grew out of a discussion on the evening of June 25, 1982, when six men gathered over drinks and dinner at Dooly's, a midtown Toronto restaurant. The six included such crime fiction heavyweights as Howard Engel, Derrick McTaggart, L.A. Moore and Tony Aspler, a writer who has co-authored, with Gordon Pape, three thrillers that have sold substantial numbers in England and North America.

"After we'd lingered long and convivially at Dooly's," Aspler remembers, "it was the overwhelming consensus that if Great Britain and the United States could have their crime writers associations, then why, the calibre of writers here qualified Canada for an organization of its own."

Aspler was the first chairman of the new group, and under his energetic guidance, Crime Writers of Canada has thrived. By late 1984, its membership across the country numbered more than 90. It has staged several lively meetings that featured guest speakers ranging from such authors as England's Dick Francis and California's Margaret Millar to a forensic pathologist who illustrated his lecture with slides of murder victims that, even to his hard-bitten audience, verged on the gruesome. The association puts out a quarterly newsletter full of chat notes on its members' successes ("Ted Wood won the Shrieker Crime Novel Award in the United States for his Dead in the Water"). And on May 24, 1984, at Toronto's Royal York Hotel, the group held its first annual awards banquet. Robert B. Parker flew in from Boston to serve as the after-dinner entertainer. But the highlight of the evening came with the announcement of the Crime Writers of Canada crime book of the year. The winner, chosen from six finalists, echoed the choice of the Crime Writers' Association of Great Britain—The Night the Gods Smiled, written by Eric Wright and starring Charlie Salter.

The association's most ambitious enterprise is still a year and a half away. From October 7 to 11, 1986, Canada's crime writers are going to host, in Toronto, the International Crime Writers Congress. The event represents a coming together of about 300 crime-fiction writers, reviewers and publishers from around the world for a few days of seminars, working sessions, formal dinners and public readings. Previous congresses have been held in London, New York City and Stockholm.

As was the case with the formation of Crime Writers of Canada itself, the inspiration to stage the 1986 congress came from a social occasion. On a Canadian vacation in August, 1985, the group's executive gathered at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., for a meeting in Sara Woods' back-garden garden. A warm and genial Englishwoman in her early sixties, Sara is a prolific writer of mysteries—more than 40 of her books had been published at last count—who has settled with her husband, retired from a career as a business executive in both England and Canada, in a gracious 155-year-old house in Niagara-on-the-Lake. By all reports, she is a persuasive hostess.

"Sitting in Sara's garden," Tony Aspler says, "I think we got enthralled by her wine and the hot summer sun, and when one of us said, 'Why don't we invite the crime-fiction world to come to Canada? everyone immediately agreed it would be a grand idea.'"

Aspler pauses in his recollections.

"It's going to be a monumental job staging the congress," he says. "You could do it could be something fantastic. It could be the final step in putting Canadian crime fiction on the international map."

Howard Engel, who has been a radio producer at the CBC for many years, has written four books in the past five years about the clumsy but clever Canadian sleuth Benny Cooperman.

THE HARD DECISION

On March 3, 1985, Gordon Thomson, president of Esso Petroleum Canada, announced a painful decision made by Imperial Oil: to suspend operations at the company's Montreal refinery. About 300 employees were affected. Here is what happened that day and since then.

BY RON LABEL

For 37 years, Paul Donato had been working for the same employer, Imperial Oil Limited. He had begun his career at the Montreal-East refinery as a young engineer fresh out of university and had risen through the ranks. As manager of the refinery during the last 10 years, he had experienced all the pits generated by the energy crisis. He
thought he had seen everything.
Then came March 3, 1983. On that Thursday morning, Donato summoned eight department heads to a special meeting in the refinery's boardroom. He cautioned them that they were in for a trying day. More than ever, they would have to remain calm and tactful in their dealings with the roughly 500 employees. A crucial decision was expected from Gordon Thomson, president of Esso Petroleum Canada, at about noon.

At 12:20 p.m., Donato's phone rang. "It's go," said Thomson. Imperial's board of directors had reluctantly decided to suspend operations at the refinery by the end of the year, after 87 years of production. Now it was up to the manager to inform the staff quickly without setting off panic reactions. Already, some radio stations had carried shutdown rumors, which worried many employees and their relatives. Donato's office was soon flooded with calls. The refinery's management had decided to call a press conference late that afternoon and to explain the decision directly to all 467 members of the staff beforehand. Until then, callers would have to be given noncommittal replies.

At 1:30 p.m., Donato broke the news to about 30 managers, senior engineers and senior foremen. This began a series of small meetings throughout the huge refinery complex at the eastern tip of Montreal Island. At two o'clock that afternoon, Paul Donato met the employee representatives on the refinery's joint industrial council. "After I had finished speaking," he recalls, "there was a terrible silence. A few of them were expecting a partial shutdown, others thought there would be some layoffs, but a suspension of operations was quite a shock. Our workers had deep roots in Montreal and an average of 12 years' service. In many cases, their fathers and grandfathers had worked at the refinery."

"Even the most seasoned trademen, including the joint industrial council chairman, Roland Depatie, couldn't hold back tears. "I will never forget that March 3," he says. "To me, the decision amounted to failure. I couldn't understand why we had to close when the company had kept telling us the refinery was very efficient.""

Until the very last moment, Esso Petroleum had indeed tried everything to make the refinery more efficient and modern. Nearly $200 million had been invested in various improvement projects at the refinery — the oldest in Quebec — over the previous 10 years. Obsolete equipment had been replaced, automated controls installed and costs slashed. " Barely one year earlier," observes Roger Hamel, then the Quebec region manager for Imperial, "we had announced a $61-million modernization project, and by March 3 we had spent about $45 million. Unfortunately, we had not realized how fast product demand was falling in Eastern Canada. There had been a drop of 20 percent, mostly since 1980, and we projected there would be another sharp decline during the rest of the decade. In Quebec, for instance, production of heating oil had fallen by half in just five years, mostly because of the rapid conversion to natural gas and electricity."

Like many other employees that day, Bertrand Dubé was incredulous. "An experienced welder in his thirties, he had worked on a string of modernization projects. "The refinery had been rebuilt from A to Z," he recalls. "A lot of young workers had been hired, and we were told our productivity rating was very good. Then, all of a sudden, they tell us we're closing. It was unthinkable.""

As for Jacinthe Dauphin, a young chemical engineer with four years' experience, her main reaction was relief. "At last," she says, "we knew where we stood. We had been hearing so many bad rumors for six months that we were walking on hot coals."

For the Esso Petroleum employees, however, there was a pleasant surprise. They found out they would not be laid off like the victims of so many other plant closures in Canada since the beginning of the recession. The company had decided to protect their financial security — not a single employee would be "terminated."

Each one was offered another job, at an equivalent level if at all possible, in Imperial's plants and offices from coast to coast. All moving costs would be paid, and no one would suffer a pay cut. Armed with a 20-page information kit explaining the relocation programs, the employees were sent home early to discuss the future with their families. "We could have adopted the traditional method of shutting down abruptly and firing the whole staff," says Hamel, who retired on September 1, 1984. "Instead, we chose to guarantee a job to everyone, from the office boy with six months' service to the most highly trained technician. Our employees made up a very special team, and our top priority was to soften the blow as much as possible."

But there was another reason, and it was just as compelling. "The refinery employees in Montreal," said Esso Petroleum's president, Gordon Thomson, "were a very skilled and industrious group of people. It was in the company's interest to do everything possible to retain them. So, from the beginning, we made every effort to do so. We knew that if we could keep them on staff elsewhere, we'd be enriching the company's life. It was a painful decision to suspend operations, believe me, but we did what we could to act in the interests not just of the employees but of the company."

Thus, in the spring of 1983, 500 families began wrestling with some tough dilemmas. Should they accept a transfer to a city far from friends and relatives? Should eligible employees take early retirement? Could they get used to living in an English-speaking region? Could middle-aged people learn a second language from scratch in a short time?

Gilbert Denis, one of 51 Montreal employees who transferred to Edmonton's Suncor refinery (below), in 1984.

René German: like many employees he found the move to the Suncor refinery both painful and rewarding.

"We thought he had seen everything."

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"It's go," said Thomson. Imperial's board of directors had reluctantly decided to suspend operations at the refinery by the end of the year, after 87 years of production. Now it was up to the manager to inform the staff quickly without setting off panic reactions. Already, some radio stations had carried shutdown rumors, which worried many employees and their relatives. Donato's office was soon flooded with calls. The refinery's management had decided to call a press conference late that afternoon and to explain the decision directly to all 467 members of the staff beforehand. Until then, callers would have to be given noncommittal replies.
supervision to their assistants in order to work full-time on the various manpower programs. Now faced the task of trying to relocate nearly 300 employees in places outside Montreal. Even then, two-thirds of them, 196, agreed to move — a surprisingly high proportion under the circumstances. Bertrand Dubé claims that during the period between the move to Dartmouth since he had enjoyed a six-week stint there during a management project earlier that year. "Moving to an anglophone province means a big change for a Quebecker," he notes, "but I found the people in Nova Scotia really friendly."

He was shocked, however, when he discovered that real-estate prices in Dartmouth were much higher than in Montreal — about $20,000 more for a comfortable house. "The oil discoveries offshore have provoked a real boom here," he says, "but we managed to find a house similar to our old one but with a garage. A lawyer from Imperial looked after the purchase, and we got some help to cover the difference in interest costs. The company was really helpful."

An additional problem was that Dartmouth plant itself, however, the atmosphere was a little cool at first. "We signed some papers and left the personnel office, got a hard hat and one hour after arriving were on the job. We were not given a tour of the plant. We maintained the old production, and there weren't any slowdowns.

You don't see that too often." Donato, who is now 61, decided to take early retirement himself. "I spent 16 years outside Quebec," he says, "and didn't feel like moving again at the dollar's current level."

During the summer and fall, about 100 Quebec employees, spouses and children settled in Edmonton. Two of these were skilled technicians. Gilbert Denis and Rene Germain. They had some happy experiences with the newcomers, and management at the Strathcona refinery set up a resourceful, 24-hourly assistance committee. The group organized three-day orientation sessions for transferred families, featuring bus tours of Edmonton, tours of the downtown core.

Paul Donato, former manager of the Montreal refinery, has high praise for the dedicated work of the employee assistance team. The unit is set up to help workers in their day-to-day lives. A trip "that is a goal," he says, "a reward that keeps us going." While the various transferred workers and their families faced different problems in adapting to their new environment, Montreal has Imperial's highest marks for its handling of the relocation. Very few Canadian companies, if any, got as good a reception as they did, and virtually no families from Quebec received English instruction based on everyday activities, such as visiting a meat market or a garage. "That welcome program was very well thought out," notes Denis. "It was a positive experience for us.

The largest contingent from Montreal — about 300 people, including 78 employees — moved to Sarnia. Gilles Boucher, an engineer with almost 20 years' service, obtained the same job he had held in Montreal, which was that of manager of mechanical operations. A mass transfer involving so many people raised all sorts of problems, and the company's observers, "The company did everything it could to minimize the impact and to deal with all the changes and family problems you go through. The school system is different, and there's a whole French-language high school in the city. At work, though, we feel we were brought in to help and to cooperate. As in the case of any new job, we had to build our own relationships and routines. On the whole, though, the group from Quebec has integrated well and people here are nice."

While many found more hurdles than they had expected, few of the relocated employees expressed their choice. Their daily lives have changed in many ways. Much is different — the climate, the lifestyle, the jobs. French-language schools are scarce. Some Quebec training certificates for skilled workers are not recognized in other provinces and new exams must be written in English. Many want to abandon stimulating careers. Diane Guinane, wife of Gilbert Denis, describes her experience as an opening. "All of a sudden, you're back at square one. Some people in Montreal were saying that we were lucky to avoid losing our jobs, but I sometimes wondered whether job security was worth the price we were paying."

Last summer she spent a few weeks in Quebec to see her home city. "A trip that is a goal," she says, "a reward that keeps us going."
The playground of the public school in north Toronto is filled with children waiting for the morning bell to summon them. A small boy shouts to a friend who is holding a football, "Hey, Dougie, throw it here." Two girls with skipping ropes recite a rhyme in unison. The chatter is loud and completely in English.

Suddenly, the bell rings, and they dash toward the door. In a classroom on the first floor, the young woman who teaches Grade 1 welcomes them. "Bonjour," she says with a smile. They smile back and return her greeting. One little girl adds, "J'ai oublié mon livre.

This could be any public-school classroom in Toronto, except that the bright poster on the back wall talks about les pommes, les pêches, les chiens et les chats, the words on the blackboard are in French, the spelling and arithmetic books are in French and every word that is spoken by the teacher and the students, is in French. It is a French-immersion class.

It is an experiment that children who are still exploring their first language should undertake their formal education in a second one. But that is the immersion theory, and it's now accepted by virtually everyone who has studied the way children learn. Youngsters can absorb two and even three languages at once without confusion — and the earlier they start, the more quickly they learn.

Just before noon, the bell rings again. English words, French words and laughter fill the halls and tumble out into the school yard. One little boy runs toward his mother, who is waiting for him on the sidewalk.

"Ca va bien?" he calls. She laughs. Eleven years ago, when Ann Loughtery was 11, she joined the first Grade 7 immersion class at Ottawa's Alta Vista Public School. Quickly she made a discovery that surprised her: "I could do as well in that class as I'd been doing before in the English program — and learn French. It seemed like killing two birds with one stone." Although early expressed in such terms, the idea of learning two languages is sweeping the country. Last spring, when the Calgary Board of Education announced that it would accept early registration for French-immersion classes, more than a dozen parents slept on the sidewalk in front of Mayland Heights Elementary School to avoid being shut out. The same scene was repeated at two other schools in Calgary.

This year, about 150,000 students in Canadian elementary and high schools from British Columbia to Newfoundland — including at least 15,000 beginners — are receiving some portion of their education in French. And the number is growing by about 20 percent a year as hundreds of thousands of English parents join the rush to produce a generation of youngsters fluent in both English and French.

Some of the impetus is economic. Many parents believe their children will be better equipped for the job market if they speak both official languages.

This view is supported by a 1980 study, written by a staff member of the Economic Council of Canada, that showed bilingual men and women earn between 10 and 15 percent more than Canadians who speak only one language. But parents have reasons other than economic ones for wanting their children to be bilingual. "I just think it's a good idea," one mother says, "for us all to be able to speak to one another." Judy Gibson of Pont-Croquillan, B.C., who has two children in French-immersion classes, expresses it this way: "We hoped our children's intensive exposure to a second culture would stimulate an interest in the world beyond their community and a tolerance and understanding of others. If we couldn't afford to travel, then bringing a little of the world to them was a good alternative.

Another reason for the success of French immersion is an organization called Canadian Parents for French. This voluntary group now has about 11,000 members in the 110 chapters that form its 10 provincial and territorial organizations. Its goal is to support and improve French-language learning opportunities, and it achieves this in a variety of ways, which include providing interested groups with speakers, newsletters, research funding and advice on organization and on dealing with school boards and the media. From the very beginning, as the name suggests, parents — not professional educators — have been the catalyst.

The immersion approach was first proposed 22 years ago by a parent group in the Montreal community of St. Lambert. The group persuaded Quebec's Ministry of Education and a local school board to initiate an immersion experiment in a school and carefully evaluate it. The spread of language immersion was greatly aided by the positive results of that experiment.

One man who was extremely close to early developments in language-immersion programs in Ottawa — which were among the first to be introduced — and later across the country is W. Russell McGillivray, who served as the superintendent of programs for the Carleton Board of Education until his retirement in 1983 and is now an educational consultant. He helped develop early immersion programs (those that begin in kindergarten or Grade 1) and shape the research projects that have studied early and late immersion programs (late immersion programs are those that begin in Grades 6, 7 or 8). Over the years, he has also welcomed a parade of observers from the United

French immersion programs are found in all parts of Canada, including the Yukon where 150 children are enrolled in a program at Whitehouse Elementary School.
Balloons That Flew" for youngsters of 11 to 15 years who are trying to decide whether to continue their education in French or switch to an English program. But mostly the association has been helping small groups of parents across the country to persuade their school boards to introduce French immersion programs. The results of the group's efforts are impressive. In Ontario, there are about 100,000 students in French immersion programs, the most in any province. In New Brunswick, French immersion classes are provided at a variety of levels, starting with those for students who have already learned some. Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have expanding programs in a number of communities. And Newfoundland (including Labrador) now has 8,000 students in immersion classes in seven communities. This is perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the immersion movement.

The birth of the group can be traced back to Keith Spicer, Canada's first commissioner of official languages. In his travels during the middle 1960s he met people from across Canada who were trying to persuade their children attend French immersion programs. He brought 35 of them together for an informal meeting in Ottawa. Among them was a young man named Pat Webster of Oakville, Ont., a mother of five whose children were attending English-language schools.

Each of us had been working alone in our own little corner," she recalls. "The get-together was a super chance to talk. It was obvious that we should set up a national association of parents to work on the same thing within the same framework."

The group met again in 1972, added nine new parents and was formed in March, 1973, with Pat Webster as the national chairman.

The questions came in a torrent. As the association grew, so did the number of people who joined. How can we get French immersion included in our province? Do you really think it will happen? Why, for goodness sake, didn't we try to persuade them sooner? Why didn't we work in the 1960s for French immersion? Can children learn math in French? Why can't we add French immersion to the same age in nonimmersion programs? How will we be able to help my child if we decide to enroll him in French immersion and then move to another province? If we move or the program is discontinued, what are the options available? Are the teachers well qualified? Who can help parents deal with these and many other issues, the organization published a handbook in 1979 called "Parenting Children: What to Look For in French Immersion", which, with 10,000 copies being sold in its first year, qualified for a Best Seller designation. The Canadian Parents for French has also been co-sponsored with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, a book entitled "French Immersion: The Trial about 2000 in the middle of Labrador. She's delighted that her son is learning French immersion, but a little overwhelmed at how quickly the program came about. "In April of last year," she recalls, "I was musing out loud the fact that French immersion courses seemed to be mainly available in large centres. A friend was feeling the same way, so we started talking to people. We finally produced a telephone list of everybody in the area with children of kindergarten age and have met together once a year. In two weeks we had a group and within two months approval for a kindergarten student was given by the school board. As a result, 25 kindergarten children walked into the classroom to begin learning a new language and met with their teacher, Ann Dallaire from Quebec."

While it used to seem that early immersion classes attracted mostly the children of upper-middle-class families, the program in Happy Valley-Goose Bay is proof that the idea no longer appeals to a much wider community. "It's for everybody," says Laura Jackson. "In our programs there are children of single parents, teachers, carpenters, armed forces personnel..." And in some cases people are waiting for wings. "We've got more children waiting in the wings for next year."

Immersion programs have grown most dramatically in Western Canada. In British Columbia, students frequently do better in English studies than those in immersion courses, and predi-lectures on the programs are more like those in other universities than those in immersion courses.

The early concern that French immersion would somehow hinder their learning of English and maths has proved to be unfounded. "If anything, they're more open-minded about that," says Stewart Gooding. "It simply is not true. By the time the immersion children reach Grade 4 or 5, their English-language skills are just as good as those of their child who's studied solely in English, and in other subjects they're just as competent."

McGillivray sees added benefits. "We don't yet have enough hard evidence, but students in immersion programs do seem to be more flexible and more innovative in their thinking, and they certainly have better research skills."

In talking with many parents whose children have attended immersion programs, McGillivray has discovered a common theme. "Regardless of their initial motives for enrolling their children in the program, parents say later that immersion provides a more challenging educational experience for their children than the conventional system. It has opened their horizons and expanded their horizons in a rich way."

Karyn Brown of Hanover, Ont., enrolled her six-year-old son, Kyle, in a French immersion program at James A. Mager Community School. "He's always been shy," she explains. "But now he's completely immersed in the program, he seems to be more outgoing and has a little more confidence."

The parents for French encourages parents to make the most of summer camps, exchange programs, tours, films and children's plays. Pat Webster has observed that "children who have opportunities to use the language in a natural, adult environment realize it's a real language with an important place in community life. They feel a sense of ownership, a sense of pride, and they do it more in the people whose first language it is and a little more naturally."

While French immersion programs have developed greatly in Canada during the last few years, some of the early programs still lack the support of the Canadian government. Relatively few high schools offer immersion programs at the moment, and there are some that are only offered in the country's universities.

Maxwell Yalden, who retired recently after serving seven years as the commissioner of official languages, asked in a recent speech, "Are we doing enough to get the message across to our citizens? Can they learn French?" If we asked it in Grade 8 and then abandon it "for more serious things" do we seriously believe they will still have an effective command of the language a decade or so later when they really need it?"

Russell McGillivray is optimistic that the impact of Canadian Parents for French, which has been so successful to this point, can expand immersion opportunities at school and, particularly, the university level. "The universities," he believes, "are saying, Yes, we'll do it if there's a demand. In four or five years, when thousands of students from immersion programs graduate, they of course will want to maintain their bilingual capability by taking some French subjects in France or Quebec...it's not that we've seen how many students will want to do this and whether the universities will be able to provide the courses satisfactorily."

One solution is for students simply to attend French immersion programs in France or Quebec. "Parents of students who are interested in French as possible, and then enrolled at Laval — a totally French university in Quebec City. "Why did I go to Laval?" she says. "That's what everybody asks me. It was simply that I didn't want to go to a university that closely reflected my middle-class WASP background. I was attracted to the university of Quebec because I thought it was more honest and more open mind."

Russell McGillivray, superintendent for French immersion programs for Ottawa Carleton Board of Education until his retirement in 1981, believes that the parents are the driving force behind the development of French immersion programs.
PLACES OF MY PAST

BY ROBERT THOMAS ALLEN

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES HILL

Sometimes, when I come across one of those real-estate ads listing houses for sale in a sort of economic outer space — "$357,000, delightful Tudor" — "$490,000, near amenities" — I think of the houses I've owned ($12,000, detached and of the places I've lived and the part they've played in my life, of sunny rooms, cellar workbenches and views of bayfields and the sea, and the view from the dining-room window of my boyhood home in east Toronto on a winter afternoon — maybe during Christmas dinner — when the lights were lit on the next street over, and you looked out on shadows backyards and fences and clotheslines, the outside world still there, composed and silent, surrounding our lives. That house had some great features for a kid: an old pitted, thick-painted bookcase right beside my bed, so that I could reach into it on a Saturday morning and take out, say, Treasure Island and float off in my imagination, amid the cracking of waves and crackling of sails, to a gleaming South Sea lagoon that was attached to my bed somehow by a magic golden thread; and an attic up under the peak, where you could lift a pane of amber colored crinkled glass from behind two bent nails and poke your head out...
a window the size of a pothole and inhale the escaping scent of wool, dust and old steamers trunks and the smell of fresh air, leaves and pavement, and look down and see the tree tops as if from another world, knowing nobody knew you were there.

When I look back over what I have lived, one I remember with special fondness, from the days when my wife and I were making the normal number of moves of young couples, was a room we rented one summer in a clapboard house on Centre Island, just across the bay from downtown Toronto, when Centre Island was a weekend retreat for the backwater of gawkers and bellhops and sagging old houses framed in willows. There was a picnic atmosphere to the place and a festive feeling about the trip home on the ferry, the sound of the ship's horn, the smell of the sea, the sound of the piers and the cannon shot, the red sails of sailboats, the sound of the seagulls and the white cotton of the sea in the sky.

The island was called Ginn's Casino, which had a dance floor and a breezy outdoor lunch counter where you could comfortably sit and listen to the music of Eddie Stroud's orchestra and look out at the lake and imagine the great vespers you were going to do in some vague future. Often, in our room at night, we would sleep to serenaded by dance music.

The first place we owned was a two-story yellow brick house on the brink of a hill in the Beaches district of Toronto from which we could see Lake Ontario, where the three peaks of the tops of the trees at the foot of the hill. What I remember most about the house was that we had close friends living a few streets away. There was a special, enjoyable feeling about knowing that they were over there, having supper at the same time as we were. The women would sometimes arrive at home with a basket of eggs, or a bundle of something; a potted plant, perhaps, or six eggs or some dress fabric, and would deliver them, and we'd walk along Pine Avenue, a quiet tree-lined street, to meet each other. About halfway to the back of the house there was a pleasant porch, one of those I often see of someone approaching along the sidewalk, then I'd see his face and the different types of people who had in-

1. "Here goes your baguette ... Here are your eggs," they'd say, and stand there, one hand on their hip and the other six eggs, and talk, perhaps make plans for a family trip the next weekend to Lake Shore Drive or to the "Gloria" from St. Basil's hammill, and invite me to join them. Another special recollection is of a neighbor, a young woman, who every day would walk along the sidewalk on a moonlit night, sing-

2. ing in harmony, past the church and the dark silhouettes of the palm trees. One of the best places we ever lived was a small house outside a village couple of hours' drive northeast of Toronto. We rented the house and gardens, a neighboring farmer used the pasture and a hayfield next to the house, but for walking, or just looking, the view was lovely. Along the back yard like a feather duster and the round of the cabbage palm on the front lawn, the sound of bells and the tree looking like, someone walking in the direction of the wind. The exercise of the cars passed with their blue light, flashing. When it was dark all you were aware of was the sound of trees and the steady roar of the ocean.

3. The wind began to hit the house with solid blows, the power spot where the sundial joined the outside wall, and we lined up sauce-

4. pans and casserole dishes, placing everything that would hold water — even the rain came into the dining room. We went to bed, laying to the storm, not worried so much about the way it was at that moment, but about how it would be in the morning. And the house was moving a bit when the wind hit it, like a great fire. We all got up and went down to the living room and huddled there around a lamp made of a candle in a Nescafe jar. By daybreak we were still lying on the floor, looking out, having a stunned, staring up at a clear blue sky. I remember there was a great closeness in the family that morning.

5. My wife and I now live in an apart-

6. ment in a high-rise building. When we took it and furnished it, quickly and economically, we thought of it as a temporary base to use while we decided where we were going to live, but we've now been here five years and haven't quite decided yet. We've moved so often that we haven't many possessions left. Sometimes we feel embarrassed at having touched an age that is referred to by magazines for old folks as "maturity" without having finally settled down. We feel that we should have our own house, all paid for, and be putting around the garden or workbench. But we have a lot of pleasant memories, including memories of some great gardens and workbenches. My wife has grown bananas and papayas and had hedges of yuca and oleander, and has grown giant squash on the farm, and I had workbench with a working surface made of hickory covers that I salvaged from the beach. Sometimes when we talk about the place places we've lived and I don't think we'd trade our memories of them for anything else. The disadvantages — for instance, insecurity — it has also had its good side. on the other hand, we have been living in the house we rented near wooded bluffs in east Toronto, where; a half a minute's walk we could drive ourselves into a clump down to a seacoast and listen to the waves breaking on the rocks, or out to the bluffs of Laguna Beach, California, where Catalina Island looked like a slate-blue cloud on the horizon and there was a fragrance of cypress leaves, sagebrush, kelp, mist and grilled steaks in the warm air, the bungalow we once owned in flat open countryside west of Toronto where we could see the sun setting in a station in a field that belonged in the Pratins, a scene right out of Doctor Zhivago. Our daughters still talk of the Easter-morning treasure hunts they had on the beach — "Go to the second dune and take the basket," they'd say, with a nest of kittens in the barn on the farm, and of the Christmas tree of Spanish moss brought home from a cigarette package, which we had one year in a motel room in Tecumseh when we came back from the south and stayed in them until we headed north for the cottage. Once we moved into a cottage during a snowstorm. The only heat we had was from an open fire, and we cooked soft coal briquettes in town, and on the same trip bought delicious homemade bread, and I still remember the sprawling snowscape with the soft coal sacking and fresh head with those days on the shores of Ontario's Georgian Bay. We stayed in a cottage on Lake Simcoe, north of Toronto, until October before starting south again. We drove in a gray wagon in the golden time of year when chipmunks flitted around the empty cottages and the misty nights were perfumed with the wild scent of skunks, and the lake lay calm and warm and pale blue and a fisherman's only companions was the only person swimming in Lake Simcoe, and only the swimming was under water, while floating around looking up at the sky, and we would be living next, something I'm not quite sure of yet. Q
In Closing

One afternoon in the fall of 1914, a nine-year-old boy named Sidney Richard Johnson sat on the ground at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto when he looked up to see a magician standing before a small crowd, producing a deck of playing cards from the pocket of his vast coat. He was spellbound. He paid the magician's assistant a dime for a little book that promised to explain it all; naturally, it explained nothing. But it contained advertisements inviting him to send away for tricks—yes, or, as they are called in the parlance of magic, effects. He became the owner of a copy of a book of magic. By the time he was 16 years old he was performing and becoming known to his audiences by the stage name Sid Lorraine. In time, when he was in middle age, he was held in enormous esteem by magicians the world over, not just as a performer of magic, but, even more, as its scholar, a being of distinction in the world of magic.

The biggest question some have about magic is whether it can find a place in an age in which all novelty seems revealed, with computers in the home and people on the moon and various other miracles seen on the nightly news. “I don’t think we should have any great worry over that,” says Sid Johnson. “For example, if you watch people, particularly children, at a magic show today, you would see they can still be just as amazed when a magician does something with a handkerchief or an egg or a coin as I was so many years ago. And, after all, it’s done by a human being. It’s a person taking a thing in a world in which we are surrounded by technology, but they still respond to a person standing right in front of them who is able to mystify them. Magic will always have a place.”

Mr. Johnson has certain convictions about magic. One of which is that he has expressed in the series of lectures he has given at magic conventions—in Britain, the United States, and Canada. In fact, he retired from his full-time career as an art director at a large advertising agency in Toronto. He says, for example, that no matter how brilliant the magician’s sleight of hand, if the magic doesn’t really entertain, it shouldn’t be shown to the public.

“One, when I was a young man I knew a very gifted Mexican magician, Manuel, who was able to do some amazing things with coins. He was so good that he could do sleight of hand with both hands, and he’d be using both hands at the same time. He came to Toronto. He was staying in a cheap hotel; he was drawing small crowds. One day, he and I went to see another magician perform—a man of more ordinary talent in my view, but one who did tricks people knew and told jokes that brought the house down. The Mexican magician turned to me and said, ‘I wish I could do that.’ I said, ‘But your talent is infinitely better.’ He replied, ‘But look at the crowd he’s got.’ I’ve never forgotten that. No matter how good you are with your hands and with misdirection, you’ve got to entertain.’”

For that reason, Mr. Johnson pays a large tribute to the work of Doug Henning, the Canadian whose work on television and on Broadway has made him famous around the world. But there are some more traditional magicians who argue that Henning’s work relies more on modern music and colorful staging than the elements of pure magic that distinguished great conjurers of the past. “That criticism can be made,” says Mr. Johnson, “but it merely reflects individual taste. And the thing to remember is that magic must be open to change, and Doug has fostered that. Some magicians, like people in every field, don’t like change. They insist, for example, in working always in a black suit. I gave that up years ago. I left black suits to undertakers.”

Beyond that, Doug Henning’s work has given magic great new popularity. There are more magicians working today than at any time I can remember in the past 20 years. And part of the reason is that Doug Henning’s great success has given magic a new popularity.”

“It’s true that Mr. Johnson performs these days? Mr. Johnson replies in two words. “Trade shows.” These gatherings, he says, whether they are to promote tires or tractors, almost always have magicians at work entertaining visitors either at display booths or on small stages. “You can’t find a good trade show these days.” He says, “that doesn’t have at least four magicians in it. There was a show in Canada last year, and there were more than a dozen magicians working at it. Two of the men are friends of mine from abroad and both had been booked last year for a trade show in Rome this summer. And do you know what they use? The old magic, the same things I was doing 30 years ago. They work with a deck of cards. That’s why I’m feeling very good about magic’s quality to endure.”

I left Mr. Johnson’s home late that afternoon, but I was to see him again another evening a few days later, when a group of magicians, members of Toronto’s Hat and Rabbit Club, got together at a downtown restaurant where they watched a couple of magicians perform and where a few of the members strolled in a good natured way. I was to find that table to be doing magic with coins and cards.

Mr. Johnson sat, along with his wife and several of the club’s older members, at a table set aside for them near the front of the room, where, along with the rest of us, they watched a couple of young magicians produce streams of silk and handfuls of coins and doves that perched on their arms. Sometimes we glanced over toward the entertainers, a stage reached into the air for coins or silks in ways that, for all we knew, he may have devised or refined for magicians everywhere. Yet each time they performed another miracle, he seemed just as surprised and, in fact, just as enthralled as he must have been on that day more than 70 years ago when he came under the spell of magic—a spell that was to be so deep, so enduring and so treasured by those who followed him.

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