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Imperial Oil

Winter in the Laurentians
by Frank Hennessey
A FAMILY OF FRIENDS

In 1965, about a year after my parents had left their farm and moved to Vancouver, I met the Tishko family of the Mennonite-Grade Six school. I was 12 years old. They were from Menno, a town in the Netherlands. I remember them as very kind and warm people.

My parents were from the Mennonite Church in Ontario, and they had moved to Canada in the early 1960s. They had left their small town in the Netherlands to find a better life in Canada. They had come from a family of farmers and decided to start a new life in a new country.

The Tishko family had also left their home in the Netherlands to find a better life in Canada. They had moved to a small town in the Prairies, and they had become very close friends with my family.

The Tishko family was very caring and supportive. They would often come over for dinner and would help my parents with their daily chores. They were also very interested in my education and would often drop by to see how I was doing in school.

The Tishko family and my family were very close friends. We would often go on picnics together and would spend hours playing games in the park. We would also often go on bike rides together and would stop at the local ice cream shop for a treat.

The Tishko family was very different from our family. They were from a different culture and had a different way of life. But despite these differences, we were able to find common ground and become close friends.

The Tishko family was very important to our family. They helped us to navigate this new country and were always there for us when we needed them. They were a big part of our lives and will always be remembered with fondness.

The Tishko family was a great influence on me. They taught me the importance of hard work and dedication. They also taught me the importance of being kind and supportive to others.

I will always remember the Tishko family and the time we spent together. They were a big part of my life and will always be remembered with fondness.
which they were scheduled to travel to Manitouw, unpacked their domestic utensils, Shouldered the railway personnel aside and attacked it vigorously with buckets of soap and water. "If we scrub that train from top to bottom," she laughed, still enjoying the memory. "We even cleaned the train-driver's windshields!" It was that same spirit that enabled Mennonites to turn large parts of the vast, treed Canadian prairie into some of the most productive farmland in the whole country.

As children we always answered curi- ous queries about who we were by ex- plaining who we weren't — that is, what we didn't do. Mennonites didn't smoke or drink. They didn't watch television or go to the movies. Mennonites didn't join the military. They didn't dance. They didn't wear civil clothes. They didn't join labour unions or fraternal organizations. They didn't try to overthrow existing governments.

In southern Ontario, the more conserva- tive Mennonites maintained an even longer list of restrictions. They didn't put pictures on their walls (graven im- ages) or sew buttons rather than ties on their clothes (spatially dirty). They didn't use electricity or the telephone (moderants). They didn't drive cars or even tractors.

In time, of course, North American influences nibbled away at this list, with results whose comic side even conserva- tive Mennonites have nowadays come to chuckle about. Dividing God's will has always been an imperfect science, with no certainty about just how much His instructions might have been coloured by the diviner's personal tastes and pref- erences. Thus some Mennonite leaders were convinced that God would only permit electricity in the barn, while oth- ers permitted its use in the house as well. Some announced that God forbade the use of tractors entirely, while others gradually allowed them — but only if fitted with uncomfortable steel wheels. Eventually, some churches began to con- done automobiles, but only those with- out chrome or on which the chrome which had been obscured with black paint.

Trying to keep up with this sort of rea- soning kept local (non-Mennonite) auto- mobile dealers in a constant state of con- fusion. It even led to several auto-dealer bankruptcies, when an elder of a very large church, who had previously insis- tently on only "carriage-like automo- biles" (for example, open landau cars), unexpectedly relented and permitted the use of more modern vehicles. Local deal- ers, who had ordered large numbers of the expensive and rather old-fashioned vehicles to conform to the elder's pre- vious regulations, were suddenly stuck with a lethal number of unsellable, unre- turnable cars.

To qualities such as thrift and industry one should probably add the propensity for a certain fastidiousness. The Mennonite preoccupation with order and neatness (the proper way) has always con- tributed a significant part of the Mennonite makeup, and it took many immi- grants, my father among them, some time to get used to North American in- formality and imprecision. Back in Ger- many my father had been trained as a cabinetmaker, and I can still remember the way he would stand suspiciously at door jams or window frames in the liv- ing rooms of the various Canadian houses we lived in or visited and then leap up, make a few swift measurements and sit back down again, disgusted. He always owned two tape measures, a wide- chrome-plated Lufkin for the six work- days of the week and a little black one, small enough to fit inconspicuously into the watch-pocket of his Sunday suit, for the seventh day, when work was strictly prohibited.

Until the 1960s most Mennonites were farmers, both by choice and by conviction. They considered it an al- most religious calling — a vocation de- signed by God as the one most right and proper for a Mennonite to pursue. And although the steady migration of farmers to Canada's towns and cities since then has included many Mennon- ites, the old instincts are hard to erase. "You know I just can't figure it," a Mennonite accountant from Vancouver laughed as we talked about our childhood on the farm. "It still wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning — maling time — even though I haven't smelled the inside of a barn in 20 years. It's as automatic as going to church on Sun- day. I can almost feel my old man shak- ing me up at dusk and whispering 'Opaaimer, Wills, maren.'"

My own parents left their farm most reluctantly, after an outbreak of disease in our dairy herd made it impossible to continue.

In the old days, everybody in a Men- nonite family pitched in unquestion- ingly to support the family farm. Paying for and building up a farm constituted most Mennonites' primary preoccupa- tion. As kids it didn't even occur to us to question that. We picked strawber- ries, raspberries, beans, blueberries and even hops all summer long, and every penny we earned was used to pay down the mortgage. Our "salary" was an ice- cream cone at the Harrison Hot Springs Hotel at the end of the summer. This was nothing new. From the 1920s to the 1950s, hundreds of Mennonite farm girls had routinely worked as domestics or factory workers in the larger western cities, always sending their wages home. As recently as the 1960s it wasn't unusual for Mennonite young people to be taken out of school for a year or two to contribute full-time to freeing the family of its farm debt.

Even if there wasn't a farm debt to be paid off, many of the more conservative Mennonites, afraid of secular educa- tion, would pull their children out of school as soon as the law allowed. And those who didn't go that far endeav- oured to ensure that their children upheld the traditional barriers between the Mennonite and "English" world. During supper, for example, my father or mother would often ask what I had been taught in school that day and would then proceed to put what I had learned in the "proper perspective." Much of what public schools offered us in the areas of science or social studies thus received considerable revision.

Most Mennonites came to Canada speaking at least two languages and soon spoke three: High German in church, Low German or Pennsylvania-Dutch (widely misnamed Pennsylva- nia-Dutch) at home and English in town. Pennsylvania-German was largely spoken by the Swiss-German Mennon- ites of Ontario and Low German by
the Dutch-German Mennonites of the Pratins. Though these two dialects are quite dissimilar they share a wonderful comicality and cheekiness that belies the Mennonites’ reputation for excessiveness, severity, and Calvinism. Their earnestness and impertinence make these dialects virtually impossible to translate properly. I know, I’ve tried my hand at it many a time. Since neither dialect is familiar with proper grammar, one can spell anything any way one pleases, and it’s an adventure all by itself to try to wrestle either dialect into print. Furthermore, neither dialect has been invaded by modern technical jargon, and thus the terms for anything invented after the 18th century tend to be quite ingenious. A vacuum cleaner in Low German, for example, is called a Jübel (bowling broom) or Schafzuga (stuffed lack). A tape recorder is called an Oppbotschach (vase dropper) and a cassette tape a Drehsenrot (circular string). Even nontechnical descriptions tend to be frank and colourful. A young woman’s hair is called a Jübelhau (giggle cat) and a pretentious, macho man a Mädbinge (mosquito-stallion). The sense of where each language should be used quickly becomes part of every Mennonite’s intuitive reflexes. A teenage carthel candidate in our church, whose job it was to stand just outside the church doors every Sunday morning to hand out the weekly bulletin, once described to me an absolutely typical scene. As he stood there two old Mennonite struggles stepped up the stairs toward him, both gesticulating and chattering excitedly in Low German of recent trials and spills and in the high drama of doll picking. “And the split-second they reached the church doors they just automatically switched to High German—bango—without even missing a beat,” he chortled. “I don’t even think they register the change consciously. You just don’t speak Low German in the House of the Lord, at least not upstairs in the church proper. We’ve all been brought up that way,” he laughed. “But it didn’t stop them for a second from continuing with their doll picking saga—all the way up the stairs to their seats.”

Speaking of food, for which the Mennonites are justly famous—their farmer’s sausage, wide variety of delicious pastas and pies, sauerkraut, porgi-like verrekl, aipcd red cabbage and a way of roasting ducks for which even the ducks are said to contribute themselves with enthusiasm—I’ve never encountered soups quite as good as those made by the Mennonite mothers, aunts and grandmother in my life. (Few Mennonite men, it appears, have as yet evolved sufficiently to be allowed near the production end of a soup pot.) It always starts with real stock—no bones ever went into the garbage in our house before contributing their marrow to the soup pot first—followed by an array of vegetables, spices, cream and egg yolks, the specifics and proportions of which I can only guess at. All I know is that nothing ever set the world right as predictably as a huge bowl of Tante Gertras’ Mennonite asparagus or mixed-vegetable soup. It has always struck me as entirely appropriate that the Mennonites’ unofficial motto is “Make borsche, not war.”

The matter of names is another interesting aspect of Mennonite life. The vast family trees and the habit of passing the parents’ and grandparents’ given names directly on to the children have resulted in a very small number of names being used by a very large number of people. Thus a non-Mennonite in a Dutch-German Mennonite town in Manitoba or Saskatchewan might well be forgiven for the distinct impression that absolutely everybody in the phonebook is called John Wiebe, John Epp or John Jacob. In Ontario’s Swiss-German Mennonite towns, the names tend to be John Martin, John Shantz or John Weber.

To lessen this confusion at least a little, both Mennonite groups have developed a tradition of giving their members informal nicknames—such as Second-Hand Weber or Sunflower-Cracker Jazera, Goodstein (Big Feet) Martin, Dead-End Shantz, Drag-Race Epp or Zoop Zuck Wiebe. These monikers are linked to personal idiosyncrasies, places of work or dwelling, or virtually anything else that helps distinguish one John Wiebe from the 11 others living on the same concession road. (Drag-Race Epp, by the way, didn’t own a drag strip, he had a game left.)

In recent years, much has changed in the makeup and demographics of the almost 600,000-member Mennonite community. While many of the “religious” Mennonites—still worship regularly, others, called “ethnic” Mennonites, no longer belong to the church, though they still belong to the culture. More than three-quarters of Canadian Mennonites now live in towns and cities. The original Dutch-German and Swiss-German groups now represent merely the two largest parts of a culture that in Canada alone has grown to include Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Punjabi and Chinese-speaking congregations. Most formerly German-speaking congregations have switched to English. The use of Low German and Pennsylvania-German is fading fast. It’s becoming harder and harder to distinguish Mennonites from other Protestant Christians.

But it’s mostly the ethnic Mennonites, like myself, who lament the too-rapid passage of this sturdy, colourful, often wonderfully idiosyncratic culture. Religious Mennonites quite rightly argue that we’re lamenting the least important aspect of Anabaptist heritage. They point to the spirit of charity and mutual assistance, which remains as vigorously in evidence as ever the ploughing, barn-raising and quilting bees, the hugely successful relief work of the Mennonite Central Committee both inside and outside Canada, the Mennonite Disaster Service, which sends volunteers to rebuild people’s houses and barns following tornadoes and blizzards, the rock in the seething social whirl represented by a church dedicated to Christian principles and the security of a healthy family in a world falling apart for lack of enough values. And they’re right, of course. Of course they’re right.

But it would be an awful shame to have to face the day without at least a prospect of a bowl of Tante Gertras’ magnificent cold apple compote or her sinfully good Mennonite asparagus soup to stave off the lurking evils of the world...
THE FUTURE of OIL:
NO EASY ANSWERS

BY PAUL MILLER

Future historians, when they come to describe the 20th century, may well be inclined to call it "The Petroleum Century." Petroleum has provided much of the power that has made the past 100 years a period of unprecedented change. It has sparked the greatest explosion in mobility since the evolution of winged flight, compressing distances, re-shaping cultures, changing the aspect of cities and, arguably, creating entirely new levels of expectation about individual freedom.

As the Canadian petroleum industry enters the last decade of the millennium, however, it certainly faces a bogglesome array of uncertainties: What prices will oil and gas fetch? How fast will new supplies be developed? Will oilandsregain and frontier development be economic over the longer term? Will imports gain in terms of market share? Will exports rise or fall? How fast will domestic consumption grow? How will international events affect the politics and economics of energy? What impact will environmental concerns have on the production and use of petroleum?

There are no easy one-word answers to those questions. The future of oil will depend on a complex web of factors, and even the most likely scenario of one day can be totally altered—as recent events in the Middle East have demonstrated so dramatically—by the political upheavals of the next century. Complexity and uncertainty, however, do not cause the world to stop. Companies like Imperial Oil—working in an industry where a product delivery in the year 2000 could depend on a government approval received today—must look to the future to guide their current plans and investments. To help them construct the most likely scenario of future scenarios, organizations in both the public and the private sectors enlist the aid of people like Jim Hughes, Imperial's manager of energy analysis.

To Hughes, the starting point for assessing the future of oil is demand. And, as he sees it, the three critical elements creating greater demand for oil in the next decade or two will be the continued need for fuels used in transportation, economic growth in the less developed nations; and the new unknown surge of growth that may occur when the centrally planned economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union join the mainstream of world trade.

Transportation is the most important of the three. Oil fueled the transportation explosion of the 20th century; now the close relationship between oil and mobility appears likely to persist well into the 21st century. The foundation of that relationship can be summed up in two concepts: energy density and cost-handling.

"Oil still has a significant advantage in the transportation sector because of its high energy density—the amount of energy it delivers for every kilogram," says Hughes. "When you have to carry your energy around with you, for example in an airplane, it's difficult to find a substitute for the high concentrations that oil delivers. And oil has a second advantage: unlike some fuels, it's easy to use and you can refuel quickly.

Hughes notes that in recent years in Canada, oil has been steadily edged out of some of its other traditional uses, such as providing heat for homes and office buildings. In its place, Canadians have chosen alternatives such as electricity and natural gas, which are readily available, comparatively priced and have particular advantages in certain situations. As a result, this country now uses oil for a smaller percentage of its total energy needs than any major industrialized nation.

From a peak of almost 40 percent in 1979, oil's share of the Canadian energy market has fallen to just over 30 percent. The same trend has been evident in Europe and Japan, although not to the same degree, mainly because they lack attractively priced alternatives.

In the domain of transportation, however, oil still reigns, providing virtually all of the energy consumed. Growth in demand for transportation energy has been one of the main reasons that the world's daily oil demand has increased by about one million barrels each year during the past five years. But what impact will environmental concerns have on future demand for oil in transportation and other sectors? Both those who produce the oil and those who use it are concerned that by burning fossil fuels we could be spoiling the quality of our air and contributing to global warming.

In air quality there is some good news. Over the last ten years, thanks to legislation, companies have cleaned up and tougher emission controls on cars, urban air quality in Canada has been improving steadily by almost every measurable standard. As older cars are replaced by newer ones and oil companies continue to remove potential pollutants from gasoline, air quality is likely to improve even further. Meanwhile, in less densely populated areas such as western Canada, auto emissions have never been a significant contributor to air pollution. Nevertheless, it's quite possible that, given the general concern in North America over air quality—sparked by smog problems in relatively limited areas such as the Los Angeles basin—governments in areas with major air quality problems could place limits or taxes on gas consumption that would affect the demand for oil.

Governments policies to address global warming could also affect oil demand. Scientists with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change agree that heat-trapping atmospheric gases are increasing and will lead to higher global temperatures—although they are less certain about the timing, magnitude and regional patterns of this climate change. They also agree that the burning of fossil fuels contributes to this phenomenon. It's clear that, working on its own, Canada can accomplish little on this issue. We contribute only about two percent of all the carbon dioxide emissions produced from fossil fuels, and studies have shown that attempts to reduce our output significantly could cost tens of billions of dollars, with the burden falling more heavily on some regions. So any response must be international and based on careful discussion and research.

Given these concerns, why not simply find other fuels to replace oil in transportation? Unfortunately, some of the substances being suggested for gasoline pose a variety of practical and technical problems of their own, which is one reason why they are not already more widely used. One of the leading contenders, for example, is methanol. However, because it is highly corrosive, car engines must be modified to use it. And metha-
not requires more energy to manufacture and lacks the energy density of gasoline: a car that will get 560 kilometers from a tank of gasoline will travel only 340 kilometers on a similar quantity of methanol. Moreover, methanol also releases much more formic acid, a possible carcinogen.

A more fruitful approach may be to reduce the pollution potential of the energy products we already have. Many experts believe that improved versions of existing products—a new generation of “green gasoline,” for example—will continue to power the greatest proportion of the world’s vehicles well into the 21st century.

Another key to the future of oil demand is consumption in the less-developed countries of the world, those in southern Asia, Africa and Latin America. The populations of these regions are growing quite rapidly and their per capita income is relatively low. Economic growth will be needed even to maintain incomes at their existing levels and, beyond that, to raise living standards closer to those in the industrialized world. Energy will be needed to fuel that economic growth; in fact, developing nations are expected to account for more than 60 percent of the world’s total growth in demand for energy during the next 20 years, and almost all of that growth is demand for oil.

"Oil is a good, easy source of energy to get your economy going," explains Hughes. "Electricity requires both power plants for generating it and costly distribution grids. Natural gas, assuming you have domestic supplies of it, needs pipelines, and that means specialty equipment and skills, as well as capital."

By contrast, oil requires very little costly infrastructure. The exact petroleum product required for a specific purpose can be moved to where it’s needed and stored cheaply until it’s needed. And if you don’t have enough money to build a refinery to manufacture petroleum products, they are easily purchased on the international market.

Because of those features, particularly attractive in countries where capital and skills are scarce, oil is expected to supply much of the developing world’s need for energy between now and the year 2010. One wildcard that has recently been added to the energy-forecasting deck is the question of what will occur when the centrally planned economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are fully reunited with the international market economy. Until recently, these countries were expected to continue as they had under central planning, in a sort of economic suspended animation. With the dramatic developments of the past two years, however, forecasters have been forced to take another look at this region and predict what its probable transformation to a free-market economy may mean for world energy demand.

For example, the Eastern European countries have a relatively large population group of more than 100 million people, many of whom are highly skilled and educated. Their economic output, however, is relatively low—a little over half the output of their neighbors in Western Europe. If these countries apply free market principles to their economies with the same success as their Western European neighbors, which seems likely, demand for energy will almost surely grow. Oil is a prime candidate for supplying a large portion of that growth. For one thing, oil now provides only about 20 percent of the total energy in Eastern Europe, compared with several western European countries. Coal supplies a very high proportion—55 percent—of Eastern European energy, but that is unlikely to increase because of environmental concerns. In addition, Eastern Europeans own only about one-third the number of cars, per capita, as their neighbors in Western Europe. So economic growth will probably be translated into increased vehicle ownership and a corresponding increase in demand for the petroleum products needed to run them.

Although the precise effect of Eastern Europe’s emergence onto the world economic stage is difficult to predict, the region definitely represents an underdeveloped market for oil with good potential for growth. So it appears that, even after a century of phenomenal growth, demand for oil will continue to increase. Transportation will still provide the underpinning. But economic expansion in the less-developed countries and in the centrally planned economies of Eastern Europe will be responsible for most of the growth in world demand that occurs during the next two decades. Compared with the growth rates of the immediate post-war period, future increases in demand for oil are likely to be modest, in the range of one percent a year. But even that will take world demand from current levels of just over 67 million barrels a day to more than 78 million barrels a day by the year 2005.

Here in Canada, according to the Calgary-based Canadian Energy Research Institute, growth in oil demand is expected to be even more moderate—probably less than one percent a year. However, that will still mean an increase from about 1.6 million barrels a day in 1990 to about 1.8 million barrels a day in 2005.

The equation of the marketplace, however, has more than one side. Demand for oil may be expected to grow, but what will happen to supply, the vital other side of the equation? After all, the past two decades have seen not one, but several oil-supply crises, the last of which is still quite fresh in people’s minds. Does the prospect of growth in demand during the next two decades—relatively modest though it may be—raise the risk of sustained price increases and possible shortages?

"With the globalization of trade that has occurred in recent years, people seem to have outgrown the notion that hoarding a particular commodity is an effective trading strategy," suggests Bob Peterson, Imperial’s president and chief operating officer. "And I think that’s particularly true in the case of oil. The petroleum exporting nations have seen what can happen to demand for their product when prices skyrocket, and I sense that most of the exporters would much prefer to see an orderly market in which some growth can take place. Obviously the events of recent months make it harder than ever to be certain, but I don’t sense that we’re going to see the kind of sustained run-up in crude-oil prices during the coming decade that we saw during the Seventies."

Peterson’s conclusion is supported by an intriguing, and yet not widely known, development in the world of petroleum supply. This year, the world’s proved reserves of oil are expected to exceed one million barrels for the first time in history. That’s an increase of more than 55 percent since 1980, during a decade when oil prices have fallen significantly.

Oriented, most of the new reserves have been found in a region that already has an embarrassment of oil riches—the Persian Gulf area of the Middle East. The "life index" of proved oil reserves in this region—that is, the number of years that the reserves will last at current rates of production—now exceeds 100 years. As a result, some of the Persian Gulf states must begin to think not of hoarding their reserves, but of finding that there will be a continuing market for them and any future discoveries will well into the next century. The "way the world responded to the dramatic oil price increases of the 1970s un-
doubtlessly shook the assumptions that a lot of people, including the members of OPEC, had about the commodity," says Jim Hughes. "One of the most important lessons was that demand for oil does not automatically go up year after year — regardless of what you do to prices. Oil demand actually dropped during the early 1980s, for the first time in modern history. The conservation drive unleashed by higher prices caused people to do things like installing more energy-efficient furnaces and insulating their homes. And once insulation is installed, it keeps on insulating, even if someone has found a lot of new oil and wants to sell it."

In effect, the major oil-exporting nations may have become more realistic and marketing-oriented about their commodity. Most of them have only one wealth-producing basket, after all, and all their eggs are in it. It's up to them to see that petroleum is priced in such a way that markets for it continue to be healthy.

Among the major oil-consuming nations, alliances have been struck — including the International Energy Agency, of which Canada is a member — for sharing oil if significant shortages do occur. Strategic stockpiles of oil have also been built up in countries like the United States — the world's largest petroleum consumer — that would eliminate the immediately calamitous effect of a major disruption in supply.

There will always be a potential for international politics to affect the supply and pricing of oil. However, the consensus among experts is that we're unlikely to see sustained increases in oil prices. For consumers, that should mean that under normal circumstances gasoline and other petroleum products will be relatively affordable, unless taxes are greatly increased.

Volatility in oil prices makes life difficult not only for consumers but for oil companies as well. The recent sharp fluctuations in prices have underscored how tricky investment decisions have become. "The petroleum industry has traditionally been considered a high-risk business," says Peterson. "But that reputation was based on geological risk. You could spend a lot of money drilling an oil well without finding a drop of oil."

"With the wild fluctuations in crude-oil prices of recent years, a new element of risk has been added — the risk that the pricing assumptions you make as the basis of a major investment decision may become totally invalid by the time the investment is completed."

Canada has a wide range of oil-development options. The most affordable one — which could be pursued even at the prices that prevailed earlier this year — are new discoveries of light conventional oil in the western provinces. Unfortunately, expert opinion is virtually unanimous that, after almost half a century of very intensive exploration, there are few large, undiscovered deposits of light conventional oil yet to be found in western Canada.

What's more, the reserves that were found during the last half-century of extensive exploration are now running out. It's generally agreed that, by the mid-1990s, Canada could once again become a net importer of crude oil.

The prospect of increasing reliance on oil imports does not seem so daunting, however, as it might have several years ago. If oil prices increase and remain stable for a period of time, the country is in the happy position of having new sources of supply to develop. If world prices fall below levels that make new investments worthwhile, this country could well be better off to import its oil than to subsidize uneconomic domestic production.

As a 1988 report by a federal advisory committee on Canada's energy options, entitled Energy and Canadians into the 21st Century, suggested: "Energy security is best sought in ways that increase energy choices and enhance adaptability to change, rather than by hoarding or by governments forcing un-economic development. At the same time, Canada should cooperate internationally and maintain domestic emergency measures against possible oil supply disruptions."

What are those new sources of oil that can be developed at higher prices? Among the most promising are the oil sands of Alberta, which constitute a genuinely giant storehouse of energy — about 2.5 trillion barrels of very heavy oil in place, according to the Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board. As the industry develops, cheaper, more effective technology through the operation of plants like Syncrude — or if increases in oil prices occur more rapidly than currently expected — the oil sands could continue to play an important role in regional economic development and in national energy supply. In its offshore and Arctic frontiers, Canada has an inventory of resources already discovered and the promise of major future discoveries in huge and relatively unexploited basins of sedimentary rock.

For Bob Peterson, the challenge of tapping this potential underscores the importance of a continuing commitment to research — the type of research that is being carried out in the company's recently opened $47-million research centre in Calgary.

"If you could somehow find a way, through research and experimentation, to build an oil-sands plant that could operate successfully even when oil prices are low — say, $12 a barrel — that would be a major breakthrough and a highly positive development for this country. It certainly strikes me as a lot more positive than simply waiting for the oil price increase that will make it all possible.

And what future does Peterson see for the company that has discovered and produced more oil than any other in Canada over the past 100 years?"

"Oil is such a useful commodity — both for transportation energy and for the thousands of other products that can be made from it — that it's probably going to be in demand for a long, long time. From the standpoint of Imperial Oil, the current period of uncertainty underscores the need for us to keep our powder dry — to keep our investment options open and our financial strength intact. Then when opportunity knocks, we'll be there. Just like we've always been."

The history of oil, from North America's first commercial discovery by James Miller Williams in southwestern Ontario to the present, has been one of boom and bust, of perceived surplus and scarcity. During the 1920s, one of the largest American automakers, convinced that there was no more oil to be found, made plans to manufacture a car that would run on alcohol. By the 1960s, people were convinced that there was enough cheap oil in the world to fuel an era of unlimited growth.

Perhaps one benefit that will emerge from the turmoil of the past two decades will be a calmer perspective on this important commodity — an understanding that, if we can deal with our environmental concerns, oil may still be the best choice for transportation energy and all the other needs it meets so well. And given that there are still generous, proved reserves of oil, it should be possible to supply those needs.

The fascinating question is the price at which that equilibrium between supply and demand will occur. The answer to that question will have a great bearing on the types of oil developments that will occur in Canada during the next two decades. ©
THE HECTIC CAREER of ROBERT LEPAGE
Quebec's theatrical wizard attracts controversy and international acclaim

By MARIONNE ACKERMAN

THE water at Vivadhi's restaurant brings breadsticks and ice water, recognizes the table-setting for two and disappears serenely. Robert Le Page surveys his menu quickly and orders a pasta plate, salad and a mineral water with lemon. "I'm on a diet," he explains. "Italian food is healthy, isn't it? If you add a salad?"

By the time he finishes his fettuccine and a brisk mixture of greens tossed with olive oil dressing, the conversation has ranged over world politics, Quebec theatre, magic, travel and the Canadian identity. A multilingual francophone who grew up in Quebec City, 32-year-old Le Page has created a handful of original theatrical works that are now playing to rave reviews and standing ovations across Canada, Europe and the U.S., giving him a unique perspective on life, politics and art.

"French and English Canadians make the same mistake," he says, reaching for the dessert menu. "Anglophones go to London and we go to Paris. We really don't know each other at all." "Having persevered in his resolve to eat healthy food, he decides to indulge in dessert. Fasting, he concludes, as the waiter brings a piece of chocolate cheesecake, is the most effective way to lose weight.

Noisily, the discreet waiter slips us the bill and disappears. Le Page rises to rush back to rehearsals of his next work, having booked the Canadian premiere and confessed his passion for Italy — cuisine and language. The entire lunch seems like a scene from one of Le Page's plays — perhaps the beautifully choreographed moment in Répabug that encapsulates a day in the life of a waiter as he works his way through a series of unseen clients, setting and clearing one movable table a dozen times. Executed with grace and speed, the scene conveys the poetry, rhythm and precision of the job — and its monotony, though without ever once becoming monotonous. But Répabug, a murder mystery that intertwines past and present, is from Hamlet and the fall of the Berlin Wall, is more than an exercise in visual style. Like Le Page's other plays — like his own life — Répabug moves easily from the mundane and anecdotal to abstraction and debate.

Robert Le Page spends a lot of time eating in restaurants. The recently appointed artistic director of the National Arts Centre's French theatre section has a schedule and a reputation that keep him on planes and in hotels more often than he's at home in Montreal. Not surprisingly, airports, restaurants and foreign capitals figure largely in the creations that have won him wide acclaim in London, Sydney, New York, Paris and a string of other European capitals.

Le Page's plays also reflect the vastness and diversity of Canada. More than any other Canadian artist, he has challenged the Two Solitudes myth with a compelling story that takes his characters across the country. His three-hour and six-hour versions of The Dragon's Trilogy explore this subject with a power and beauty rarely seen in the theatre. Performed in French, English and Chinese, it is an epic tale of two young girls whose curiosity about Quebec City's Chinatown in the 1920s profoundly affects their life journeys.

One girl marries a Chinese man who opens a shoe store on Toronto's Spadina Avenue during the war. The other joins the army and sees the world. When their lives intersect again in contemporary Vancouver, the forces of hazard, fate and culture converge, leaving the spectator with the strong feeling that there is significance in life's coincidences and an underlying willfulness to experience that transcends cultural differences. It's a feeling Le Page says motivates his own life and art.

The Dragon's Trilogy conveys the historic importance of Quebec City, the bustling, commercial heartbeat of Toronto and the modernity of Vancouver. When the Times of London critic Irving Wardle first saw the work on an extended visit to Canada, he said it told a foreign visitor far more about Canada than anything in the then-current season of the Stratford or Shaw festivals.

Some critics have tried to see the play as a pro-federalist statement, but Le Page says this is unfair. "All of my works are full of cross-cultural references, languages and different peoples. I'm very interested in artistic dialogue, because it is artistically very rich and challenging and, well, interesting. It's not a political statement. I'm interested in exploring people, geography and myth."

His love of travel and his ability to find the connections among various cultures not only inform his work but feed his own insatiable curiosity and quest for self-knowledge. "We didn't start out to create The Dragon's Trilogy just because I was interested in China. To learn about Asia was to learn about ourselves. Knowing about other cultures helps us understand who we are."
The play has been extremely successful in connecting with audiences of diverse cultures. This fall, it ran for a month in Los Angeles and two weeks in Toronto. As well as touring across Canada, it has been acclaimed in more than a dozen European cities and Australia.

The prestigious Paris daily, Le Monde, devoted a main feature to Lepage’s work when The Dragon’s Trilogy played to the French capital last year. Irving Wardle wrote in The Times that Lepage was "a magician compatible with the young Peter Brook." In a city like London, which is notoriously blase about important the- ater, being compared to the most inno- vative experimental director since the Second World War is not only high praise, it’s almost a sign of adoption.

Little in Robert Lepage’s early childhood hinted that he might one day have an international reputation in one of the most public of all arts. Born in Quebec City to a middle-class francophone fam- ily, he underwent a severe depression in his early teens which sent him to psycho- therapy over a two-year period. Apart from school, he spent his time alone in his parents’ bedroom, watching TV, unable to talk to anyone.

Finally, he took a theatre class at high school and at 16 went on stage for the first time. "I had become very close in on myself," he recalls. "I was totally surprised to discover a talent for theatre. It was the group thing that did, discovering an art form where you could be part of a group. I didn’t feel alone in the."

Lepage has seen the world via his the- ater, through travel, and through his political and aware of current interna- tional trends in the avant-garde. Yet he and his company have also connected with the community of artists he began working with after graduating from the- ater school at Quebec’s theatre Le Théâtre Repère, who all collaborated on The Dragon’s Trilogy.

“They’re my family,” he says. “When I don’t can’t go on tour with them, we’re in con- stant contact by phone.” He works best as part of a group, ideally with people who have worked with him previously.

Actor and artistic director Louise La- traverse was instrumental in bringing the work of the then-unknown activ/ direc- tor/writer to Montreal in 1985, when she included his show Circulation in the Théâtre du Nord’s summer festival. ‘It was a real, but important Montreal theatre. She echoes the comments of many who have worked with Lepage: “He’s an extraordi- nary person to work with, extremely calm. Always in good humour. The diffi- cult past about his method is that you never know what it’s going to be, what’s going on. He’s very secretive, as if to talk about the man would be some- how to jeopardize it.”

To create a play from scratch, Lepage and company usually begin with a place or an anecdote, quickly translating it into objects that can give a physical substance to abstract ideas. The actors improvise, and gradually the scenes are strung together to tell a story, and set, costume, and music are added. In The Dragon’s Trilogy, it all begins with a parking lot, Chinatown paused feet. As suits come and shoe boxes. An at- tishman arrives in Chinatown to sell shoes, meets an old Chinese man, chal- lenges him to a game of mahjong which sets the epic plot in motion. The six- hour version of The Dragon’s Trilogy was created in three languages without a word set down on paper. The dialogue grew from improvisation, so that the en- tire text was recorded only in the minds of the players.

Use the most literate and playwrights, who rely on specialists to flash out the visual side of their work, Lepage usually designs his own sets and lighting plans. Lepage’s painter’s eye for beauty and fasci- nation with technology give his produc- tions a style, influence throughout the- er’s that has brought a new, younger audience into the theatre. The video and computer-game generation loves his cool, multilingual works, so full of tech- nological wizardry and visual surprise. Lepage’s reputation is greatest as a cre- ater of decision to return to Europe. Between a st- he’s directed Shakespeare and Brecht for the prestigious Théatre du Nord in Montreal, but he is also an accomplished actor. His maste- ry of foreign languages and accents has led him to play a British soldier from a British shoe salesman in The Dragon’s Trilogy, to a female radio host in Montreal, a Toronto couple of two thousand miles who move gracefully in a suit or a kit and high heels.

Traveling interest in other cultures has had a great impact on Lepage the actor. He has a facility for foreign lan- guages and no end of interest in learning them. When he created Vinci, a one-man show about Leonardo da Vinci, he learned enough Italian to talk to the artist. Last summer he visited Germany and worked on his German. He has now embarked upon Japanese.

“Learning languages I am reminded again and again that all cultures connect,” he says. “Learning I- German and even Shakespearean English has given me a much better understand- ing of Canadian history and I think anyone could be content to know just one language.”

His travels and the international suc- cess of his work have affected not only the setting and the way he creates theatre, but also the way he lives. "Living in Mon- treal and Canada, I feel like a world citi- zen. I’ve been stopped being a discovery in Canadian theatre for more than a period. Of course, I’ve lived very concerned about what’s happening in Quebec. But I’m just as aware of what’s happening in the world."

Indeed, Lepage says he now feels com- fortable on both sides of his Indian and In- dian background is in Ottawa. His permanent address is in Montreal, but his passport is blank, and he plans to keep it that way. He has yet to receive a few centuries, young learn- ing. Beuys was the kind of artist that I feel I don’t reason to know a few cubes well,” he says. “When the Berlin Wall fell, I thought the event had a per- sonal significance. I’ve been there, talked about the wall in my work. Traveling to Europe has made me more aware of the world."

Like most contemporary Quebec art- ists, Lepage is an ardent nationalist who has a strong sense of the Quebecois identity. Yet he also has a keen interest in what he calls “the other Canadian cultures.” He has friends and

In the middle of that hectic season, Lep- age went home to visit relatives in Que- bec City for Christmas. He stayed a day and fell asleep over Christmas dinner.

“J’ll probably do all too much work,” he confesses. “But it’s so hard to say no. There are so many interesting projects that come my way.” An un- perturbed workaholic, he has nevertheless taken a slightly more relaxed attitude to his work since becoming artistic director of the National Arts Centre’s French theatre section. Working closely with the English theatre chief, Andis Celms, Le- page has launched a season designed to appeal to lovers of classical theatre as well as younger, more experimental-cen- tric public.

The N.A.C. (or "Knack," as he has informally referred to the French the- aterical team and a first-rate workshop to create large, complicated shows," he says. "It really is a chance to see real Canadian theatre—Canada in microcosm."

I’m looking forward to consolidating my work in the capital next year. A year ago, Lepage was playing the part of jester with a dozen projects in the works. Since then, he has added three more. He is also planning to do a new edition of his first season at the N.A.C., his ener- gy does seem more concentrated. Charac- teristically, he rushed off to Montreal’s Dorval airport only hours after opening his seasons with Le Visage de la Vieille Dame in September. "I worked so hard, I just had to get away, lie on the beach, go to a party. I stood in line for half an hour, only to find out I was a day early for the flight."

So we went home, relaxed, read a book, called on friends. Is fate treating Rob- ert Lepage something? If so, he is, listen- ing to what’s being said, we’ve been discov- ering, the joys of being alone with my- self sometimes. That’s new for me. I think this is the real phase of my life. “I pause to reflect. ‘Next year I’m going to do a one-man show again... I need to be my self!’
THE MOST MEMORABLE MONTH

Recollections of Christmas in New Brunswick

BY KENNETH BAGNELL

In the village I remember more than any I’ve known, the first snow did not come until early December, falling in flakes fine as sand so that the nearby church, of which I was the minister, seemed to fade behind a misty curtain of white. At night, the snow would thicken, falling softly, snuggling, so that by morning when I looked out my study window, my church, the village and the marshes beyond it sparkled like an ocean of white.

The village was called Riverside, set on a long winding highway in the woods of New Brunswick, south of Moncton on the way to Fundy National Park. It was 1958 and I was only 23 when I arrived in this, my first parish — a new minister with a new bride. That December as the first snows came, I felt that though still fresh from theology college, I was now a man on my own — my first Christmas away from home, my first Christmas in marriage, and, as the male choir’s practice of “O Holy Night” drifting from the church on Friday evenings reminded me, my first Christmas as a minister.

My house, called the parsonage, was in Riverside, but my parish had, in fact, five churches, all white, all in villages that by their names spoke of early Canada and, in their calmness and serenity, of an era that in those very years of the late 1950s was drawing to a close. Hopewell Hill. Riverside. Alistair. West River. Alma.

They were set in the smallest of all the counties of New Brunswick, a county with no large communities, but one with a famous geological formation — the Rocks of Hopewell Cape — and a rich past, for it was already thriving in the 1700s with several Acadian settlements.

Sometimes, reading local history, I would think of those early Acadians and their rich celebrations at Christmas — the music was drawing to a close on that Friday evening, the bell ringing, the caroling, the overflowing tables at which large families enjoyed all the favourite dishes of the season. But Albert County had long since settled into quiet pastoral communities of firms Anglo-Saxon outlooks, celebrating Christmas in its own traditional ways of which the churches were all the very heart.

As Christmas neared, my churches, and others, gleamed at the side of the road or were sheltered beneath low, sloping hills of snow-dusted spruce and fir, buildings tensed by a handful of men and women growing old in body and dwindling in number, but beyond all else in their lives, faithful to their church and, in their goodwill and kindness, to their minister.

The village of Riverside began with a low hill and then a turn, to the side of which was the well-tended cemetery, with small dikes here and there, where most of my parishioners of those early days now rest in peace, calmly tended too. Riverside, lined with houses, small fields and below them wide marshes, was scarcely a mile in length along the highway. In those days about 200 people lived there, and at its main intersection was a garage, a general store and a post office. Running down toward the marshes was a small street with two churches, the one Roman Catholic, the other St. James United. Beside each was the clergy home, white as the church.

As I arrived that same week in 1958, and even in those pre-Vatican II days, our friendship and cooperation were cordial and genuine. In the winter, when we met sharing our drive-ways, the village, white from ground to sky, seemed to have an aura of silent morning anticipation, as if waiting for the moment of Christmas to burst upon it.

Every December Sunday I would travel the 30-mile length of the parish — or the “charge” as it was more commonly called within the United Church — to conduct four services, two in the morning, one in the afternoon, one at evening. There were days when the snow was higher than the car, though I thought little of it, being in those remote, sparsely rural reach. The snowplough operator, in that country often extended to the minister and the priest, always made sure we were able to leave our lanes for the highways.

During the week, from Tuesday onward, my mornings were religiously confined to my study, where I prepared for Sunday, which, like ministers of my time and place and those before us, I took very seriously indeed.

Then in the afternoon I visited my people. I climbed into my car at one o’clock and seldom returned before six. I would sit in kitchens and stand in fields, and, in the months of winter, walk into huge old barns, where I would sit with men on boxes and stools, surrounded by the stench of urine and the sweat of old winter hay, and talk not of the large issues of politics and society, but of the crucial intimacies of our lives together — a wife’s illness, a brother out of work, a family enduring the absence of a loved one through death or other hardships as Christmas neared. I had come indeed to be a preacher, though for me preaching was demanding, even difficult. But I soon found that while preaching had to be supported by disciplined study, it would be, for at least, more rooted in the soil of my afternoons in kitchens and barns, where the light of experience cast its corrective truth over all that — presumptuous in my youth — I thought I knew.

I grew to believe deeply that my people, and therefore all people, were formed or transformed by the rhythms of their particular world. In the case of my parishioners, it was the rhythm of the seasons, the earth and the forests, for that is where almost all worked, always outdoors, forever — so it seemed — helping a neighbour or being helped, looking after animals or going deep into the ocean of forest beyond their homes. In the winter, the snow brought silence to the land but not to the people, for there were animals to tend, barns to repair, mills to maintain.

Contrary to the myths of those who have never known country life, it was not an all-simple, gentle existence. The demands upon farm life, seasonal life, family life were great, from children waiting in winter shelters for the long bus ride to school, to farm wives caught in distant lonesome and fiscal worry. Young people, too, often lived far from those their own age, so that distance became a barrier to making friendships, keeping them, growing by them. Often on winter nights, I would drive to one of the churches, where I did my best at what I never felt was my strength — leading young people who came from miles around in youth activity, sometimes a lot of study, a game or two, or just talking together about the community. Once in a while, when attendance was five or six, I confess I grew discouraged. But natural as that is, neither a minister nor anyone can measure the irreplaceable possibilities of small gatherings. Many years after I left New Brunswick, I received a personal letter from a man thanking me, as he put it, "for what you did at those meetings for those of us who were young when you were our minister." He was a university professor and, when he wrote, the head of a professional faculty.

My days were busy and, at times, emotionally trying, sometimes overwhelmingly so. Even in summer, the time when most ministers left for holidays, the many tourists who visited Fundy National Park, and often filled the church in the park village of Alma, kept me close. The people naturally wanted their minister to be there when the numerous visitors were.

Then, when summer rusted into autumn — an autumn that swept thorough hills of peace and bough with gold and red — the busy yearly round began, not only the church groups and activities, but the numerous community obligations and opportunities that can consume a minister’s time.

But it was December that was the most memorable month.

The house in which we lived was a large, well-built home, once the residence of an early and revered high school principal. It shone with fine hardwood floors and a wide bright entrance, so the left of which was my study, in which sunlight filtered through the trees upon the lawn and then onto my desk. To the right, through large glass-paneled doors, was the long, dappled living room, where sometimes couples stood before me to be married, and often my wife, an enthusiastic helpmate, entertained members of the various groups of
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each church had its choir, sometimes a mere half dozen, sometimes a dozen, and its ritual rehearsal and its own Christmas presentation

which the minister's wife, at least then, was always a loyal member. Usually the women brought an array of local dishes, served in that serious, intimate style that parishioners adopt in a parishionage. The conversations were filled with life, and for those who would regard such hours as solemn, I can only recall the days on which I would drop in, late in the afternoon, to hear laughter filling the hallways and drifting to the kitchen porch through which we usually entered, to savour the day's activity before the guests departed. One woman, a graduate of the old days of Home Economics, taught my wife needlepoint, and I will recall her mild, instructive voice on quieter days, as she emphasized the importance of being both imaginative and meticulous.

By early December, a man who grew and shipped New Brunswick spruce and fir trees to distant places would arrive with a tall tree, one of the many gifts with which, by local custom, a minister was surrounded at Christmas. We decided it quickly that Christmas in 1958, as if anxious to assure the people who came and left the church across the lane at evening, and stood for a moment in snowy silence and gazed upon what was their house and ours, that the young minister and his wife were indeed preparing for their first Christmas together.

My first week of December was almost entirely spent in the study, as I began my series of Advent sermons. The study smelled of good wood, with the musty scent of scholarships, and on its shelves here and there, like remnants of past years, were a handful of aged, dried books with certain sentences underlined as if their owner thought those who came later could benefit from their wisdom. One, I remember, was a simple four-word sentence, typical of the thought of the age, yet as wise now as then: "Livedhood has elapsed life." Beside it, in black ink, was the notation: "Quoted in the fall of '47.

But as Christmas approached, something came over the house and over me. I would, by the second week of December, move a small table into the living room, pile the fireplace high with the logs that had been stored for years, in one of the many back sheds that are tucked on to New Brunswick rural houses, and on the record player place a set of Christmas records — the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, the Bobbi Shaw Chorale and, of course, the triumphal sound of Handel and the Messiah. There, as the wind and snow blew in gusts against the narrow double windows, for long, mosaic silent hours before our first child was born, I would write by hand, word after word, sentence after sentence, the sermon I would take into the pulpit in a small black booklet the following Sunday.

At Christmas in those villages, each church had its choir, sometimes a mere half dozen, sometimes as many as 20, and in its ritual rehearsal and its own Christmas presentation. It was usually held on the Sunday before Christmas, each small sanctuary brightened with decorations, never shown, never ostentatious, but always enough to make the season feel and to draw those who came, a few of them strangers, into the special moments of the Christmas season and service.

The choirs did best in every village, as did the volunteer organist, always at an old foot-pedaled organ. But no choir in all of Albert County seemed as active as the choir that came from all the congregations and most of the villages — the Albert County Men's Choir. It was directed by a man named Alonso Stiles, a cheerful local teacher, school principal and dairy farmer who lived a few minutes' walk from the parsonage in Riverside. Often they practiced in the Riverside church, so that as I worked at the table on my sermon, I could look through the parsonage window at the men arriving in the shadows of an early winter afternoon, climbing down from pickup trucks and entering the back door of the church, from which soon the familiar hymns would flow, "O come all ye..." then cease, then begin again as Alonso raised his hand, perhaps asking for more from the bass section — "a little earlies, Vernon, Everett" — or more unity from everyone.

We were at an advantage, for Alonso Stiles was not just the director and organist of the male choir, but the choir director, organist, treasurer, secretary, elder, recording secretary and general overseer and "lay man" of our tiny Riverside congregation of half-a-dozen families. So from time to time on Christmas Eve, the male choir found itself in the choir stalls of our church, and its presence did much to draw the tide of the attendance.

Christmas was a paradoxical time for the minister. I was busier than ever with the round of special services and yet never weary, as if the expectations of the people, the joy of the season and my own enthusiasm all combined to make it of, all my obligations, both the most arduous and the most rewarding. In all five congregations, there would be some event surrounding the season, uniquely their own, and usually of long custom — the children singing, the women doing readings, in some a special festivity in which a very few and faithful people managed to till the old sanctuary with a memorable mix of mirth and mystery that left us always grateful and sometimes touched. At times, many of us would attend the services of other churches and they would join us, as if to gain more of the season that means so much to country people, that was, to so many, too fleeting.

There were experiences of those Christmas weeks, poignant and forever unforgettable. Once, in the early days of December, I was called by a family, as most ministers and priests are from time to time, to offer communion to an elderly woman in the final hours of her life. I did, joining her husband and a relative at her bedside, reading the old words, helping her to the bread and wine, in what I felt as a moment of final assurance and comfort.

It was roughly two weeks later, after her funeral, when my wife, at the time entertaining our community White Cubs for their annual Christmas party at the parsonage, answered the doorbell. She called me. There I saw the woman's husband, a tall, somewhat gaunt countryman in a working man's plaid shirt. He was probably in his middle sixties, his thick hair dominating a face that was lined and friendly and spoke more than his voice ever could. Probably he had never been out of his province, but he was a man of true native wisdom, wise beyond books. He said nothing, simply prostrating toward my wife a large wrapped parcel, written with care and readied for our kitchen by his own hand — a Christmas turkey. It was the most memorable of all our gifts that year. Christmas dinner for the minister from a man grateful for his help in his sadness and hoping, despite his personal grief, that my family Christmas would be joyous. He may well have known that he was carrying on a very old custom in which country ministers were partly paid in milk, vegetables, meat and fish. My wife and I seldom saw him again, but we have never forgotten his visit that day.

Though Christmas Day was the Holy Day, it was Christmas Eve, the Holy Night, for which we all seemed to wait with such great expectancy. At dark, the crunch of feet upon the night snow and the shadows of the familiar families would fill the laneaway by the house, then flow in a dark file up the steps to the church. There a few candles flickered over the dark pew and the worn old velvet chairs that stood behind and beside the pulpit. I read the familiar lessons and spoke words I cannot now recall but which I hope were clear and good and offered someone a small light upon the way. It was, of course, the night of nights for the man of the church.

Sometimes today, so many years later, when I hear familiar choirs under great directors in renowned cathedrals, I think of these Christmas Eve services in our tiny church and how their worth to me as a young minister depended not on great quality of voice, but on something less measurable, the gift of human sincerity. That is why every Christmas Eve I take time alone to recall once again the services and the congregations — voices, faces, farmers and woodsmen, men, women, children gathered under an old roof and revealing, in beautiful simplicities, that everywhere, everywhere, it is Christmas. Tonight. 1
ROADSIDE ARCHITECTURE

The once-maligned service station wins admirers—even Prince Charles has a kind word

BY WYNNIE THOMAS

Earlier this year, when some of the world's most distinguished architects gathered in Montreal for an international congress, The Canadian Architect magazine assembled what it called an "architect's compendium" of buildings in the city that were deemed to be of particular interest. Among the score of structures selected by prominent local architects was an Esso service station.

A service station! How could this be? Aren't service stations supposed to be a necessary evil in the architectural landscape, devoid of any aesthetic appeal, tolerated but not admired, part of the price to be paid for our mania for mobility and our ongoing dependence on the internal combustion engine? Wasn't the Canadian-born economist John Kenneth Galbraith correct when he called the North American service station "the most repellent piece of architecture of the past 2000 years"?

Today, many architectural historians...

FROM THE PURELY PRACTICAL TO THE SUPLIME: CANADA'S FIRST SERVICE STATION AND MIES VAN DER ROHE'S VISION AT NUN'S ISLAND IN MONTREAL
THE NORTH AMERICAN SERVICE STATION AS CULTURAL ICON. SINCLAIR LEWIS STUDIED IT, JOHN STEINBECK WROTE ABOUT IT, ALEX COVILLE PAINTED IT. THE HISTORY OF THE GAS STATION WOULD NOT DISAPPEAR WITH THE CAR, BUT IT WOULD DISAPPEAR WITH AUTOMOBILES.

The car was a revolution. Like the Industrial Revolution, it brought an end to the five-day week, it created the oil industry. It changed the United States, it changed the whole world. It was a new way of life. It was a new way of work. It was a new way of money.

And it was a new way of architecture. The car was a new way of architecture. It was a new way of design. It was a new way of living. It was a new way of thinking. It was a new way of everything.

And it was a new way of looking at the world. It was a new way of seeing the world. It was a new way of understanding the world. It was a new way of relating to the world. It was a new way of being in the world.

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THE RITES OF WINTER

The magic and mystery of Newfoundland's mummers

BY BARBARA WADE ROSE
ETCHINGS COURTESY OF DAVID BLACKWOOD

It is Christmastime. On the edge of a fishing village on the northern coast of Newfoundland sits a fisherman's white weatherboard house. The windows are framed with blinking, coloured Christmas lights.

The winter sky has been dark since mid-afternoon. The sparse trees that shoulder the backyard are partially lit by the lights of the house; their backs are in shadow, and all is utter blackness beyond. The sea rumbles off in the distance. Through the windows members of the family can be seen, as they warm themselves at the stove fire and chew thick slices of fruitcake.

Suddenly there is a loud knock at the door.

In the fishing villages, friends never knock when they're visiting—they generally open the door and march right in.
A knock means strangers are out there in the dark.

The knock comes again, harder this time. Then the voices begin. They're breathless, eerie, as if the speakers are至关 as they talk. "Mummers allowed?" breathe the voices, rising a little at the end.

It's no threat as a question — mummers have been known to play nasty tricks — but it's spoken by the voices of history and ancient ritual.

Variations of mumming — the Christmas tradition of donning disguises and playing the fool from house to house — can be found throughout the Western world. The origins of the word are lost — it may come from the tradition that mummers are reluctant to speak — and the practice itself dates back to celebrations of the Twelve Days of Christ- mas in the Middle Ages and possibly further, perhaps to the ancient rituals of the winter solstice. In North America it is Newfoundlanders who've preserved the tradition best, isolat- ing as they were until mid-century before the age of radio and television — although there is a Mummers' Parade in Philadelphia every summer, and small pockets of mum- ming take place up and down the New England coast. Even in Labrador, the native fruit tradition includes a ver- sion of mumming in which masked visitors enter the house and ask the children if they've been good all year.

Caron George Earle, at 76 the retired Anglican priest of Queen's College at Memorial University, hasn't gone mum- ming since he was 19. But in Notre Dame Bay, where he grew up, most of the families had originated in Devon and Dorset, counties with a strong mumming tradition. "Mumming was a great social thing," Earle recalls. He loved the custom so much that when the steamer that was taking him home from school one Christmas got stuck in the ice, he sent word ahead to his friends not to go mum- ming without him. "Then I got off the boat in St. John's and walked on the ice for two miles in two days flat, got home around suppertime, and we were out mumming by 7:30." Mumming began soon after the fishermen came home for Christmas and the doors were heaved up onto the sand, when rural people settled in for almost two weeks' holiday until Epiphany on January 6. And in the evening they dressed up to disguise themselves, cross-dressing as women or men, stuffing their shirts with pillows and adding a homemade mask or a lace doily from the tablecloth to cover their faces. George Earle still laughs when he describes spending most of the day preparing his costume. "You'd make a false face out of cardboard or sometimes you'd dress in Mother's wedding dress. It was hard to walk in!" festooned with home-brewed or fruit cordials for the children, the mummers walked from house to house in the neighborhood to see if they could outwit the occupants with their disguises. "The big thing was to get into the house," says Earle. "Sometimes you just wanted to get in out of the cold." Once inside, the visitors would remain mum while their hosts tried to draw them out: ask them where they lived, invite them to sing a song, or — in extreme cases — drown them with a bucket of cold water to make their real voices ring out.

Mumming on a dress isn't easy as it sounds, says George Earle. He was once discovered. "They knew our little mummers. I used to stand a bit and that would come out if they asked me too much about the mummers. They'd say you'd recognize clothing — so we learned to switch clothes."

Even the stitching style on family quilts commanded as close attention as mummer's disguise could be interpreted by a pair of eyes. In the process one of the men had a heart attack and died. So they laid the body out on the ground and stood around it holding kerosene lanterns, while they waited in the dark for someone to come with a sled. Then the mummers lifted the body onto the sled and carried it back to Westville.

Blackwode implies, the mummer was also the Fool, the wise anarchist who revealed truths and delivered justice. As mumming days mumming was often an excuse for hum- bling the proud, a chance to release a little of the steam of social tension. Mummers three floors at passably — pref- erably members of the upper classes — and in 1833 the St. John's garrison had to be called in to quell a mob of mum- mers who had gathered around the house of a newspaper editor. The editor's wife went out with the mummers and dared (despite that two years later his ears were cut off by dis- guised assailants.)

Several times, under the guise of anonymity, a sort of rough justice would be meted out at year-end to transgres- sors in the community. In the 1930s the people of one out- port, when the man had ne'er seen his father during the winter, was visited. When the man had not prepared his mum- mers for his aged, sickle father during the year. He was rouged up by a group of mummers while others in the community burned his wishes. David Blackwode's grandson, who "from time to time someone would fail to appear to help him get to church," recalls the punishment.

The advent of darkness in a series of prints that now numbers more than 20.

As Christmas approached, he returned to it again, recall- ing a story his father once told him about the mummers. "It was an old man," he says in a saluted voice from his home in Port Hope, Ont. "A group of men from Westville were crossing the marsh to Badger's Key, dressed as mummers and carrying their disguises. As they were passing, a man from the marshes came running through the night, the long reeds from village to village across the ice and snow, the sense of participating in a ritual that was as old as life itself. Every few years, Blackwode has long been to the subject, capturing this same quality in a series of prints that now numbers more than 20.

The reverse aspect of mumming was sometimes carried too far, however. Drunkenness and religious hatred often played a part. A series of riots in 1850 and 1851 following a mum- mers' parade led to an act of the Newfoundland legis- lative Assembly, declaring that any person "dressed as a Mummers, masked, or otherwise disguised, shall be deemed guilty of a Public Nuisance." Technically the ban is still in effect but has long been forgotten. One woman in a 1980 Christmas Day interview enthusiastically described a re- porter her plans to go mumming that day. She was Lucie Verge, Newfoundland's minister of justice.

Some of mumming's allusive edge shows up in the Mummers Play, which in earlier days was often performed for the boys and their guests. Based on an ancient tradition that dates from the Middle Ages, the play tells the story of St. George fighting a Turkish Knight, becoming wounded, and being rescued by a Doctor to receive the fight and win the day. The play probably stems from stories surrounding the winter solstice, in which the forces of light battled the forces of darkness. Although St. George, like the sun, ap-pears to be dead, he is soon revived, a miracle made possible for everyone through the skill of the mummer. A simple
Brookes can recall one house where the men among the mullumens were counted against the number of men at the party before they were permitted to have a telephone. And once a telephone rang when the Turkish Knight was in the middle of his big death scene. He improvised by calling out,..."and if that’s my wife on the phone, tell her I won’t be home tonight.

Mullumens Trompe member Benno Davies, who revisited many a St. George in his role as the Doctor, once wrote down the creed of mullumening that helped him among the snow intelligentsia of St. John’s. He counselled practically: "Think nothing of having the couch moved all the way across the room only on to them change your mind. Furniture is to be grown from, grandchildren making imposing woskency, an evening gown can provide a hiding place. Note that the audience is also to be considered as objects if you are going to spend the next five minutes as a corpse, you may as well aspire upon a row of squelching legs." Davies described the Mullumens Play as "a must for any theatraics seeking to invoice genuine change."

The Mullumens Trompe expanded its venues from private houses to public rooms, to fact that future productions would be reviewed. A Review arrived at the school in Wrentham, Alberta, a tiny farming community of some 20 residents located 50 km southeast of Lethbridge. Normally Sylvia Hirsche, a teaching assistant and the school’s part-time librarian, would have passed the magazine on to a teacher for classroom use. But this time it fell open at an article and she decided to read it.

The article was titled "Making A Difference" and it described the uses to which Imperial Oil financial grants have been put by various community organizations across Canada. And reading it got Sylvia thinking once again about her dream. The dream that she and her teaching colleagues at Wrentham School had some of the same concerns about the needs of its 56 pupils in Grades One to Nine. In fact, only half of that space was occupied by the children, the other half had had to be used to house the school’s nine computers. That didn’t leave much room for books, but there weren’t many books anyway. For example, the library lacked a complete set of any encyclopedias.

Over the years, Sylvia and her colleagues had requested what she described as "cheating a little" to get their students enough books to read. Because the University of Alberta’s extension library was not available to schools, they would borrow books from the library in their own names, use them for school purposes for a few weeks and then return them. And every three weeks Sylvia would make a trip to the Lethbridge public library, take out about 100 books on her personal library card, catalogue them and use them in school. These weeks, however, were only a hop to another trip to Lethbridge to return them and get a new batch.

It wasn’t that the educational authorities were indifferent to the school's resources; it was simply a function of the rural distribution of the library’s collection. To buy a new set of an encyclopedia, for example, would have consumed almost a whole year’s book-buying budget. And an Alberta government scheme to provide matching grants was of little practical use to a community of the size of Wrentham, which lacked the population to raise any significant amount of money.

After reviewing the article the second time, Sylvia sat down and typed a letter to the vice-principal and manager of the library to convey her appreciation of the manager’s corporate efforts.

"The thought is that I am on my mind anyway came again," wrote Sylvia. "What can we do to get a bigger, better-equipped library? We desperately need a library that will give our program of donations and works and maybe we don’t quietly but I decided that I would try. I wrote to the Vice Principal of the school because, sometimes after many disappointments another one is hard to take..." But these students are just as smart, just as creative, just as important as any child who lives in a bigger centre, where more is available to them. If a child is taught to read and has access to good books, he or she has one foot on the road to a dream. Where the money went off, the community spirit took over. Local fund-raising activities added to the pot. For a reduced price, a Calgary contractor provided plans for a wood-frame building and agreed to act as project manager.

Sylvia paid off that on cool Thanksgiving weekend in October a group of Eas Resources Canada employees and their families, some 40 of them in all, complete with harnesses, hand saws, electric drills, carpenter’s squares and painted hard hats, descended on Wrentham to join members of the local community in the modern equivalent of a barn raising. But unlike the traditional barn raising, this library raising turned out to be a mixture of hard work and good fun. There was a special church service, a traditional Thanksgiving dinner and, of course, a dance. By noon on Thanksgiving Monday, Sylvia Hirsche’s long-cherished dream was approaching reality. The new Wrentham Library, complete with heat and water, was finished externally, with only a few tasks, such as painting and carpet-laying, remaining inside the building. And it all took place, appropriately enough, during International Literacy Week.

Rick Jeffers, Eas Resources’ community affairs advisor, who led the Calgary volunteers, was elated. "This was an opportunity for a group of people to be involved in a project that benefited a community," said Jeffers. "It was something far more than making a donation; it was an opportunity for us to do something in a genuine spirit of volunteerism and philanthropy."

Sylvia Hirsche, who was there to watch a dream come true, was most satisfied. "It was a wonderful project, and it’s been a joy for everyone involved."

So far, however, it remains an unfinished miracle. The Wrentham school’s splendid new library still awaits most of its books. There is, as yet, no money to buy them. But there is still time before the official opening in February 1991. Given what has been achieved so far, it would be indeed if the library were to open without a full complement of books on its new shelves. Including, perhaps, a complete encyclopaedia. — Wayne Thumey