History Mystery

With tales of ghosts and arson in mind, a writer sets off
in search of Canada's oldest occupied residence

By Ted Ferguson

A SOFT RAIN WAS FALLING ON THE QUEBEC COUNTRYSIDE
as I drove off the bridge and headed toward the village of Ste-Famille on Route 138.

Even on a late autumn afternoon, with the leaves off the trees and the fields hazing to brown, the island was a charming place. Roadside vendors sold apples and maple syrup, a tractor hauled a load of firewood across a firmoad, a freighter slipped up the St. Lawrence toward Quebec City, 16 kilometers to the west.

But it wasn't the scenery that had brought me to the island; it was detective work of a sort. I was on the trail of Canada's oldest occupied residence.

I had begun my quest a few weeks earlier with a phone call to Linda Barker, an information specialist at a University of Toronto library. A day or two later, I was sitting in her office. She pushed a pile of books towards me with a look that suggested she didn't envy me my task. "Tread carefully," she warned. "I suspect that if you name one house as the oldest, you'll get a letter from someone saying his or her house is older. Construction dates aren't always recorded—often they aren't even known. Even if you surveyed every house in the country personally, you couldn't be absolutely sure you'd found the oldest."

Feeling downcast, I started to go through the books Barker had given me—Canadian architecture texts dating back to the 1920s. The most compelling was Historic Houses of Canada, a 1952 work by Katherine Hale, a Toronto journalist. She wrote a great deal about homes in Annapolis Royal, which is in an area of Nova Scotia discovered by Samuel de Champlain in 1604. Descriptions of spiral staircases, dormer windows and the like form the book's backbone, but Hale had an appreciative ear for local legends. In one Annapolis Royal house, a female slave is said to have murdered her master in 1804 by poisoning his coffee. A woman who later owned the coffeepot used in the crime told Hale that Colonel Delaney had brought about his own early demise by once promising the slave she would be freed upon his death.

There were other stories from Annapolis Royal, too. During the 1850s, Sir William Penhallow Williams, a hero of the Crimean War, supposedly saw the spectre of a wounded soldier in his home. Exac-


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the 1800s, most of the early houses had been made of wood and burned like dry kindling. One older home that escaped destruction was the two-storey wooden cottage built on the city's outskirts by the dairy-farming Mallard brothers in the mid 1700s. I decided to find out more about the place. After several phone calls, I found myself talking to Peg Magnone.

"Yes, I do live here," the retired teacher said over the phone from the cottage. "I love the place, but believe me, it took plenty of work to get it into livable condition." Magnone bought the house eight years ago for $11,000 and spent more than $50,000 restoring it. The cottage is located only a few minutes' walk from downtown St. John's, yet the previous owner, an elderly member of the Mallard family, had lived there without electricity and running water until her death in the 1960s. "Our house had two buckets of water every day," Magnone said, "and she used kerosene lamps."

Electricity and water were installed, and Magnone herself scraped off 27 layers of wallpaper, paint, and wallpaper and, with a relative, cleaned the smoke-stained ceiling beams near two stone fireplaces. "It was well worth all the time and money," she said. "Living here gives me a wonderful sense of history. Despite the changes I made, the cottage is essentially the same as it was in the 1700s."

Hanging up the phone, I checked my notes. Magnone's cottage was not as old as Sherman Himes's cottage in Nova Scotia, and Doyle had said that nothing in New Brunswick preceded it. As far as I could determine, Himes's cottage was the oldest occupied residence in the Maritimes.

As a transplant from western Ontario, I knew the Prairies didn't have a major influx of white settlers until the 1860s. One of the first of those settlers, Arataniy Bowerman, was a buffalo hunter and trader who moved into a cabin near Albert's Water ton Lakes in the 1870s. Transported some time ago to the site of a historical museum in Pincher Creek, Alta., Bowerman's vacant home is among the oldest Prairie dwellings still standing.

I also knew that the passion for modernity that swept the Prairies during the 1960s and '70s had led to the demolition of hundreds of older buildings. One notable survivor, the Matt house in Saskatoon, is a two-storey, wood-frame dwelling built in 1884 by a stonemason called Alex Strome. The house was requisitioned as a field hospital for wounded soldiers in 1885 during the Northwest Rebellion; the City of Saskatoon is currently restoring it as a heritage site. It's easily said that the Matt house is the oldest house in the province as old as the Matt house," said a Tourism Saskatchewan travel counsellor, Krista Piché. "I know the provincial and municipal governments try to save older buildings, but many are still being torn down.

It's really sad. Every time an old house is demolished, part of our history is erased."

Fortunately, that sort of thing won't be happening in Vancouver's Gastown. I called a friend whose apartment is situated in the historic waterfront district, which is protected as a designated heritage site. An amateur historian, he reminded me that Captain George Vancouver hadn't had it easy. The western region of Canada until the late 1700s.

In 1867, the Fraser River pilot Gassy Jack Deighton, a visionary man of Falstaffian garb, offered free wine to anyone willing to help him build a hotel in what became known as Gastown. Deighton House was erected and opened within 24 hours. A hundred years later, the remaining buildings in the district were renovated and turned into offices, shops, and restaurants. "There's nothing out here older than the 1800s," my friend said. "It seems to me you should be looking in your own backyard, Ontario or Quebec."

My search had been reduced to two provinces -- I was finally getting close to solving the mystery.

I made my way to the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, where a librarian brought me some books -- Ruth Moffat's Stone Houses, W.P. Percival's The Lane of Queens and E. Roy Wilson's The Beautiful Old Houses of Quebec -- and a few documents and pamphlets dealing with pre-Confederation architecture. I learned a lot.

For example, 19th-century stonemasons constructing elegant townhouses for United Empire Loyalists, who began to arrive in Upper Canada during the 1780s, often placed a coin somewhere in the building to record its year of completion. Some homes featured second-storey exterior doors that had no steps leading to them; their purpose, some people say, was to convince tax collectors that the house was not yet finished. The homes of Metis pioneers, who started coming to Upper Canada in the 1790s, were frequently patchwork affairs constructed from fields of sheets of all colours and sizes -- members of the religious order believed in using everything they found. In her 1984 book, Moffat says the Loyalist settlers, on the other hand, carefully matched the stones. "The Loyalists admired order and rationality... This reflected in their buildings, which were tasteful, balanced and substantial."

Interesting though they were, none of the books told me what Ontario's oldest wood-frame house was. So the next day I made my way to the Archives of Ontario in Toronto. There I found a document stating that a Prince Edward County stone house that remained standing today was erected by a mill owner named Nicholas Leiser in the early 1800s. Another stone building in the area, the Clapp-Fallaw house, was built between 1847 and 1852. A local architect and historian, Court Noonan, said in a telephone conversation that he felt a stone house built by a farmer named Reynolds in the Prince Edward County countryside might be of about the same vintage. It's hard to pin down a definite date on some buildings," Noonan said. "We go by old diaries and letters and county land records. Some people claim the Reynolds house was built in the 1790s."

My thoughts turned briefly to the provincial capital -- I wanted to ensure that the building I was seeking wasn't in my own city. I contacted Joan Crook, a preservation officer with the Toronto Historical Board, who told me that Toronto's longest-standing building is the 1793 Scadding log cabin. The cabin is not occupied; now located on the grounds of the Canadian National Exhibition, it is open to the public at certain times of the year. Most of the city's old stone and brick houses, however, weren't built until the second half of the 19th century.

What about Kingston? The city's streets seem to be lined with historic buildings. "I don't know the precise number, but I'm sure there are dozens of pre-Confederation houses in this area," Bill Firthell, president of the Kingston Historical Society, told me. "We're busy trying to help as many people living here who are devoted to keeping an architectural record of our past. We have lost some houses to high-rises but far fewer than other communities."

Firthell said that what had been Kingston's oldest wood-frame house, a legacy of the 1790s, was burnt to the ground by vandals three years ago. He talked of two old residences that are occupied today, Elizabeth Cottage and the Rosemont house. In the style of a Gothic manor, Elizabeth Cottage was built between 1834 and 1839. A local architect and historian, Court Noonan, said in a telephone conversation that he felt a stone house built by a farmer named Reynolds in the Prince Edward County countryside might be of about the same vintage. It's hard to pin down a definite date on some buildings," Noonan said. "We go by old diaries and letters and county land records. Some people claim the Reynolds house was built in the 1790s."

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house in the Prince Edward County community of Wellington.

The Beautiful Old Houses of Quebec tells us that a house in Stillery, a town adjoining Quebec City, is probably Canada's oldest. It was started in 1657, but in June 1657, fire ravaged the building. The original stone walls, however, survived the fire, and reconstruction started immediately. Today, it serves as a museum. A St-Gabriel farmhouse on Montreal Island went up around 1661, but no one lives in it today.

It fell on me to do the right track. I made a number of telephone calls to tourist, historical and cultural bodies in Montreal and Quebec City. The consensus was that the building I was seeking was either the Ursuline convent in Quebec City or a farmhouse on Île d'Orléans.

Excited by the knowledge that I might soon be sighting my quarry, I rented a car and drove east.

NEARLY A DOZEN STONE HOUSES appeared along the winding road leading from the bridge to the village of Ste-Famille on Île d'Orléans. It was impossible to tell if they had been built in the 1650s or a couple of decades later. In the village, a number of people were coming out of the 18th-century church. I parked the car nearby and approached a middle-aged woman. She said she had no idea which residence was the oldest on the island but she had heard of a house built around 1700, which was inherited by two brothers years ago on the condition that they never sell it. "The brothers can't stand each other, I gather, but they live under the same roof and farm the land together," she said. "I've heard they haven't spoken to each other for 15 years, except for the time one brother accidentally ran over the other's foot with the tractor. And then all he supposedly said was 'Sorry.'"

Another woman emerged from the church and, on hearing our conversation, pointed to a large white house and said someone there might be able to help us. The ground floor contained the Bouchette Ulrich Printem. Inside, a man said, "You're asking the wrong person. Call Madame Bouchette. She's here all her life and knows everything about Île d'Orléans."

Louise Bouchette turned out to be a coordinator with the Île d'Orléans Chamber of Commerce. "There are many houses on the island that have been owned by the same family for more than eight generations," she said over the phone. "But I'm fairly certain all of the houses put up in the mid-17th century are gone today. I don't have any solid dates, but I believe the oldest houses still occupied were all erected around 1800."

Bouchette gave me the names of four islanders residing in homes once owned by pioneer settlers.

The first person I called didn't want to talk about her house; the second had his phone disconnected, the third hung up without an explanation. I was luckier with the fourth. Suzanne Howard, an artist and restaurant owner, purchased the abandoned Morency house with her former husband in 1961. It looks very much as it would have in 1720, when it was built. As you walk in you see the large hearth with the original baking oven beside the fireplace. The plaster stirs, more like a ladder than the staircases of today, are also original, as are the built-in cupboards, coffering and dormer windows. "Old houses have souls," Howard said. "You feel the presence of those who made up their lives in them before you."

When I explained the purpose of my visit, she shook her head. The order did not allow visitors on its premises. There were some rooms, she said, that a man hadn't set foot in since the building was constructed in the 1600s. "If you want to know about the convent, go to the museum. It's all there. Everything."

Montcalm's yellow sandal lay in a glass display case at the Ursuline museum, a small stone building dating from 1644. After the French general died fighting British troops on the Plains of Abraham in 1759, his body was exhumed from the chapel at the convent. About a century later, workmen repairing the chapel discovered his remains, and the ruin of the day decided they would keep the skull, "for people sometimes collect the skulls of exceptional individuals," said Denise Roy, a museum guide. "They keep arm bones and fingers, too, and placed them in nice pieces of material specifically woven to contain them."

While visitors cannot enter the convent, they are able to view its interior through a video made about the Ursuline order. The narrator explains how Marie de l'Incarnation and Madame de la Perci, sent out from France in 1639 to found an Ursuline teaching order in New France. The order's original convent, built in 1642, was destroyed by fire in 1652 and completely rebuilt. In 1666 fire swept through that structure; the building was reconstructed using the original walls. It is this building that the Ursulines occupy today.

The convent is arranged in a quadrangle, an enclosed courtyard at the centre encircles the nurseries. The camera takes in down-town, vaulted corridors with gleaming wooden floors to sparsely furnished common areas and individual cells. With its tall chimneys, dormer windows and high ceiling, the refectorery, is the narrator tells us, the oldest surviving structure of its size and kind in Canada.

Leaving the museum, I walked to the front of the convent. The schoolgirls were gone. A group of American tourists with video cameras were getting shots at the building. I almost told them they were admiring the oldest inhabited residence in Canada. What stopped me was the memory of Linda Bark's advice. Maybe I had missed a building somewhere in Quebec that predates the convent by a year or two. Best not to make such a definitive statement to the tourists or anyone else. Instead, I used the word that journalists often use to snub themselves embarrassment. That word is probably..."
What Price Gasoline?

Although motorists tend to be frustrated by the rise and fall of gasoline prices, there are good reasons for the fluctuations

BY RUSSELL FEITON

One of the main pleasures of driving from coast to coast is that I get to drive, in season, to green and hospitable places around and about Toronto in the company of my regular golfing partner, a man with whom I find I have more in common than merely a passion for the royal and ancient game.

A senior level, civil service accountant nearing retirement age, my friend has travelled widely, read extensively and is generally a thoroughly companionable and easy-going fellow — except in one respect. Knowing that I work in the oil industry, he nags me at every opportunity about gasoline prices. And since our golfing forays take us from the inner city through its suburbs and outlying satellite townships to its rural environs, he seldom lacks opportunities.

"Ah," he might say as we pass the Ecco self-service station a few blocks from his home, "gas is 54.9 cents a litre today, I see. It was 50.9 cents last Tuesday, but of course, this is the weekend. Prices are always jiggled up for the weekend, right?"

Or, as we cross an intersection where there are two or perhaps three stations, he'll say, "The same price at all stations, eh? What a coincidence. Last week they were all six or seven cents lower, but now they'll all be somewhere in between. Up together, down together — what do you guys do, hold a conference call every day to decide how much you can rip drivers off for?"

If the truth be told, my friend understands the dynamics of gasoline pricing better than he pretends, and no one has explained to him how many times in the years we've known each other. He just likes to tease me. I'm sure, though, that his mock cynicism and rhetorical questions reflect the genuinely held views of many motorists across the country. In fact, customer surveys carried out by Imperial Oil show that three-quarters of motorists believe that "the companies work together to fix the price of gasoline at a certain level."

Moreover, that belief is not only widely held but deeply ingrained, according to Breend Howley, vice-president of public affairs for the Canadian Petroleum Products Institute, whose membership includes the majority of oil refiners and marketers in Canada. "While every government inquiry into the subject of prices has concluded that the industry is very competitive, the perception is that it is not," says Howley, "so we have to deal with that perception."

It is a perception that seems to be based at least partially on the belief that gasoline prices have continued rising over the years. An examination of actual prices over the last several decades suggests otherwise. Adjusted for inflation, the average retail price of gasoline in Toronto, including all taxes, remained between 45 and 55 cents a litre from the early 1960s until the late 1970s, when the international price of crude oil rose sharply. As crude oil prices stabilized — albeit at a higher level than previously — the retail price settled in the mid 1980s into a 45 to 60 cents a litre range before falling again in the 1990s to between 50 and 55 cents a litre. Average prices in other parts of the country have also remained remarkably stable in real terms. And this is despite substantial product improvements such as the introduction of unleaded gasoline, high-octane premium grades and engine cleaning "detergent" additives, not to mention the numerous tax increases that have occurred.

The share of the average retail price of gasoline taken in taxes by the federal and provincial governments has risen, however, from about one-third in 1960 to more than half in 1985. The price before tax — that is, the price charged to cover the costs of crude oil, manufacturing, distribution and marketing and to earn profits for refineries, marketers and service-station operators — has therefore actually declined. This would seem to indicate that the industry has become more efficient at making and selling gasoline over the years and that these efficiencies have been passed along to consumers in the form of lower prices.

Clearly, however, it is not the "real" or average price of gasoline that bothers motorists. Their most common complaints, says Howley, derive from the fact that prices fluctuate widely and that prices at ostensibly competing service stations go up and down in unison. They also complain that prices vary from one city, town or rural area to another or sometimes even within what appears to be the same market area — from Ottawa to near-by Neysdale Falls. Out, for example — without any apparent reason.

"People see the prices change, sometimes daily, and yet there's no difference in the product or service being offered," says Howley. "Without a logical explanation, people naturally start to assume the worst. Petroleum companies rarely get the benefit of the doubt."

One reason for consumer scepticism is to be found in the fact that, for the most part, we live in a world where the prices of most commodities remain relatively stable from day to day. Most oil industry executives understand motorists' confusion and frustration when gasoline prices bounce around. Says Brian Fischel, senior vice-president of Imperial's products and chemicals division: "I'd be frustrated, too, if I found that the price I paid last week for milk or bread at a supermarket had been 10 or 12 cents a pound a few hours earlier. And I'd be even more annoyed if I found that the price had gone down again the next day or that the price for the same product at the same supermarket chain was even cheaper on the other side of town. Frankly, if I didn't understand why these things happened, I'd feel cheated."

Another cause of consumer frustration is probably to be found in the unique nature of the product itself. Not only is gasoline something that one rarely sees, it is also something that you have to buy when you need it, or it is not a postponable purchase. When your gas gauge is hovering around the empty mark and you have to take your children to a hockey game, visit the in-laws or get to work in the morning, you can't wait around for the price to come down. That's generally when you recall that had you filled up two days earlier you could have saved yourself some money — forgetting, of course, all the occasions when filling up two days before would have cost you more money.

Your average motorists might be a little more tolerant of fluctuating gasoline prices, if only by virtue of the fact that they have learned to make the most of sales and to hold off filling up at a price that suits them. But motorists, of course, find this hard to accept. Research indicates that 25 percent of customers believe that petroleum companies and service-station operators still make a profit when prices are at the low end of the scale. And when prices rise, consumers conclude that the difference is clear and excess profit, which comes out of the pocket of the long-suffering motorist.

However, says Imperial's Fischel, "the reality is that at the low end of the price range, gasoline is sold at near zero profit to the marketer or, occasionally, at a loss. That's hard for people to accept because they don't believe any company or industry would routinely sell a product for little or even negative profit, but we do. We don't like it — it doesn't make sense, really — but it's what severe competition results in. And, of course, the motorist who fills up when the price is at the low end of the range is actually getting quite a bargain."

"Even at the high end of the range of price movement, our profit margin is extremely thin," explains Fischel. "The average annual return on investment of the retail marketing division of the major petroleum companies in Canada over the last decade has been around four percent. That's well below the average for Canadian manufacturing industries as a whole and an appreciable low level of return for a business that requires enormous investments in distribution systems and service-station networks. It certainly doesn't represent good value for our shareholders."

When I explained all this to my golfing friend, he purported to be unmoved. "Selling gasoline," he says, "isn't the only business in which it's tough to make a dollar these days. And I grant you there's a lot of competition, but that doesn't explain why prices fluctuate so frequently, just nowhere else in some locations." He has a point, in some markets, prices can vary by as much as six cents a litre over a matter of hours.

To understand why, it helps to know what constitutes a market in the gasoline retail business. When gasoline sellers talk of "markets," they are speaking of any location or area where a number of stations compete directly for the same customers. It can be as small as a single busy intersection in an urban area or even two competing stations within sight of each other. On the other hand, a relatively large area, such as a township or a rural county, can constitute a single market. It is the characteristics of each of these various markets that have a large effect on prices. Rick Dobson, manager of Imperial's automotive division, explains that "in markets where there are relatively few competitors, each having a satisfactory service operation and stable market share, prices naturally tend to remain at a level that allows everyone to make a profit."

1995 Summer
a reasonable profit, and they rarely fluctuate very much. You will sometimes find different general price levels at stations in the same broad geographic region, with one station charging 5 cents more than another. The reason for this is that they are not in the same gasoline retailing market. It’s not that consumers in the higher-priced area are paying unreasonably high prices, but rather, that people in the area where prices are more volatile and generally lower are actually benefiting from the competitive forces at work in the particular market.

It’s also important to understand, Dobson says, that gasoline is a very price-sensitive product. “Motorists will bypass one station for another to save one cent a litre, or about 25 to 30 cents a fill-up. In fact, industry research tells us that a one-cent-per-litre price difference between competitors in the same market will result in a 10 to 20 percent difference in sales volume.”

Of course, what makes it easy for motorists to choose among competing stations is the fact that they are already in their cars. Relatively few people would take the time and trouble to drive from one supermarket to another to save 30 cents on a five litre bag of potatoes. In other words, people don’t turn their cars off to walk a few blocks to save a few cents on something. But gasoline prices are posted outside gasoline stations in letters that can be seen from hundreds of metres away. Driving a short distance to save 10 cents on a gallon of gasoline costs nothing in time and trouble, so many people do it.

There’s another less obvious but important reason why gasoline retailers are quick to lower their prices in response to competition from other stations nearby stations. Gasoline retailers are in a very competitive market, and the way to compete is to lower prices. In other words, they are willing to sell gasoline at a lower price if it means they can attract new customers or increase their share of the market, or perhaps because they have bought a shipment of gasoline from an importer at a very low price and can afford to undercut the competition. Indeed, over the years, the independents have proved themselves to be formidable competitors for the major petroleum companies; their share of the total gasoline market in Canada has been steadily increasing during the past two decades and today stands at about 25 percent (seven years ago it was about 20 percent).

The problem with lowering prices as a marketing tactic, though, is that it seldom works for very long. As soon as other stations in the same market begin losing customers to the lower-priced competitor they immediately lower their own prices as well. Indeed, the low-pricing tactic is in fact more often undermining the original price cutter to recover their lost volume and to boost their own business. And so begins a downward spiral, with no one willing to allow another to set a lower price. As a result, the price may decrease temporarily, but is expected to increase again and to continue to increase. In fact, as a result of conservation and more efficient automobiles, gasoline consumption in Canada has been virtually stable for the past two decades. Therefore, total consumption is only about three-quarters of what it was in 1980 and is not expected to increase substantially in the foreseeable future.

“Price wars have been going on for years and years, but the only winners are the consumers,” says Dobson, “and the losers are the gasoline companies.”

One Ontario market some years ago, the battle got to the point where one station operator was paying a penny less than another for his gasoline. But what eventually happened, of course, is that one retailer decided that enough is enough and put up the price to a realistic level, wherein all other competitors in that market, who had also been losing money, breathed a sigh of relief and put them up too.

These abrupt price restorations create the impression that collusion and known regional monopoly was needed to fix prices must be at work. “That is more a matter of perception than reality,” Dobson says. “To the consumer, it might appear that prices move together, but really it’s always a case of one competitor leading the way and the others in the market following almost immediately—certainly as quick as they can. It looks like it happens simultaneously, but really it’s a near-instantaneous chain reaction. It’s also a misconception,” Dobson adds, “that prices always go up before a weekend or a holiday—although, again, it must seem that way to the customer who finds a higher price at a local station on a particular Saturday, Sunday or holiday. “But when you look at it from a consumer’s point of view, and not a retailer’s point of view—disciplining the market can be done by frustrating, but intense competition has kept the average price extremely low. And at the low end, the consumer gets a steal.

If gasoline prices are too stable, will gasoline consumers be happier than they are today?

“I don’t know,” says Dick Dobson. “My guess is that if prices were ever to be the same at all stations in all markets all the time, with differences between markets reflecting only differences in distribution costs, we’d hear from our office that overall price level was too high. Where are the lower prices we used to see? They’d ask.”

As a critical personal test, I put the question to my golfing partner during a recent round in Saint John, New Brunswick. Interrupting his customary sycamoric tirade against “big oil,” I asked, “Would you prefer it if gasoline was priced in the same way as your Ontario, for example—if you could buy it only at a few outlets scattered around town, if all brands were priced the same with only slight differences for premium grades and, if the price were never to go down, only up?”

He looked startled at first, then thoughtful. After a moment or two, he grinned. “Um,” he said, looking at his watch, “what time did you say we’re teeing off?”
Star Attraction
Little known in his native Canada outside Quebec, astrophysicist and author Hubert Reeves is a major celebrity in Europe
BY BARBARA WADE ROSE

In 1993 the President of France asked the French explorer and marine biologist Jacques Cousteau to head the newly created Council for the Rights of Future Generations. The group would advise the government on environmental issues. Cousteau was to select eight people to join him on the council, men and women working in the sciences and arts whose expertise was unquestionable and whose opinions would carry sufficient weight to enable the government to act where needed.

Among the scientists Cousteau chose was a white-haired, bearded Canadian, Hubert Reeves, an astrophysicist, a popularizer of science, a best-selling author and a respected teacher. "I chose him," Cousteau explained, "because of the great good sense with which he is able to explain the most complicated theories." In a world where much of science seems complex and unfathomable to the average person, Reeves has made it his mission to explain the mysteries of the field and, equally important, to help people recognize its poetry.

Today, the 62-year-old Reeves lives for most of the year on a farm near Burgundy, but he was born and raised in Montreal and still returns to the city each year for the fall term to teach graduate students at the University of Montreal. While in Canada, he lives in the turn-of-the-century house in which he was raised. Now belonging to his son, it is an unassuming brick dwelling in the state of friendly abandon common to the homes of busy people – the walls are lined with books, and there are children’s toys in what was once the dining room, next to the piano on which Reeves’ mother used to play. As he sits in the front room, watching a cat sun itself in the window, it is difficult to comprehend the fact that this soft-spoken man is such a celebrity in Europe and Quebec that he attracts a crowd wherever he goes. At a sold-out lecture he gave on the origins of the universe in 1993 at the University of Grenoble, France, people who couldn’t get tickets grew so agitated that the police had to be called in to prevent a riot.

But Reeves’ reputation stems from more than his ability to explain the complexities of science. His scientific achievements have contributed enormously to our understanding of the origin of the universe. He made his mark in the 1970s through his work on the origins of the light elements (hydrogen, helium, lithium, beryllium and boron). Reeves and his collaborators showed that some of these light elements existed very early in the universe and were most likely created during the Big Bang. Reeves’ work has lent substantial scientific support to the Big Bang theory, which suggests that our universe began with a giant explosion and has been expanding ever since.

“We were engendered in the initial explosion, in the heart of stars, and in the immensity of interstellar space,” Reeves writes. “We can truly say that all nature is the family of man.”

Erich Vogt, a colleague and longtime friend of Reeves’, is the former director of Canada’s national laboratory on subatomic physics at the University of British Columbia. Reeves, Vogt says, was “a pioneer” in nuclear astrophysics. His work is unquestioned in the scientific world. Reeves’ research has also provided avenues for exploration by both fully fledged scientists and graduate students, many of whom have gone on to successful careers as astrophysicists and astronomers around the world.

Michel Caucé, an astrophysicist who works with Reeves at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique in Paris, says simply, “I was formed by him.”

Reeves has always been driven to do more than academic work, however. He is a fierce advocate of science for the masses. In the early nineties, for example, he convinced the amateur astronomical societies of France to give “a better welcome” to those whom scientists disparagingly call “heaven’s tourists” – people who may not know a nova from a nebula but who nonetheless derive great pleasure from stargazing.

In his mission to explain science to the masses, Reeves has written seven books about science in carefully chosen, eloquent language that all can understand and savour. He talks regularly on French radio and television and lectures to old and young alike.

Apart from making science accessible, Reeves is striving, for himself as much as anybody else, to reconcile the two great branches of learning: art and science. This mission may account for the gourmand celebrity surrounding Reeves, which would otherwise be a touch perplexing. He does not, frankly, dote one with his appearance, gestures or way of speaking. One must conclude that it is his lack of overt charisma that has played a significant role in his success in touching the masses to the nonscientist he seems – indeed in friendly and approachable.

HUBERT REEVES WAS BORN IN DRIE PAIN-ERA, Quebec. His parents never finished university; his father travelled around Quebec as a salesman, and his mother stayed at home to raise Hubert and his two brothers and one sister. Despite their lack of formal education, Reeves’ parents loved learning; they chose the house on McKenna Street specifically because it was halfway between the Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf secondary school, where so many of Quebec’s intellectuals (including former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau) were fostered, and the respected University of Montreal. The Reeves children were expected to attend both. “My parents,” says
Reeves, "placed great emphasis on intellectual and cultural values." His mother filled the house with music from the upright piano in the dining room; one of her son's earliest memories was of watching her fingers play the lyrical notes of Beethoven's Appassionata sonata. His father, Reeves recalls, was fascinated by the stars and planets. He would wake the children up early morning while it was still dark and lead them out to the porch to show them Venus. Every summer when the Reeves children were young, the family journeyed to the countryside. "It was like a pilgrimage," says Reeves - to visit one of the family's best friends, a botanist and Trappist monk. The young Hubert watched Father Louis-Marie at work in his laboratory and followed him like a sponge on walks in the woods, "where he would move a rock or an old tree and show you all of nature," Reeves recalls. "He knew every possible plant."

As a boy, Hubert soaked up the love of learning that surrounded him. He wanted to be a botanist like Father Louis-Marie. He wanted to be a cellist in a quartet and play Schubert for an appreciative audience. He wanted to act in the theatre. But the astonishing group he had the physics and mathematics, far outshining his fellow pupils at Jean-de-Beaude, destined him to be a scientist.

In the early 1950s, Reeves began to study physics at the University of Montreal. "I studied in a mineralogy laboratory where we had to slice stones, making thin discs that we illuminated with ultraviolet light," Reeves recalls. "The resulting pictures were absolutely beautiful - they looked like modern paintings. I sold so to the teacher, who did not want to buy them. I thought how stupid of him. Why not contemplate before you analyze?"

Around this time, Reeves spent an evening at an apprenticeship at the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory in British Columbia. At the end of the day he often rewarded himself by sitting on a hill overlooking the ocean to watch the sunset. One evening as he contemplated the panorama, it occurred to him that the gleam of the stars was nothing more than the result of the interaction of atoms with electric light and magnetic fields. The young scientist was flustered at this intrusion into his reverie. Could science and art not survive in harmony?" He set off down roads he never intended to take," he writes, "in hopes of recapturing in the universe the ability to enjoy in peace the sight of pink waves on a tranquil sea."

After completing his master's degree in atomic physics at McGill University in 1955, Reeves married and pursued graduate work in astrophysics at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. While he practiced his trade, he and his wife took to a resort on the Mediterranean, where they met other families. The children played together, and in the evening the ritual was for the adults to give friendly, informal talks about what they did for a living. At Reeves's talks, people clamoured for more. For his vacations, he began to pack slides and a projector along with his summer clothes. He can still remember one time when no one went to bed: "They were still asking for more when the daylight came."

In 1981, he finally found a publisher, Editions de Seuil, for Atom of Silence. He was told he could expect perhaps 1,500 copies to be sold. Since it was published, more than half a million French-speaking Canadians have bought the book. "In 1990, the book was published in French in 1990 and in English three years later. More than a quarter of a million copies have been sold altogether, and the book remains a best-seller in both Montreal and Quebec. The English edition introduced Reeves to an English-speaking audience."

Privately, Reeves kept a journal in which he strove to link disparate concepts from physics, religion, music, biology - whatever attracted his interest at the moment. An educator who taught in both French and Quebec, he says of the expansion into his universe: "The English edition introduced Reeves to an English-speaking audience."

Marcel Arnaud, an astrophysicist who once studied with Reeves and is now a professor at the Université libre de Bruxelles, expected Reeves would become "as popular as he is now" in his country. "He is a very good speaker, his talks are entitled "In the country of the universe" and he has an interest in astrophysics."

"Reeves would now like to interest all Canadians in science and astrophysics as he has interested Europeans and Quebecers. He wants, he says, to give something back to his people. Reeves sees in Canada a model for the rest of the world to follow. If he says, there are many different groups of people, and while they do not always get on well with another, they manage to live together in peace. "It is important to him, he says, that in Canada there is a country where a different groups of people live together in peace. "It is important to him, he says, that in Canada there is a sense of community, a sense of belonging, a sense of unity."

The lecture hall, a large marble-and-glass room furnished with marble, was filled with capacity with people of all ages and backgrounds, some new, some old, from all the universes, some simply science enthusiasts. A woman in the front row was a retired artist, interested in hearing Reeves speak because she was, she said, "absolutely fascinated" by the first chapter of Maclure."

As the audience settled itself, Reeves set up slides and an overhead projector at the front of the room. There was no fears. When he requested the first slide to accompany a talk reported to be about outer space, a picture flashed on the screen of two children laughing together, an image that could not have been discovered, it is sure, the mind reflects. It responds only not with "Ah, yes," but also with "Of course!"

"Reeves's intention, as promised, did become apparent through the course of his talk. He linked the evolution of matter to the evolution of humanity. The universe is made up of increasingly more complex materials, he said. If they had not been made, we would not have been made: "Man descended from the primates, the primate descended from the cell, the cell descended from the molecule, the molecule descended from the atom, the atom descended from the quark."

He talked about life, evolution and the universe. The picture of the laughing children in Peru was flashed on the screen once again at the conclusion of his talk, a charming notion of the summit of evolution. The audience applauded enthusiastically. Reeves had once again, as his colleague Michel Castel said, "brought the stars into our homes."
Cleaning Up

The air we breathe is a great deal purer than it was just 20 years ago. And much of the credit for this belongs to cleaner-burning automobiles and improved gasoline

BY WINNIE THOMAS

The encouraging progress that has been made so far in reducing automobile emissions has been confirmed by a study recently completed by the Canadian Automobile Association, an organization that represents the nation's motorists. Richard Godling, the association's vice-president responsible for standards and performance, says that preliminary results of the study suggest that automobile emissions in Canada, have been very encouraging. "The automobile emission standards that have been introduced have had a huge impact on air quality," says Godling.

"One interesting statistic I've heard quoted is that, kilometre for kilometre, one 1970-vintage car generates as much pollution as do 20 automobiles manufactured in 1995."

That's all good news. But we're not altogether out of the smog yet. Although no areas of Canada are subjected to the severe air-pollution problems that afflict some major urban centres in the United States, there is still room for improvement in the quality of our air.

Current, in the country's urban areas, total motor vehicle emissions are responsible for about 65 percent of the carbon monoxide and roughly 50 percent of the nitrogen oxides. These gases are released by the three principal tailpipe pollutants - carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides. These last two being precursors of ground-level ozone, which forms from the reaction of sunlight and other substances present in the atmosphere.

Automobiles are not the only offenders; we tend to forget that internal combustion engines also contribute to these problems. Some of these machines don't come equipped with such effective pollution control systems as do the family automobile. According to The Economist, a lawn-mower that operates for an hour can create as much pollution in a new car that's driven for more than 1,000 kilometres.

Last year, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, a joint federal-provincial body, established a task force to develop options for setting improved national standards for automobile emissions and to consider whether, and to what extent, additional vehicle or fuel standards may further help to improve the quality of Canada's air. This initiative was welcomed by the petroleum industry, which, through the Canadian Petroleum Institute, has made a number of recommendations to the task force on the best and most economical ways of improving the quality of Canada's air.

In fact, there's very little dispute among the various parties as to what needs to be done. Basically, there are three areas of concern: one is the smog-forming emissions of ground-level ozone, which afflict some parts of the country during the summer months; another relates to the so-called acid air toxics, such as benzene; and the third is in the area of fine particulates. (Carbon monoxide is not regarded as a problem in Canada, as it is in some urban communities in the United States. Levels of carbon monoxide in Canada's cities are well within acceptable limits.)

Ozone has been fingered as the number one baddie as far as the nation's air is concerned. A gas made up of molecules comprising three oxygen atoms bonded together, ozone is created by a complicated reaction that occurs between nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds in the presence of heat and sunlight. Ground-level ozone is the chief ingredient of urban smog and can trigger eye, throat and lung irritation. It is also believed to have an adverse effect on vegetation, including farm crops.

Like some other potentially harmful gases, ozone is a naturally occurring substance. (If you take a walk through a pine forest for many kilometres from the nearest urban centre, you are exposing yourself to ground-level ozone - at a level, in fact, that is about one-quarter of the recommended Canadian limit.) This so-called background level of ozone is created when naturally occurring nitrogen oxides react with oxygen and are driven off by the trees.

In urban areas the main contributors to ground-level ozone are the combustion and evaporation of fossil fuels, various industrial processes and the evaporation of solvents found in dry-cleaning fluids, oil-based paints, varnishes and thinners.

However, higher than recommended levels of ozone are not far from being a universal Canadian problem. They occur not only in certain parts of the country and only on hot summer days. The three areas of the country where recommended ozone levels are most frequently exceeded are British Columbia's Lower Fraser Valley (vancouver) and, central Canada's heavily-polluted Montreal-Windsor corridor, and Saint John, N.B. Most of the ozone in Saint John comes from the United States by way of the prevailing winds, so there is little that can be done locally to alleviate the situation. In the Lower Fraser Valley the problem is largely local in origin, while ozone levels in the Montreal-Windsor corridor result from a combination of local and transboundary causes.

Imperial Oil chairman Robert Peterson is one of many in the petroleum industry who believe that reducing ozone levels throughout the country should be regarded as an environmental priority. "In my view," says Peterson, "limiting the formation of ground-level ozone is the primary air-quality concern in Canada today. It's an area where we have already seen improvement, but further progress can and should be made."

"It's important, however, for Canada as a country to balance what needs to be done to achieve a clean environment with what we can afford and to make sure that we don't spend our limited financial resources inefficiently. My own company has embarked on a five-year plan that will see emissions from the transportation fuels we produce and sell substantially reduced."

Some of the measures in Imperial's plan have already been implemented. Over the past two decades, for example, the company has invested millions of dollars in capturing volatile compounds from its storage tanks. For us, says Peterson, "this programme simply made good business sense, particularly during a period of rapidly rising prices for petroleum products. However, it also makes excellent environmental sense."

Likewise, Imperial supports capturing vapours that would otherwise escape from tanker trucks when they are loaded at terminals and when they discharge their cargo of petroleum at service stations. The company has already spent millions on equipment to do this at its major terminals in the Toronto and Vancouver areas and in modifying its tanker trucks in those areas. A further $15 million has been earmarked to develop similar equipment on other equipment to do this at its major terminals in the Toronto and Vancouver areas and in modifying its tanker trucks in those areas. A further $15 million has been earmarked to develop similar equipment on other

To ensure that its surge-pressure vapour is sold in the Lower Fraser Valley during the summer months and another means of combing the Regina build-up. For its part, the Canadian Petroleum Institute Insti-
tute has recommended to the task force on vehi-
cle and fuel standards that reduced summer gase-
oline vapour pressure levels be mandated for the
Canada-Petroleum Products Institute and the Lower Fraser
Valley, beginning in 1997. Imperial also exposes another cost-effective
and common-sense means of lowering ozone lev-
els: regular vehicle inspection and maintenance.
Some older vehicles can spew out 100 times the
hydrocarbons, 50 times the carbon monoxide and 11
times more ozone-forming nitrogen oxides as are
emitted by properly tuned late-model cars. But
even relatively new vehicles can pollute if they are
not properly maintained.

As a new generation of yet more efficient and
cleaner-burning automobiles reaches the market in the near future, emis-

tions are expected to continue to fall, despite an increasing number of vehicles
on the road. In fact, the federal govern-
ment has calculated that more than half of the total reduction in ozone-forming emis-
sions in Canada between 1994 and the year
2000 will result from normal turnover in the
car population.

On the other hand, some genera-
lion environmental concerns exist in Cana-
da about a category of emissions known as
hazardous air pollutants or air toxics, of which benzene is one. At present, there is considerable contro-
versy over the health effects of benzene, partic-
ularly at low exposure levels. Most experts do
agree that in extremely high concentrations (of
the order of hundreds of parts per million) ben-
zeno causes acute myeloid leukemia and other
blood disorders. However, there is a lack of data on the effects of current exposure levels, which rarely exceed 10 parts per million.

In an effort to gather more information about the effects of low level exposure to benzene, Impe-
rion conducted a pilot study based on groups of employees who could be exposed to hydrocarbons, including benzene, during the course of their work. The researchers have not yet determined what level of exposure is necessary to bring about any noticeable effects.

Gasoline is cleaner and performs better than the fuel we filled our tanks with just a decade ago. As the Canadian Automobile Association's Richard Goddard notes, "There has been a clear improvement in the quality of gasoline. When fuel standards first went into effect, we often got complaints about gasoline, but now we have lost count of the compliments we receive." However, there is a lack of data on the effects of current exposure levels, which rarely exceed 10 parts per million.

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The Yukon's Lonely Island

Once an important Arctic whaling station, remote
Herschel Island is now a territorial park

BY PAUL CHARD

Sitting on a small grassy hillside, the sun
warmed one side of my face, a sharp breeze
cooling the other. I gazed out at the Beaufort Sea.
The currents of time, like the currents of the sea,
have brought many changes to the shores of
Herschel Island.

Known for centuries as Qikiqtaruk, which
means "the island" in the lan-
guage of the indigenous people of
the western Arctic, Herschel Is-
land measures only 18 kilometres
from east to west, averages about
half that from north to south and
reaches just 153 metres at its
highest point. Two kilometres
from the mainland, it is the only
island off the coast of the Yukon
to the north, there is nothing but
the polar ice cap.

Both desolate and quietly
beautiful, Herschel is a place of
contradictions. The all-but-empty
buildings and the seemingly
forgotten graves, with their fall-
cold shelves, create a cer-
tain loneliness - almost despair.

Yet, in summer, the island's low
rolling hills look friendly and inviting, and the
fragile arctic flowers have a delicate beauty and
seem, at first thought, to be at odds with their harsh environment.

It was approximately 40,000 years ago that
glaciers thrust all up from the sea floor to create
Herschel Island. With no bedrock to support it,
most parts of the island are eroding into the sea.
As the same time, currents are building up a series
of sand spits on its southern edge.

While the sea has shaped the island physically,
people have defined its character. From the small
hill on which I am sititng, I can see the narrow
spit that at the close of the last century was home
to the vibrant whaling community of
Pauline Cove. Today, empty warehouses and
cabin remnants are among the few easily discernible signs
of human intrusion on the Herschel Island.

Earlier, I walked among those well-kept but
coldly empty structures. In the 102-year-old build-
ing known as Community House, I leafed through
pages of old photographs they tell only a small
part of the story of what life on the island was like
a century ago. The American whalers were happy
faces for the camera; their smiles hide the hard
ships they endured in this isolated northern environ-
ment.

They came to the icy waters of the Beaufort Sea in pursuit of
the bowhead whale. The wintery months of 1894-95 - when
whaling was at its peak - saw 15 whal-
ing ships and 1,500 men and
dogs sail out the cold water
bar at Herschel Island.

That winter, Pauline Cove was the largest commu-

ty in what is now the Yukon
(it was still more than a year
before gold would be discovered
in the Klondike). By 1907, how-
ever, the whale population of
the Beaufort Sea had been all but
exhausted, and the whalers ceased
to come to Herschel Island.

But the passing years have
brought others to the shores of the island. Fur
traders found their way here. An Anglican mis-

sionary arrived in the summer of 1893 and by 1907
had established a mission to bring Christianity to
the Inuit. And in 1903 the RCMP arrived to exer-
cit Canadian sovereignty over the island.

But long before the white man set foot on
the island, the Inuit had been coming. For centuries,
Herschel has been a hunting and fishing stop for
the indigenous people of the area; in fact, evi-
dence of seasonal occupation of the island goes
back 1,300 years.

With the white man's arrival, however, came
the opportunity to trade for European goods. "It
became a regular spring ritual for the Inuit to wait
for the whaling ships to arrive so trade could begin
at Herschel," says Agnes Griben White, an In-
icultrist who has occupied recent years by Inuit of

The only island of the Yukon coast, Herschel is both
lonely and inviting.

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INUIT OIL RESEARCH 21
the western Canadian Arctic) women who lived on Herschel Island for a year during the early 1960s and who served as an interpreter when an oral history of the island and the surrounding area was being compiled a few years ago. "Whoever had schooners would pick up people who had no schooners. Everyone brought their fun to trade for the year's supplies. It was a trading post for the people, a place to stay for the summer. That was the only time the Inuit of the region got together in one spot."

The island was given its English name by the British explorer Sir John Franklin, who named it after his friend Sir John Herschel, the well-known British astronomer. Franklin, a veteran naval officer, had been sent to North America by the British government to map its coastline; he first sighted Herschel on July 17, 1826.

Over hundred and sixty-one years later, the little Arctic island became Yukon's first territorial park and is jointly managed by the Yukon government and the Inuvialuit, whose land claim settlement includes the island.

A priority for the park is the preservation of the historic structures on the island, and over the past few years the Yukon Heritage Branch has stabilized all the old buildings that were still standing, restoring a few of them.

Along Main Street, as one narrow road is colloquially known among the park staff, are a number of indentations in the ground — they are all that remain of the Inuit sod houses that once lined the street. Built of wood and covered with earth and grass, these houses were warm in winter and cool in summer. At one end of Main Street stands a building that has been taken over by some of the island's abundant wildlife. A house built by the Anglican missionaries in 1916, it now serves as the Mackenzie's most westernly population of black guillemots, some comical-looking birds that must beat their wings furiously to keep the pudgy bodies aloft. Binning has been installed to ensure that the building remains part of the landscape and a home for the guillemots, and artificial nesting structures have been built inside the building and on its roof.

The guillemots are not the only birds that seek refuge on the island; thousands of sea ducks, for example, spend the summer on Herschel's south shore. "The island provides a bit of a refuge from many ground predators on the mainland," says Dave Mosow, a bird biologist with the Yukon government. "Herschel is this little knob up on the edge of the continent — you can go no farther north." Being a final landing spot and a safe haven means that Herschel sees a lot of unusual birds, explains Mosow.

EROSION HAS SCARRED the shores of Herschel Island, leaving dark cliffs crowned by the low rolling hills. In summer, thundered in mist, as it often is, and covered by an emerald blanket, Herschel provides images of the coast of Ireland. But the similarity between the two sides ends there. Herschel is, after all, tundra.

Walking on Herschel can be difficult — I discovered just how difficult on a hike from Pauline Cove to the other side of the island with Marlene Bailey, the park's interpreter. The permafrost and scrubby vegetation have conspired to create low hummocks that make walking difficult. Spongy, powdery soil just large enough to sit on, the hummocks present a challenge even to the most seasoned hiker.

Bailey was the soft-spoken daughter of Agnes White, who lived with her parents when she was growing up. Her father was a special constable with the RCMP and was stationed here shortly before the post was closed in 1960.

We started our walk on the beach — the walking is easier there — and, as we picked our way through enormous pieces of driftwood that had washed up on the shore, Bailey pointed out some cedar logs. I hadn't thought to look under the sea last summer when the wood had come from Bailey reminded me of where I was and of the fact that no trees grow either on the island or along the Beaufort coast.

Most of the wood comes down the Mackenzie River, she told me; some of it is carried there by its tributary, the Lield, which begins in the Yukon and flows through northern British Columbia and back into the Yukon, where it joins the Mackenzie. But the cedar logs are a bit of a mystery. The park ranger, Andy Tallant, believes they wash down the rivers of northern Russia into the Arctic Ocean, eventually finding their way to Herschel Island.

Another possibility is that they have been carried by ice currents from the coast of British Columbia or the Alaska Panhandle, through the Bering Strait and along Alaska's Arctic coast, coming to rest on Herschel Island. Either way, it's an amazing journey.

Another remarkable aspect of the island is its flora. Considering the fact that less than the top one-third of a metre of soil shows each summer, the variety of plant life is quite extraordinary. By the middle of August, many of the flowers have died, but nonetheless, as we continued our walk, Bailey pointed out ahost of insect pollinated wildflowers, and on northern slopes, where flowers bloom late — a number of arctic wildflowers. There were a few buttered samplers of her favourite, the elegant mountain-mallow, whose petals are brushed with pink and yellow, as well as one or two droopy purple monkshoods and the odd pale yellow arctic poppy.

We came upon a mountain sorrel, and Bailey told me to eat one of the leaves; it melted on my tongue before the flavour — something close to raspberry — burst out. Later, her keen eye spotted some blueberries. The plants, barely taller than the tiny berries themselves, were scattered sporadically over the tops of the hummocks.

From a ridge on the other side of the island, Bailey and I looked out to sea as orcas_polka resorted on the horizon at the mouth of es for beluga whales and seals. The wind had brought ice flows close to shore, but no seals had floated in with them. Not sure there any whales this day.

The hike back to Pauline Cove was done. The wind, which had been at our backs before, had intensified and now brought a cold rain. We spent most of the day walking straight down the beach to our boots, trying to protect our faces from the pelting rain.

This was the first fall storm in the Mackenzie Valley. The wind gusts to more than 50 kilometres an hour. Back inside a building at Pauline Cove we listened to the wind howl as it was forced to yield to anything solid enough to withstand its force. Closing the door required both hands and all my strength.

With winds like these in the middle of August, what must it have been like during those months from mid-October to mid-June, when the whales, with their ships locked in the frozen harbor, waited out the cold weather on the island? "It was a pretty tough existence," says Jeff Hawton, director of the Yukon government's Heritage Branch, "and a dangerous one. The winter — with its temperatures of -40 Celsius and colder, ferocious winds and six weeks of almost complete darkness — took many lives. But it was not just in winter that the whales faced danger. Whaling itself, particularly in Arctic waters, was a risky business. Each of the large whaling ships carried four to five smaller whaleboats. The boats, less than 10 metres long, pursued the whales, all the while endeavouring to avoid ice. On board, the crew maneuvered the boat into position, readying the harpoon and explosives that were used to injure the whale and shorten its fight. "Success in whaling is entirely up to the men," wrote Hartson Bedfish in one of the few accounts recorded by the adventurouse men who pursued the whales to the Arctic. "His judgment must be pitted against the natural witsms of the whale, and he must possess accurate knowledge of the whale's habits and characteristics. Even then the whaler is due for a surprise now and then..."

It was the bowhead that was the prize catch for the Herschel whalers. Fashions of the day dictated that ladies' skirts be full, and the hoops

Two volunteers from the mainland to work on the island have seen human life for at least 1,000 years.
that supported those skirts were made from baleen, which hung in strips inside the roof of the mouth of some whales to filter food out of the water taken in as they swam. In addition to skirt loops, this strong but flexible substance was used to make ladies' corset stays, buggy whips, fishing poles and umbrellas.

The bowhead, which is nearly twice the weight of a grey whale, is a particularly good producer of baleen—a large bowhead has about 200 strips of it, some more than three metres long. Bowheads are relatively easy whales to kill, but whaling of any sort in these days was a dangerous undertaking—a mis- placed harpoon had the potential to kick off a pursuit that could last hours. Once har by the whales' harpoons, the whale would take off under the pack ice, towing the whalers and their boat behind it. Bowfishing recorded one fight between the whalers and their unfortunate quarry: "The whale kicked then and knocked the bottom completely out of the second boat. We picked up the crew, grapnel for the line and picked it up, then used all the bombs I had and left the whale for dead.... When we got down there with the ship the whale had gone. We picked up the wrecked boat and eventually found the whale, which we struck again. He was gruggy, which may have been a good thing for us, as he rammed the ship and the ice until twenty-three bombs had been exploded in his vitals and eight to nine hours had passed before he was finally dead."

With the exception of the officers, whalers were not well paid. The home ports of most of the whaling ships that plied the Arctic waters were in California, or, in some cases, on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Bowfishing was the first mate on the steam schooner Mary D. Hume the first year she wintered at Herschel Island (over the years he spent several winter seasons on the island, sometimes as captain of his own ship). A diary entry from his first stay on Herschel reads, "On November 29th, a sun disappeared all at once. For days it had been hanging low on the horizon before it dropped out of sight." Stranded on a tiny Arctic island, far from all that was familiar and knowing that daylight would not return for several months, must have been an eerie experience.

Accounts of that time are filled with stories of men trying to desert. Some, so deranged by their surroundings, even attempted to walk more than 900 kilometres over frozen sea and land to cash in on rumours of gold in the Klondike.

In preparation for winter, the captains would anchor their ships in Pauline Cove. Crude would live on board, living through the frigid wintry months. Often the sails would be used to create a large tent over each ship's deck. With snow piled on the outside, the sails became "ball rooms," in which they were housed, allowed the crew to live inside in some degree of comfort. They also provided an ideal setting for the occasional boxing match, normally held when it was too cold for outdoor physical activities. When they were able to venture outside, the whalers indulged in a variety of sports to help ward off cabin fever. Sledging and skiing became popular, as did both soccer and baseball. "Field" for both sports were marked off on the ice of the cove, and leagues were established.

It was during that game on an unreasonably warm day in March 1897 that a storm whipped up in a matter of minutes. The men scrambled for the whales' boughs and ships while the temperature reportedly dropped from 7 Celsius to 29 Celsius in a matter of minutes. When the storm had blown itself out the next morning, five men were found dead, having been unable to find their way to shelter in the blowing snow.

During the 15 winters the whalers spent on Herschel, 39 perished from disease, cold and accidents. Two of the bodies were never recovered; the rest remained frozen in the permanent ice kilometre from Pauline Cove. In the summer, the clean white grave markers of the whalers stand out against their green backdrops, battered by the long nights of the sun. Near by, on every person who comes to Herschel Island visits those graves.

The markers are actually replicas, placed on the graves prior to Herschel's becoming a park in 1987. The Yukon government recovered the originals, which are now stored in Whitehorse. The marks show that the men buried in these Arctic graves were, with a few exceptions, between the ages of 18 and 25 when they met their deaths.

For the graves of the Inuit outnumber those of the whales by about four to one, and it is believed there are many unmarked Inuit graves on the island. When the whalers arrived in the 1880s, the Inuit population in the Beaufort region was estimated to be more than 2,000. European diseases, however, began to take their toll in the Inuit; by the time the whaling period was over, less than 200 Inuit remained alive in the area.

Andy Tardiff, the park ranger, has his own connection to the island. His grandfather was born here. Tardiff came here for the first time when he was 17. Nearly 10 years later, he began to return to the island to hunt and fish with various members of his family.

Today, he says he wouldn't trade his job on the island for any other. He spends most of each summer here now. But with more than 100 visitors last summer, Herschel is a very different place from the island Tardiff first visited. "There was hardly anyone around in those days—maybe just some biologists and other scientists."

Many of today's visitors come to the island at the conclusion of a one-week rafting trip down Yukon's Firth River. Most arrive on cruise ships; others fly in from Inuvik for just a few hours.

The majority of the Inuvialuit who currently come to the island live in the Mackenzie Delta communities of Aklavik, Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk and travel to the island by boat in the summer. I stopped in Inuvik on my way to and from Herschel Island. It was while I was there that I spoke with Robert McLeod.

McLeod lived on Herschel Island with her grandparents during the 1940s. She says there were four to five families living on the island during that time, plus members of the RCMP. She was only seven when she left and has never been back. And while her memories are fading, she says the island has a very special place in her heart. "There are some things that you don't forget," McLeod says. "Some things that you don't want to forget."

By the time McLeod was born, several trading companies, including the Hudson's Bay Company, had come to and gone from the island, unable to turn a profit despite the abundance of arctic fox. McLeod remembers things like skiing down hills on polar bear skins. She says they didn't think anything of using the skins for this purpose because they weren't worth anything then. "We had no TV, and I don't remember even listening to radio," she says. "We watched bears and ice move." Agnes White described a similar sense of serenity when I asked her why the island is so special to her. "Springtime," she replied. "The weather's so beautiful. I can't describe it, but it's beautiful on the warm days, when it's clean. There's a peacefulness. It's silent. The peacefulness, the sun and the hills."

The past century has been one of turmoil for Herschel Island. Its designation as a territorial park seems to make its future more stable. But the number of visitors is slowly but steadily increasing, and they will put stress on the fragile envi-
Puppeteers Par Excellence
The intellectually challenged members of Famous People Players have earned international acclaim for their inspired, artistic performances

BY SHONA MCKAY

"IT HAS BEEN 21 YEARS SINCE GREGORY came home and said, 'Mom, I'm joining a puppet show.'" June Kozak is recalling the day her now 42-year-old son announced his intention to join Famous People Players, then a fledgling troupe, whose intellectually challenged members have become masters of the art of black-light puppets. Originated in Japan, the technique involves ultraviolet light and life-size fluorescent puppets operated by black-clad — and therefore unseen — puppeteers. The result is a visual simplicity and elegance that belie the precise and complex actions of the puppeteers.

"When Gregory was five, he suffered brain damage as a result of an illness," recalls his mother. "As he grew older we were very concerned about what he was going to do in life. The most we expected was that he would get a job in a sheltered workshop. So when he told me about the puppet group, I was sceptical. Given the extent of his disabilities, I thought that his idea of becoming a puppeteer could only be a dream."

Kozak smiles as he acknowledges that, in spite of her doubts, the dream has become a near-wondrous reality. "Gregory eventually managed to do everything the company demanded of him," she says. "Not only did he learn to work the puppets, he developed in other ways too. He became responsible — he takes care of his own props, for example. He also began to travel around the city by himself, something he had never done before. He used to be shy and dependent. Today, he is a self-confident, accomplished person. Famous People Players has transformed my son's life."

Gregory Kozak is not the only individual to have benefited from the troupe's magic. Since it was formed in 1974, Famous People Players has given scores of Canadians with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to live lives rich with purpose. At the same time, it has touched the hearts of audiences and the sensibilities of critics around the world. Most important, it continues to send a strong message: all human beings — regardless of intellectual ability — can have ambitious goals and, with training and support, can achieve them. Says Jim Drelling, president of Goodwill Toronto, an organization that has supported and applauded the black-light theatre company throughout its history, "Famous People Players gives individuals with barriers one extremely important thing — hope. It shows people who have too often been told that life doesn't hold very much for them that they have the right to dream — and that their dreams can come true."

According to Susan Young, head of charitable donations at Imperial Oil, it is Famous People Players' evident ability to foster the overall develop...
Indeed, the list of stars who are among the group's biggest fans reads like a Who's Who of North American show business.

ment of people with mental, and sometimes physical, challenges that is behind Impractical's long-term support. Since 1986 it has contributed more than $150,000 to Famous People Players. "The majority of the money has gone towards the development of the undernourished school, which provides training in daily living skills as well as theatre," says Young. "That's a programme we feel particularly gives young people the opportunity to acquire theatrical and, just as important, social skills. It focuses on the growth of the individual."

Helping people with challenges attain new heights has undoubtedly been the reason why so many entertainment luminaries have also shown their support for Famous People Players. The list of stars who are among the group's biggest fans reads like a Who's Who of North American show business. At the head of the list is the actor Phil Newman, who funds the kitchen at the troupe's dinner theatre through the sale of Newman's Own products. Another high-profile patron is the pop superstar Phil Collins. Along with inspiration, Collins provided the money to equip the company's newly rebuilt rehearsal and workshop facility. The Canadian entertainers Don Harron and Catherine McKinnon are also long-time supporters. "We feel like we're members of the family," says Harron, who has both written about and performed with the troupe. "I first became acquainted with Famous People Players in 1977. When I saw the wonderful magic that was taking place — both on stage and off — I knew I wanted to be a part of it," adds McKinnon, who is married to Harron. "It has been a marvellous experience to watch the company grow — and to watch how it has helped change societal attitudes. Back when Famous People Players was founded, it was still a problem for people common to use the word 'retarded.' Now, most of us have a new understanding and sensitivity towards people with intellectual challenges. I believe Famous People Players has helped bring that about. The group has done — and continues to do — great work."

While lauding Famous People Players for the social good it does, one must never forget that the troupe is special not just because it shows the world what's possible but also because of the calibre of its performers. So said no less an expert than Lisette, the troupe's first famous mentor, who used Famous People Players to open her Las Vegas act for several years before her death in 1987. "It's not because of who you are that makes people laugh or cry," said the entrepreneur after seeing the company perform for the first time. "It's because you're truly talented performers."

As the lights dim on the 120-seat dinner theatre that is Famous People Players' home in midtown Toronto, a bodiless figure, given form by a top hat, spats and a cane, appears. This apparition — in Day-Glo pink, yellow and green — has become a symbol of Famous People Players, a trademark of chấter of elegance that has raised the curtain on hit shows from Broadway to Beijing. The dancing figure is also a firing ticket to representative Dany Dupuy, the company's creative director and driving force behind Famous People Players.

Picture a young girl, an outcast and a loner, growing up in Hamilton, Ont. A poor student, she is regularly snubbed by the other school children — who call her "dumbie" — and admonished by a heavy-handed father. She turns to a make-believe world, where she finds solace and joy. Knowing that her horse Silver is waiting for her at the school yard gate allows her to bear the terrors of her life as she stands at the blackboard and fails to come up with the answer to a long-division sum. Horrifying neighbourhood kids laugh and applied to the entertainers with her home-made puppet theatre almost makes up for the all-too-usual taunts and jeers.

Such are Dupuy's memories. Yet, as much as the woman who dropped out of high school and is now 40 has the capacity to amaze even the most sceptical individual, she has an even greater talent for pleasing an audience. "I've been a very skilled way through..., I suddenly thought to myself: just who is retained here. These kids helped the girl who had a seizure, these kids loved my show and made me feel good."

According to Dupuy, the visit to Surrey Place marked a turning point in her life. "I can only call it a miracle, because I have no other way of explaining the amazing feeling of belonging that surged through me when I brought my puppet show to those children," she writes. "Those children made me feel less of an outsider... they made me want to share my magic with people like themselves. Special people."

In spite of her belief in the rightness of her path, there's no question that Dupuy's journey — turning a concept into an actuality — was an arduous one. Establishing a professional puppet troupe involved finding re-hearsal space, working capital and, most important, the performers who would bring Famous People Players to life. The last proved to be particularly difficult. Repeatedly, schools and parents turned down Dupuy's requests for individuals to be allowed to join her company. "The attitude there was terribly patronizing," she notes. "The way most people treated exceptional people was to put them on the side and tell them they were loved. That was it. When I explained that I wanted to train individuals for something better than a life in a sheltered workshop, the caregivers just shook their heads. They said it was impossible."

Dupuy's method of dealing with people with intellectual difficulties — and everyone else for that matter — is to demand effort. Considerable effort. Since the days when she got her first job of performing-in-training from the Haney Centre in Toronto, Dupuy has perfected a directional style that blends intensity with benevolence.

For instance, she may well insist — often loudly — that a forgetful and frustrated performer repeat over and over again an action that is giving him or her difficulty. The player may Rebuke the actions for months if necessary — until the movement is...
done properly. When that moment comes, Dupuy is the first to applaud.

Given Dupuy's deep belief that man's reach should always exceed his grasp, it's not surprising that training as a Famous People Players performer takes place offstage as well as on. For example, new members are often charged with the responsibility of delivering company correspondence throughout downtown Toronto. City traffic, buses, streetcars and subways can be a daunting prospect to young intellectually-challenged people who have never before travelled alone. However, armed with a map, bus and subway tickets, an address and the advice to call if lost, the inductees have always achieved their objective.

Such challenges, believes Dupuy, help the members of her company to learn to be responsible for themselves, as well as for others. "Our company operates as a team," she says. "We must all be responsible to the team." To foster the sense of individual as well as group responsibility, Dupuy insists that all members adhere to a set of rules that includes getting to work on time and caring for specific props. The players also assume chores ranging from waiting on tables to cleaning up in the organization's restaurant.

There's no doubt that Dupuy's tough-love approach works. Certainly, audiences and theatre critics are united in their praise. On the occasion of the company's first Broadway show, A Little Little Magic, in 1986, no less important a journal than The New York Times declared: "There are times that A Little Little Magic does seem like magic: the magic of theatre, the magic of diversion, the magic that appeals one to say, 'That's entertainment.'"

But the rewards go beyond critical acclaim. Both troupe members and their families say the real magic of Famous People Players is that it can — and does — radically change lives for the better.

Just ask Barry D'Oroso. A member of Famous People Players for 18 years, D'Oroso almost didn't survive his first season with the company. "I was shy outside my home," recalls the 39-year-old performer, who immigrated to Canada from his native Italy as a child. "I didn't know my left hand from my right. I had never been on a bus by myself. I was real quiet." But times change. D'Oroso, who says Famous People Players taught him "so many things," is today one of the most vital members of the troupe. A highly competent performer, he is also head maître d' at the Famous People Players restaurant, a facility that is staffed by both company members and student chefs from nearby Humber College. "My job is to greet people, take the bar orders and serve them," he says. "I also supervise a crew that makes sure the restaurant is kept clean." D'Oroso readily acknowledges that he has travelled far. "It used to be I would never say anything," he says, his eyes twinkling, "but now they can't get me to shut up."

Lesley Brown is another individual who has flourished in the Famous People Players clique. A 28-year-old who cried and would not let go of her mother's hand the first day she joined the company eight years ago, Brown is now an independent and confident woman who has developed such a reputation for being happy that her colleagues call her Giggle Juice. "Famous People Players has been terrific for my daughter," says Sandy Brown, Lesley's father. "Before, Lesley was never very keen to try new things. Not did she have many friends. Now she has so much. She works hard and takes care of herself and her money. She travels around the city — and the world. And she has friends. Famous People Players has made her life so much richer than it otherwise might have been."

"That's an observation June Kopis kits, who applied to her job, Gregory, as well as scores of other people. "Famous People Players has grown to become a symbol of inspiration for people with intellectual disabilities and their families around the world," she says. "What it teaches is that every individual has the potential to live a meaningful life and to make dreams come true.""

Memories of Gardens, Secret and Otherwise

GARDEN HAVE ALWAYS GIVEN ME GREAT pleasure, as the American philosopher Amon Brown once wrote. "Who loves a garden still his Eden keeps." Gardens are gentle havens in this busy world of our, their colours, music and fragrance contrasting to soothe the soul and unlock the senses.

Perhaps it is my grandmother who is responsible for my love of gardens. When I was small, I took her great garden for granted but loved it nonetheless. A low stone wall surrounded her maze of rosebushes, and I can still picture my grandmother clipping away dead blooms, weeding and watering, all the time telling me about this blossom or that as I skipped along the little wall. Beyond the rose garden was a velvet lawn and, here, in the same flowerbed bright with the colours of hundreds of blooms.

There was in this garden a secret to delight a child. From a distance, it appeared that the garden ended just beyond the lawn. In fact, there was an entrance there to a wild sector, where fruit trees grew among a tangle of sunbaked bushes. There was mud and chaos and, oh, it was a wonderful hidden place to play.

My grandmother never forgot that a garden should be a place of pleasure for all. Hers was not a "Don't stand there" kind of garden, but rather one in which nature and children could coexist.

When I was 11 my grandmother moved to a newly built bungalow with an unimag-

inistic rectangle of recently sodded ground for a garden. Undeterred, she set to work, building a little rockery, digging flowerbeds and planting her beloved roses and myriad other flowers. Within a very few years, we were having meals in a garden that was somehow familiar.

Ten years after she'd moved to the bungalow, my grandmother gave it up for an apartment. I was not optimistic. Yes, there was a balcony, but no piece of ground on which she could work her magic. I smiled a few years ago when I opened a letter from her and found in it a photograph of her sitting beside a trophy. Her 'balcony' flowers, she wrote, had been named second prettiest in the English city of Cheltenham.

But my grandmother's gardens were not the only ones to give me pleasure. I also enjoyed my own gardens and those of friends. There seemed to be something different and wonderful in each. The house I lived in was a small child's had a big old oak tree where I would play for hours, alone or with a friend, looking out not just on our garden but those of our neighbours.

I would sit with a friend in her garden on a white wrought iron bench that had once belonged to the British prime minister William Gladstone. I didn't really know much about Gladstone, but I felt important sitting on his bench, which, to my mind at least, gave the garden a distinguished air.

When I was 10, I moved from the city to a village, where we lived in a house with a wonderful, comfortable old garden that seemed to belong to another time. Down one side ran a wide bed planted with a disorderly and rather motley collection of flowers, some as tall as I was. Immediately behind the house was a large lawn. When we had first arrived, the area had been largely taken up by an enormous bed of Brussels sprouts. We were not particularly averse to sprints, but they weren't the prettiest sight to look out on from the verandah and tended to give off a rather unpleasant odour in warm weather.

By far my favourite part of this rambling garden was the large fruit cage beyond the lawn. Gooseberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants, loganberries and raspberries grew in profusion, and many was the quiet hour I spent there picking a bowl of berries for a summer pudding.

Another garden that sticks in my memory is one with which I had a chance encounter about 15 years ago. It was in the central Indian city of Jaipur, at an old hotel that had been built in the early 1800s as army officers' quarters. My husband and I were travelling through India and found ourselves stranded in Jaipur when we changed trains on our journey from northern India to the southern city of Madras. It seemed the train we had expected to take could hold no more people. We arrived at the hotel at night, and it wasn't until the next morning that we saw the beautiful garden outside our window. Enclosed by a black wrought iron fence, it had a perfectly manicured lawn dotted with rosebushes and other, unfamiliar flowers with scents as erotic as some of the birds whose song serenaded us as we read the newspaper there under blue skies and a warm sun. I remember that garden as a tonic. We were travel-weary but weren't ready to give up on India, the garden, with its blissful tranquility and scents of home, restored our spirits completely.

As I watch summer take hold of my garden — rather meagre compared with those of any past year — I find myself thinking of my grandmother. She is 91 now, and this summer I will visit her. And well she sits with her balcony, having tea among the flowers, and I'll find myself thinking of the many happy hours we've passed together in the gardens of our lives. — Sarah Lansley