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Bonnie Burnard's Canada
My Canada

Winner of the 1999 Giller Prize for her first novel, A Good House,
Bonnie Burnard grew up and currently lives in southwestern Ontario.
Her previous works include the award-winning short-story collections
Women of Influence and Casino & Other Stories

My Canada starts here at this window. Lake Huron has been calm all
morning; the light clean under a good summer sun, the sky almost cloudless. Small
waves break on the fine shoreline sand with lazy confidence, white and sturdy. At
the horizon, the colour of the water is teal blue, which is, I think, the very finest
blue, but closer in, churned-up sand stains the water a natural, expected tan. The
breeze, seen clearly in the flag on the pole near the new change house, is robust.

To the south I can see down the beach to
where the land curves out into the lake,
although it is not land I see but a long arm of
dark trees, pine and spruce, birch and maple,
the greens indistinguishable from this distance.
The shoreline (the same essential trees, the
same rocky outcrops or their worn-down
descendants) looks as it must have looked
centuries ago to someone approaching by water.

Tomorrow is Canada Day. Tomorrow night
I'll have the company of young people on the
balcony. There'll be beer and, most certainly, a
wildly wild, childlike appreciation for the show
of fireworks on the lake. They do seem to know
how lucky they are, living in this country, now.

I left southern Ontario when I was 22, the
age of my younger daughter, and from that time
until I returned here six years ago, I lived my life
in other parts of Canada. This was essentially
unplanned. Sitting here looking out over the
water, I think of it as luck.

My Canada has been works within a world.
By the time I left southern Ontario, I knew
it fairly well: this beach, the busts on the water,
these cottages backed by farmland often just
100 metres or so beyond the dune grass. The
farmland itself was rough pasture, and then a bit
further inland good, finely squared-off fields of
corn and beans and winter wheat. The town I
know seems not to have changed in any obvi-
ous way, although surely the front street
merchants had a better time of it then, when a
trip to one of the nearby cities was a deliberate, occasional excursion rather than a quick afternoon run into a big box store. The streets of the town were just where I left them, and most of the houses have received recent attentions (a small addition at the side, bigger, better windows, a fence reinforced because I killed with hanging baskets and a hammock), and almost all of them seem to be well maintained, with coats of paint and new front doors and sensible attention to shrubs. Many of the trees I remember (a maple marking the corner by the arena, a horse chestnut filling half a back yard) are gone, but trees get old, trees live past their prime. The nightingale sings succumb to rot, which can make them dangerous in a summer storm. I do miss the raw broad stamps that seem to be taken now when a tree is removed, although I no longer imagine the jumping up, the swinging of my arms in a wide, dizzy circle.

The first new town I saw was North cold and sparse, near the top of Lake Superior (which isn’t north at all, I know that now). Aside from the cool, which was sharp and blue, and the morning light, which banked off the snow so purely white it often hurt my eyes to look, it is the trees I remember, the thick mass of spruce and pine and fir (like the Pacific Ocean, a mass so wide that when the end of it finally appears, the beginning is gone from memory, nonexistent), broken only by man-made, almost comically man-made, highways. I didn’t stay long enough to begin to know the people who belonged in that North. It was the end of the sixties, the people I knew were temporary like me, most of them had left something and were on their way to something else. But although my understanding of that world was incomplete, it was where I learned that I could die from foolishness (this lesson learned one 30-below New Year’s Eve on a car one of those man-made highways, with a wonderful Irish ex-priest and a frozen gas line and the long-distance trucker who would shake the tune so long, so long in coming down the road).

From this North I moved into the West Coast world, into mountains, the man-blasted, rolling highway following the valleys cut by water, the rivers like prehistoric, Goon-mades. There I learned that logging trucks must own any road they want to own (the husband of the friend of a friend who was killed when his load shifted forwards through the cab on a steep descent). I taught with a small community of Austrians, the men so absolutely beautiful, so perpetually 18 and hanging on hard to that freedom, the women a study in watchful endearment, like mothers. I worked briefly in a law office, sorted through files to impose a kind of order on a disorderly practice, discovered in my sorting a murder case (the question of a fence and cattle grazing where they were not legally entitled to graze) and in that file letters from the convicted murderer, who was serving his time, and an 8-by-10 glory of the naked rancher he’d shot, the wound a black, encrusted, fist-sized hole beneath the shoulder, the neighbourly dispute thus settled, the cattle long since steak and dog food. The interior cities seemed the same as small cities anywhere: a busy, grey downtown, an old core where first houses stood beneath a canopy of early-planted city trees, then strip malls and fast-food joints so ubiquitous you could forget where you were, then the curving crescents of suburban houses, the newer churches, in one corner, in a lucky city, the small manufacturing plants that made the jobs that made the city.

After the West Coast I came home to Ontario and then I married and moved to the prairie, the move there prompted by my Vancouver husband’s company transfer. It was a good transfer, we bought a good house on a street arching with olives. But there is loneliness in a required, grown-up move, and from that loneliness comes an imperative to make a world. When he was a very young man, my father had been sent west with his brothers to work the harvest excursions, because money was needed (and money was surely an entirely different thing in 1924), and then much later, in 1928, middle age, he had travelled with my mother and another couple, their friends, in a dark, boxy fifteen car (what kind I don’t know, but even at 93 my father will remember that car) to holiday at Lake Louise. They returned from those trips with stories of mountains we couldn’t imagine and of a bear approaching a cabin door, this smaller story told as a kind of fearful joke that got better with each telling, as such stories do.

Just before I left Ontario to make a life on the prairie, my father told me that I would be wise to drop any eastern superiority I might feel, he said it was invalid and that it would only do me harm. When he offered this advice, he was thinking about the wheat fields, the broad landscape bare of trees (although not bare, not really) that could, by his accounting, feed the world. He was thinking millions of bushels and farms so big they are measured in sections. We lived on the Prairies for 20 years. Although I often flew east with the kids (who loved the home they were born to, as children naturally do), and although my father often flew out to see us, my mother, not a retired flier, came only once, to see for herself the home I’d made, think now. She has been dead nearly 20 years (the worst of it that my children didn’t know her well enough to truly miss her, as I do, but I remember her liberal refusal to leave the car when we stopped at the Diefenbaker Homestead, a dark, primitive shack that had been set up in the park as a tourist attraction. I remember her stubborn turned head, one of the many signs of her conviction, her decency. All the time we lived there, in the heart of a city, raising our kids just as other Canadians were raising theirs in other cities and towns and on farms, I was particularly aware of the craft of friendship (the friends made during that time, in that place will be friends until we start to die, and indeed, we have started), and I was equally, almost daily, aware of the homesteaders making their new lives in their sodden (you can’t drive out into the prairie without this awareness; you can’t fool yourself standing under that sky), the pianos brought over with them, the photographs of home, the hard labour undertaken by the men, the loneliness of the...
The debate about global climate change continues to command the attention of governments, scientists, business environmentalists and the public alike, not only in Canada but around the world. Is the earth's climate really changing, and if so, what is causing it, what might the consequences be, and what, if anything, can or should be done about it?

A key issue in Canada is whether we should ratify the United Nations Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. This international agreement, negotiated in 1997 by 160 participating countries, requires 39 developed nations, including Canada and the United States, to reduce their human-generated emissions of so-called "greenhouse gases" to an average of five percent below 1990 levels during the period from 2008 to 2012 (Canada's specific commitment is to reduce its emissions to six percent below 1990 levels during that time). The remaining 122 participating countries are exempt from any reduction requirements. The protocol will be legally binding and if and when it is ratified (approved by government), by 55 of the 162 participating countries, representing at least 55 percent of the 38 developed countries' 1990 emissions.

I believe it is fairly well known that Imperial Oil opposes ratification by Canada of the Kyoto protocol. In fact, the company has been critical of this stance by a number of environmental organizations. But exactly what is Imperial's position on the climate change issue, and why does it not believe that the Kyoto protocol should be ratified?

First, it's important to understand that there are separate questions. The fact that Imperial Oil doesn't support ratification of the protocol doesn't mean it fails to recognize that global climate change is a potentially serious matter or that it advocates a do-nothing, head-in-the-sand approach to the issue. In Imperial's view, enough is known about climate change for us to recognize that it may pose a legitimate long-term risk and that more needs to be learned about it. But what science has given us so far is an awareness that global climate change is a long-term possibility, not a signal of an impending and certain catastrophe.

The Kyoto protocol is based on the theory that so-called greenhouse gases generated by industrial and other human activity — primarily carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, natural gas, gasoline and diesel fuel — over the last 150 years or so are increasing the greenhouse effect, causing the earth's climate to warm beyond its natural range of variability. (The greenhouse effect is a natural phenomenon: Solar radiation is absorbed by oceans, land surfaces, clouds and atmospheric gases. These gases act as a blanket, trapping the sun's warmth. Without this effect, the earth would be too cold to be habitable.)

Some scientists have predicted continued, uninterrupted greenhouse warming over the next century or more, resulting in extreme weather such as hurricanes and other climatic environmental, ecological and human consequences. Advocating "precaution," they believe that actions should be taken immediately to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel use — hence the Kyoto protocol.

In reality, the science of climate change is far from certain at this point. And the uncertainty does not result from the traditional imprecision of science, but from gaps in knowledge and inadequate understanding of several important processes affecting climate. On the key question of whether carbon dioxide emissions from human activity are causing the climate to warm beyond the range of natural variation, there is certainly no consensus in the global scientific community.

It is true that the earth's surface temperature has risen by about half a degree Celsius over the past 150 years, but much of the warming occurred before 1940, while most of the increase in fossil fuel use has taken place since then. In addition, reliable measurements taken by satellites over the last 20 years show that there has been little, if any, warming in the lower atmosphere during the period, contradicting the computer models used to predict future climate change, which conclude that warming should occur on the surface and in the atmosphere at the same rate. Stated Dr. John R. Christy, director of the Earth Systems Science Center at the University of Alabama in Huntsville: "The typical climate change model is not accounting for what happens in the real world."

Scientists agree that the earth's climate is shaped by many natural variables, including sunlight, clouds, oceans, rain, wind, ice, storms, lightning, volcanoes, comets and magnetic fields. The climate has varied significantly throughout history, driven entirely by natural causes, with warmer periods following cooler ones and so on. So it is difficult to see how some scientists can state with any certainty that the recent rise in surface warming has been caused by human activity.

The Kyoto protocol was primarily based on a 1995 report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This report concluded, in a summary for policymakers prepared by government officials and others who are not scientists, that "the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on climate." Yet the scientists who prepared the report itself were careful not to state any firm conclusions about the connection between the burning of fossil fuels and global warming. In fact, the lead author of the report's chapter on the detection and attribution of greenhouse warming, Dr. Benjamin Santer, has said, "It's unfortunate that many people read the media hype before they read the chapter. We say quite clearly that few scientists would say the attribution issue was a done deal."

As for weather effects, the report states that "overall, there is no evidence that extreme weather events or climate variability has increased in a global sense through the 20th century, although data and analyses are poor and not comprehensive."

Because of these and many other areas of uncertainty, Dr. Ronald G. Prins, head of the department of earth, atmospheric and planetary sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has stated, "There is no doubt that our present understanding of climate and our ability to predict climate are inadequate to provide a sharp focus for policymaking."

Imperial concurs with that view. We do not believe the science of climate change is sufficiently understood for us to determine appropriate courses of action. To take drastic action now would be premature, and if those actions prove economically harmful, they could limit our ability to respond later if our evolving understanding of the science shows it to be necessary.

Having said that, even the science of climate change must be conclusive, we would still view the Kyoto protocol as an unreasonable and unworkable response and would look for a better path forward. If implemented, the protocol would adversely affect the well-being of people not only in Canada but throughout the world, while having little effect on the problem it is intended to address.

Since the industrial revolution, economic growth has been inextricably linked to the rising consumption of energy, and the majority of energy consumed is derived from fossil fuels (an average of about 90 percent in developed countries, although only about 79 percent in Canada, because of our greater use of hydroelectric and nuclear power).

The only practicable way to reduce fossil fuel consumption in the short term is by restricting energy use,
which means deliberately curtailing economic activity and growth. The Kyoto protocol, therefore, is essentially an agreement under which 38 developed nations are required to restrict their economic activity and limit the size of their respective national economies.

Some believe that the reductions in carbon dioxide emissions called for by the Kyoto protocol cannot be achieved without affecting economic growth through a combination of energy conservation measures (such as driving less and turning on lights) and improvements to existing technologies (more fuel-efficient vehicles, furnaces, and appliances, etc.), coupled with large-scale utilization of alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power.

While these actions might help, it is doubtful that they would lead to reductions of the magnitude called for in the protocol for so short a time. A 1999 study by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers determined that maximum utilization of existing energy-saving and substitution technologies would achieve reductions of between 5 and 30 percent of the United States' required reductions under the protocol.

Technologies such as fuel cells, hybrid gasoline-electric and diesel engines, and advanced diesel engines hold promise for more energy-efficient transportation, but they are unlikely to make a major contribution by the 2030 to 2012 period. Other options such as solar, wind, and biomass energy can meet some limited needs in niche areas, but require major technologival breakthroughs to be significant economic alternatives. They also come with their own problems, such as loss of wind energy and furnishing for biomass production.

In Imperator's view, several considerations should weigh against Canada's ratifying the protocol. The first is the magnitude of the emissions reductions required to meet Canada's commitment, especially in the absence of significant help from as-yet-undeveloped technologies or alternative energy sources. Since 1990, as a result of economic growth, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have increased by about 15 percent. This means that reducing emissions by 5 percent below 1990 levels—Canada's target under the protocol—would require a reduction of about 19 percent from today's levels. Natural Resources Canada estimates that if economic growth continues unabated through 2010—what is referred to as the "business as usual" case—the required reduction will be about 26 percent from levels projected for that year. This is equivalent to almost 85 percent of the combined greenhouse gas emissions from all of Canada's industries today.

Reductions of this scale would necessitate dramatically restricting Canada's economic activity and growth.

Reductions of this scale would necessitate dramatically restricting Canada's economic activity and growth—which would affect the lives of all Canadians and people in other countries. It would severely limit the financial resources available for improving health care, education, infrastructure and environmental protection.

Studies have also shown that because of the highly energy-intensive nature of our economy and our dependence on foreign trade, Canada would be more economically disadvantaged by the protocol than almost any other developed country. And these studies assume ratification by both Canada and the United States, by far our largest trading partner. If Canada were to be subject to Kyoto restrictions without similar constraints being imposed on the United States, the impact on Canada's economy could be much greater.

Ratification by the United States is problematic at this point. Prior to the Kyoto conference in 1997, the U.S. Senate expressed reservations about ratifying any agreement that excluded developing countries or that seriously harmed the U.S. economy.

A federal government sponsored analysis has determined that for Canada to achieve its Kyoto targets, we would have to reduce our intensity of the economy (a measure of the fossil fuel energy required per unit of production) by 4.3 percent. The reason for this relatively minor, but in fact it is more than double the best rate they have ever achieved in the past. That includes the 1970s and 1980s, when energy prices were higher than today, major hydro and nuclear power projects were completed, and governments heavily subsidized energy substitution and conservation initiatives.

At this time in Canada, we don't know how such a rate of reduction could be achieved and sustained without prohibitive costs to the economy and individuals. In early 1998, after signing the protocol in 1997, the federal and provincial governments jointly exhibited a package involving 15 "issue tables" (study groups made up of representatives from business, government, academia and other fields), each focusing on a specific area. These included important energy-using sectors such as transportation, forestry, agriculture, industry and electricity generation, as well as public education, technology and economic modeling and analysis.

Imperial has been participating in the process, contributing its expertise in the energy business. It is our observation, however, that after almost two years of deliberations involving the "issue tables" process, the package has not identified a realistic set of actions by which Canada-scale emissions reductions could be achieved in this time frame.

Some tables, including the one covering the industrial sector, concluded that they were not able to identify sufficient acceptable measures to achieve the targets in their sectors. In other cases, tables suggested that while the targets might be achievable, necessary changes would require going beyond measures that would be low-cost and acceptable to the Canadian public.

To cite just one example, the transportation sector concluded that in order to achieve the reductions to Canadians from driving to the extent required by the protocol, and in the absence of other measures, the price of gasoline would have to be increased, through additional excise taxes, described as "very high, unacceptably high, in the table's view." Instead, the table proposed a variety of other options, ranging from better traffic monitoring and enforcement of speed limits to discouraging driving by substantially raising parking prices in cities.

Other tables have similarly felt that energy-efficiency measures have considerable potential. Yet if these options are as attractive as suggested, one wonders why Canadians have not pursued them before, to reduce energy costs and to alleviate other environmental concerns, such as air quality.

The fact that such a focused effort by so many informed people over two years has not produced a clear, workable plan should, in Imperial's view, cause us to question whether achieving the Kyoto target is realistically possible and, if not, whether ratifying Kyoto is an appropriate path for Canada. A second concern is that ratifying the protocol is that; even if burning fossil fuels does prove to be a significant cause of climate change, the exclusion of developing countries from the protocol raises the question of whether it is fair and, more important, whether it can or will work. Why?

Developing countries face enormous challenges and desperately need energy to improve the welfare of their people. Actions show that developing countries, including China, Mexico, Brazil and India, all of which are excluded from the protocol, account for 70 percent of total carbon dioxide emissions growth from 1990 to 2025. Even if all the 38 developing countries were to meet their emission reduction targets under the Kyoto protocol, the net effect on climate change would be small.

Warming projected to occur over the next 100 years, estimated at two degrees Celsius by the IPCC, would be reduced by only 0.2 degrees, or 1.5 degrees Celsius. Moreover, imposing reduction requirements only on developed countries could have unintended consequences. For example, because they would be exempt from commitments to reduce emissions, developing countries might attract industry and investment—and therefore jobs—from countries that are subject to restrictions, including Canada.

A second important consideration is that where the Kyoto protocol was signed in December 1997, a number of key provisions were set aside for resolution in later negotiations. These included how and by whom compliance with the requirements might be measured, and what the penalties might be for failing to comply, as well as technical provisions relating to such matters as the trading of emissions between countries, and whether credits could be permitted for forests that absorb carbon dioxide.

Long term to the future of Kyoto talks, there have been a number of conferences and much negotiating, these important issues still have not been resolved, largely because of the divergent views of the 160 participating countries. In effect, the developed countries are expected to make legally binding commitments to reduce their emissions without knowing all the terms and conditions of the protocol.

As mentioned earlier, Imperial's opposition to ratifying the Kyoto protocol does not mean we believe that the potential for long-term climate change should be ignored or dismissed. But a responsible path forwards must be marked by sound scientific, economic and technical analysis.

Actions that should be taken, in Imperial's view, include continued research of the global climate system, cost-benefit analyses of proposed responses to society, the encouragement of the development and implementation of new technologies, and a greater all-round energy efficiency in all countries.

Universities, industry, research laboratories, governments and individual citizens can all contribute to this process. Governments should support and encourage research on climate science and private investment in technology, rather than target policies and programs that support particular views. And all proposals to address climate change should be carefully analyzed to assess their costs and benefits to society.

It is commonly stated that voluntary measures are not effective in reducing energy consumptions, but this is not how, Canadian industry—including the petroleum industry—has long recognized the importance of improving energy efficiency, which reduces costs and also results in lower emissions. For example, in the spring 2000 issue of the Imperial Oil Review, Imperial's own operations are much more energy efficient than they were—annual energy consumption at the Brantford recovery operation in Cold Lake, Alberta, has been reduced, since 1987, by enough to heat 25,000 houses for a year—and they continue to improve.

In summary, Imperial recognizes that climate change is an important issue. We do have an obligation to ourselves and to future generations to make that "house" properly, through a measured and responsible approach, based on scientific facts and environmental and economic realities.
Looking Back

Thirty-three years ago
Canada was celebrating its Centennial, and that June a special edition of the Imperial Oil Review was published to mark the occasion. The 36-page issue was titled "The Formative Years" and described Canada's emergence as a nation from 1812 to 1871.

Of particular interest are the many illustrations by the historical artist C.W. Jefferys.

"Other artists have portrayed Canada's history, but Jefferys is recognized as the best of them all," states the editor of the day, James Knight, in the issue's introduction. "For one thing, his details are as authentic as painstaking research could make them."

Jefferys died in 1922 at the age of 81.

At the time, he was working with Imperial to bring his illustrations together into a single collection, Imperial maintained the collection until 1972, when the company donated it to the National Archives of Canada, where it remains today.

Presented here is a selection of illustrations from the issue, accompanied by adapted excerpts from the original text written by Robert Collins, Arthur R.M. Lowrey and Harry Bruce.

The Formative Years

The War of 1812

It was deemed to be one of the forgotten scars of history. For the Britons, it was just a minor colonial skirmish. For the Americans, it was a defeat best forgotten as quickly as possible. For Canadians, even now, the war of 1812-14 lingers in most of our history books as a dry, inconsequential little fracas.

Yet what a war it was. It had everything: trickery, gallantry, attrition, redcoats, battleships, cavalry charges, courtesies, heroes and hangovers. It was probably the crucial war in our history. For the first and only important time, Canada's founding stories stood together to drive an invader from their soil. Had they failed, there'd be no Centennial to celebrate. But they won and, united as never before, went on to build a country.

Historians still debate the real causes of the war. The imperialist reasons were plain enough: Britain, locked in a death struggle with Napoleon, sought to make trade with France and was strong enough at sea to enforce it.

Not only did she block neutral America's trade but she invoked the right to search for British navy deserts or any merchantmen she could catch. Of the many resulting "incidents" arising from this high-handed policy, the most outrageous came in 1807, when the British blockaded some genuine American ships from the U.S. Navy frigate Chesapeake, killing others in the process. No matter that Britain was wrong and apologized. From then on Americans screamed for England's blood.

Many of them— and here was an underlying cause of the war—welcomed the excuse to challenge England. They still hated the British, coveted Canada and thought the latter would be an easy conquest.

They were wrong. The Canadians were shockingly outnumbered. At the outbreak, 8,000 British and Canadian regulars and less than 20,000 fighting militia stood against America's 35,000 regulars and a fluctuating rabble of militia in the hundreds of thousands. All the same, Canada started with some distinct assets: discipline, training, purpose and a leader.

He was Upper Canada's General Isaac Brock, a 43-year-old career soldier with all the quirilities of greatness. Brock was the first real Canadian war hero.

He and his force took Detroit, drove Lake Erie to a fortress at Amherstburg, Ont. Here he met a man in his own mold: Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief, already a legend in the region.

At a war council, Tecumseh bade Brock's plan of attack and carved from memory on a strip of bark a remarkably detailed map of the terrain around Fort Detroit. It was a formidable stronghold. Within were 2,000 men.

Brock and Tecumseh paid a visit to the fort. The astonished U.S. general William Hull looked out from the two men on his doorstep. It was a small but awesome force that faced him. Tecumseh had gathered a glittering array of tribes, with names that thrilled like distant war drums: Shawnees, Miami, Fox, Sac, Ottawas, Wyandots, Chippewas, Potawatomis, Winnebago, Dakota. Brock's regulars were splendid targets in scarlet uniforms and gray trousers. The general himself was magnificent in full-dress attire. As always he rode in front on his splen-
did grey charge. Alfred. Tresman, on a grey mustang, rode beside him. Hull was already unseamed. Indians frightened him. He surrendered without a shot.


He burst into Queenston in the half-light. A hundred of soldiers cheered him. He galloped up the Heights, which rise 345 feet (105 metres) over the Niagara River at this point. Suddenly there were rolls from the near 300 Yankee had found a little-known fisherman's path up the Heights, circled behind and were charging.

Brock gathered 100 men, led them to the bottom of the hill and said, "Take your breath, boys, you'll need it." Then he pulled Alfred apologetically for the punishing ride and, on foot, led a small and .brother charge up the Heights. The Americans withered. Brock, always in front in his scarlet, caught a bullet in the wrist but ignored it. The enemy fell back to the brink of the cliff. Then an American stepped from the brush 30 yards (27.4 metres) away, took deliberate aim and shot Brock in the chest. He died almost instantly. His men, shocked and disorganized, retreated with his body.

Brock's side, Colonel John MacKinnon, led another charge. Against the Americans retreated. Again the Canadian's leader was killed against the Americans surged forward. Now the Stairs and Steps flashed over Queenston Heights. Two thousand militiamen prepared to cross from the opposite shore. But suddenly America's victory went sour. Shawnee was closing in with reinforcements. The American militiamen lost their nerve and would not set foot on Canadian soil. The regulars and militia on the Heights were now outnumbered. Suddenly it was a smashing Canadian victory - but Brock was gone. Still, he had saved Canada, for the time at least.

In early July within scaffold of Niagara Falls, the Americans and a Canadian army met, head on, to their mutual surprise, at a crossroads called Lundy's Lane. The Canadians, believing themselves hopelessly outnumbered, prepared to withdraw. Then General Croghan Drummond galloped up to rally them, setting the stage for the war's bloodiest battle.

It began at 6.55, July 25. The odds were more even than usual: 4,100 Americans against 3,000 Canadians. The fight was a long, low tin, not far from the Niagara River. The bloodiest was Drummond's seven gun battery. Again and again through the evening, the battery changed hands until both sides retired exhausted and the gun stood silent and alone. Drummond had lost a third of his men, but 1,200 reinforcements trickled into the line. The Americans began a final assault. They took the guns. The Canadians drove them back. All through the hot, black night muskets rattled, brazen flared, the dying screamed. The senior officers on both sides were wounded. After six hours they saw the Americans retreating back to Chippawa. The Canadians dumped on the battlefield. Nobody really won the battle of Lundy's Lane but Upper Canada had refused to yield.

DURING ALL OF THESE YEARS America's leaders repeatedly ignored a strategy that would surely have won the war: cutting off Lower Canada from Upper Canada. They talked about it in 1812 but dallied too long. Finally in September 1813 two Yankee armies set out for Montreal.

At the Chateaugay River, 35 miles (56 kilometres) southwest of Montreal, a U.S. contingent ran into a crack French Canadian force led by Lieutenant-Colonel Charles-Michel de Salaberry. Outnumbered four to one, de Salaberry's force built barrows of logs to block the main approach, carefully arranged their sparse forces and waited.

The U.S. commander sent 1,500 of his 6,500 men to encircle the Canadians. But this advance party got lost in the dark and passed, waiting for the main force to press in. De Salaberry spotted their confusion from atop a huge tree stump. A portion of his excellent little army checked the main enemy force at the barricades. The others wheeled on the 1,500 wondering Yankees and, with the aid of wild whoops and bugle calls, which suggested it huge army, scattered the advance party, causing such panic that some began shooting at one another. The Americans turned tail.

In mid-August 1814 a British fleet sailed into Chesapeake Bay, headed for Washington with 4,000 troops aboard. In orderly fashion, the British marched unlisted into the capital of an area theoretically defended by 93,500 militiamen. They harmed no person or private property but, in reproof for the burning of York in April 1813, partly burned the government buildings and the presidential mansion. Then, having slapped America's wrist, the British marched back to their ships in triumph.

The silly, cruel and wanton war ended officially on Christmas Eve 1814. Never again did the Americans actually take arms against Canada. And the Canadian spirit was intact: it was, in fact, for the first time a strong, identifiable thing. By holding fast in the War of 1812, Canada took a long step towards nationhood.

AGITATION

In the British North America of 1820, there were only a few hundred thousand people loosely strong one a long line from Cape to Lake Huron, plus small er contiguents in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Only four places across. The line was a long, low tin, not far from the terms "city" - Quebec, Montreal, Halifax and Saint John.

But a scant generation later, in 1841, British North America was vastly changed. Lower Canada (present-day Quebec) and Upper Canada (Ontario) were joined that year by the Act of Union, passed by the British Parliament to create the Province of Canada. In all regions, population was much increased.

LOOKING BACK

Still in very recent memory were the "troubles," the rebellions that in 1837 and '38 had torn the provinces internally apart and threatened to destroy them. The rebellions, led by Louis-Joseph Papineau in Lower Canada and William Lyon Mackenzie in Upper Canada, were crushed, but they succeeded all the same. By exposing the weaknesses of the old (colonial) system they opened the way to self-government, eventual confederation and even the Commonwealth itself.

The events of 1837 and the succeeding years opened the door through which the future could be distinctly discerned: For the Canadas, the Act of Union, which created the Province of Canada, consisting of Canada East and Canada West, started in one legislature, duly followed in 1840, and in that decade Responsible Government for all the major colonies.

CONFEDERATION

The campaign for Confederation was an eerie in the hard sell at the backwoods level. The advocates were the politicians of the new central government that now ran the union of Canada West (Ontario) and Canada East (Quebec). The customers — and they were a mighty suspicious bunch — were supposed to be Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

John A. Macdonald and his colleagues had a monumental selling job ahead of them. They began on June 30, 1864, by asking permission by a conference on Maritime union.

The Queen Victoria, carrying eight Canadian cabinet ministers, left Quebec on the evening of Monday, August 29, 1864 and steamed into Charlottetown on Thursday afternoon, September 1.

The Charlottetown Conference promptly deferred the whole primary question of Maritime union and agreed to hear the Canadians for four days. A week later, the Saint John Morning Telegraph reported that the arguments of John A., George Brown, George-Etienne Cartier and the other Canadians were "almost irresistible" and that "out own delegates were still more favourable to (BNA) Union than they were."

The Charlottetown Conference had witnessed the first appearance of British North America of an undeniably authentic national spirit.

Although the Charlottetown talks had enabled the delegates to reach a large agreement on the virtues and general principles of Confederation, the Quebec Conference, which followed, could not easily agree on the details. By the fourth day the Toronto Globe was reporting that "everyone here has had a bit of the blues."

The Canadian government came to the rescue with a bill. There were 500 guests. They danced quadrilles, polkas and waltzes, and the members of the Canadian cabinet balled themselves into the spirit of the function with a gusto that inspired a Maritime delegate to describe them as "the most invertebrate dancers I have ever seen. They do not seem to miss a dance during the live nights."

He went on, "They are dancing fellows; and there is no doubt that it is all done for a political purpose; they know that if they can dance themselves into the affections of the wives and daughters of the country, the men will certainly become an easy conquest." When the long and frequently tense day-time discussions of the Quebec Conference were all over, George Brown expressed his joy at its more sober accomplishments. He wrote to his wife, "All right!!! Conference through at six o'clock this evening — constitution adopted — a most creditable document — a complete reform of all the abuses and injustices we have complained of."

Near the end of the month the conference delegates moved west. No fewer than 1,800 guests attended a conference ball in Montreal. The delegates met for another highly amiable luncheon the next day and then on a wet, golden, late-autumn day — a steamer took them north to Ottawa.

The train trip to Toronto was astonishing. All along the route crowds turned out to cheer. At Toronto four brass bands, blazing torches, exotic fire-crackers and thousands of people accompanied the delegates to the Queen's Hotel. The excitement in the streets did not die down till almost midnight.

In December 1866, delegates from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick joined the Canadians in a final conference at the Westminster Palace Hotel in London, England. The Quebec meeting had achieved a general agreement on the legal and financial basis for Confederation but some horse-trading was still necessary. Moreover, Britain had some ideas of her own concerning the legislation that would establish what they all finally agreed to call "the Dominion of Canada."

The British North America Act was introduced to the British Parliament in March, 1867, and it passed with barely a ripple of debate. On July 1, 1867, a joint proclamation from George the Fourth the Act into law for the four founding provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec, D.
Thespian Dream

Garnering rave reviews, the Soulpepper Theatre Company is reviving the classics and adding a new dimension to Toronto's cultural life

BY ROBERT CUSHMAN

LAST SUMMER LADY MASTON, a theater director from Budapest, was in Toronto to direct a couple of plays for the second season of the Soulpepper Theatre Company. His girlfriend came over with him, and one day she was driving along an expressway in a car rented from Maston by his Canadian employer. A police officer pulled her over, and she sat there, extremely nervous (like any citizen of a country with a recent police-state history) at the prospect of confronting a man in uniform—a foreign uniform at that.

The police officer asked her the usual question: did she know at what speed she had been going? She then asked to see her ownership papers. She explained, still more fearfully, that she didn't have any—that this was a rental car, a company car.

"And what company would that be?" asked the police officer.

"Soulpepper," she said.

The officer straightened up. One would like to think that he slapped his thigh. "Soulpepper," he said. "But they're fantastic. They do Beckett, they do Chekhov..."

And he waved her on without a stain on her character.

"Toronto's finest appreciate Toronto's finest," chuckled Albert Schultz, Soulpepper's artistic director and gifting spirit, when he heard the story.

The glory has been earned. Soulpepper began operations, quite spectacularly, in 1998 with a season of two plays at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre. One was a fairly familiar classic, Molière's The Misanthrope. The other—decidedly unfamiliar, at least outside its native Germany—was the 18th-century Don Carlos, a marvellous, but unwieldy, historical drama by Friedrich von Schiller. Both were well received, but it was the Schiller work that really caught the lightning; it was the first to open, and it placed Soulpepper, at one stroke, among the elite theatre organizations in Canada. Both plays were directed by

"HERE WE WERE," SAYS SCHULZ (RIGHT), "ALL MIDDLE-CLASS LIBERALS, FINDING OURSELVES WONDERING WHAT WE SHOULD BE GIVING TO THE COMMUNITY"
TWELVE ACTORS WHO HAD TALKED FOR YEARS ABOUT WHAT THEY WANTED AND WHAT THE THEATRE NEEDED FINALLY TOOK THE PLUNGE

Robin Phillips, whose work at the Stratford Festival of Canada and elsewhere had long established him in the country's premier classical director. There was a natural tendency among critics to write of Soulpepper as if it were his company. In fact, he had been one of its inspirations but had nothing to do with its founding. The company was the cooperative venture of a dozen mostly youngish actors, and Phillips was their employee. One thing he made clear before accepting the job was that he would not return for the second season. He would start them off, but after that they would have to make it on their own.

Half of Soulpepper's original 12—billed in all the company literature as "founding members"—are couples. Schultz and Susan Coyne are married to each other; so are Diego Matamoros, associate artistic director, and Robyn Steven; so are Joseph Ziegler and Nancy Palk. The core of the company is largely made up of people in their thirties, with children to raise and interests in making a living regularly enough on stage—and especially on TV—to be able to face these responsibilities with a certain amount of confidence. The best time to contact Schultz, I have found, is via e-mail: "Just a day after he's dropped his children off at school." They also found their minds haunted by other responsibilities, some of them political. "Here we are," says Schultz, "all middle-class liberals, finding ourselves wondering what we should be giving to the community."

What the community—defined here as the Toronto theatre audience—seemed to be lacking was regular exposure to high-quality productions of the classics. It also happened to be what the actors themselves were lacking.

The 12 had all begun their careers with classical aspirations. In 1987 and 1988 several of them, including Schultz himself, had been members of the Young Company that Phillips, now a freelance director, had run at Stratford as a training ground for Canada's next generation of Shakespearean stars. Schultz and Coyne met in this company,playing, of all providential things, Romeo and Juliet. Polk was a member of this group, as were two of the founding future stars, Stuart Hughes and William Webster. They had all contemplated moving into the main Stratford company, but, as things turned out, none of them did (the Young Company itself has disbanded). Instead, they became successful Toronto-based jobbing actors.Schultz achieved TV stardom in Street Legal. But the experience with Phillips left its mark and in them a continuing desire to appear on stage, regularly, in substantial plays, and to do it as a group.

Meanwhile, another group of actors had been undergoing a similar formative experience. From 1984 to 1994, Patricia Hamilton—a reclusive actress who this year is playing Lady Macbeth in the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.—ran a small Toronto company called Masterclass Theatre, a sort of postgraduate experience for seasoned actors, who performed mainly neglected European classics under international directors. One of the company's first productions featured another of the future 12, Martha Burns. (She too is married to a prominent actor, though it rather spoils the mystery that he has nothing to do with Soulpepper; he's Paul Cross, star of the TV series Da South and this year's Hamlet at Stratford.) But the Masterclass production that everybody still talks about is Anton Chekhov's The Three Sisters. Coyne was in this, so were Diego Matamoros and Robyn Steven, and—another name for the list—Michael McMillan. The director was the Hungarian who was to be Soulpepper's second general: the man with the hired car, Lieliai Marton.

Those keeping score may have noted that we are still two apostles short of a dozen. The pair remaining are Diana Leblanc, who is also now highly regarded as a director (in recent years she has been responsible at Stratford for a superlative production of Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night, a very fine version of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, and a controversial—read, much-vilified—Macbeth), and Ted Dykstra, one of the two creator-performers of Two Pints. Four Hands, a show that has kept him so busy that up to this year he was the one Soulpepper founding member never to have acted or directed for the company.

Twelve actors who had talked for years about what they wanted and what the theatre needed finally took the plunge. That was the easy part. The harder part was the work of raising money and finding a venue. Schultz emerged as a charismatic front man and fund raiser. Matamoros, the second-in-command, wittily notes, "Albert can put on a suit and walk into a gathering of businesspeople, and they take him seriously. I put on a suit and I still look like a scruffy, unwrathful artist."

The first season's budget was $700,000. It was raised bit by bit. Most of the founding members invested some of their own savings, and there were small grants from a few organizations, including the Ontario and Toronto arts councils ($15,500 between the two of them). Personal appeals from the actors to acquaintances raised $120,000. And when Harbourfront's manager of performing arts, Don Shipley, learned of the involvement of the legendary Robin Phillips, he made the De Maiziere Theatre Centre available. The Harbourfront connection has remained, and this year's Soulpepper production of The Mill on the Floss (based on the George Eliot novel of the same name) first appeared as part of the biennial world stage festival at Harbourfront, for which Shipley served as artistic director.

Soulpepper's 1999 and 2000 seasons included Chekhov's Platonov, featuring Albert Schultz as Platonov and Nancy Palk as Anna Petruchina, making the 20th-century part of the label really loose—Chekhov's first play, an unskilled and untried tragicomedy only discovered after his death and now renamed Platonov after its central character. Both the last two plays were directed—and, in fact, suggested to the company—by Lieliai Marton, who was to prove an inspirational goal to Phillips, Daniel Brooks, from Toronto's alternative theatre scene.
THE MAJOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2000 SEASON WAS THE LAUNCHING OF A FULLY FLEDGED YOUNG COMPANY

Torry Award-winning role on Broadway in Kiss of the Spider Woman, and this year as a wonderful Tzeitel in Fiddler on the Roof at Stratford, played the title role (a sort of twisted Hamlet) in Don Carlos, while the veteran actor Peter Donat was nominated for a Don for his superlative performance as Philip II of Spain in the same play. (Palk was also nominated for her role, Elizabeth of Valois, in Don Carlos, as was Michael Simpson for his role in the Grand Inquisitor.) "We got respect," says Schultz diplomatically, "from the day we opened, but there's been some snickering before that."
The 1999 season brought more fine guest performances - Peter Donalson in Our Town and Fiona Reid and Kristen Thomson in Streetcar, for example. Reid says that the Soulepepper support system, essentially her fellow actors Falk and Coyne, who weren't even in the production - made playing Blanche Dubois particularly rewarding.

The two extremes in terms of casting have perhaps been Platonov, cast almost entirely from the company core and suggested by Martin as a play about middle-aged sleazefests at the crossroads, very much like the actors themselves, and The Mill on the Floss, in which only two of the actors had any previous Soulepepper credits. The major development of the 2000 season has been the launching of a fully fledged young company, like the one at Stratford that formed and inspired Schultz and the others a dozen years ago. The young company is performing Twelfth Night, which is an integral part of the company's season. Some of the young company actors, all of whom are in their twenties, have had extensive professional experience; a couple have just emerged from theatre school. Obviously, they aren't playing all the parts in the play themselves: more seasoned actors will play the "mature" roles.

Schultz thinks the finest of the four King Lear played during his career by the great William Hurt is the one he played as a guest artist with the Stratford Young Company (Schultz himself was Edgar), and he hopes for similar results from this new combination of young and seasoned actors. He also hopes that these young actors will be the Soulepepper of tomorrow.
The training of young actors (and directors) is something that Soulepepper has taken very seriously since its inception; there have been master classes and training company productions (unadvertised but open to the public). Matamoros, a natural teacher, is head of training.

Martha Burns is head of youth outreach, a program that demonstrates an equal commitment to the training of young audiences; though, refreshingly, the aim has been to encourage children to come with their families rather than with their schools. Soulepepper has, piquantly, "the Bring your parents to the theatre' scheme - a $25 student ticket lets both a student and a parent in. But, Schultz stresses, "the kid has to make the call." There is also the VIP Youth Come Free program, which provides free access to Soulepepper productions for young people who otherwise would not have the opportunity to see a play. The company works with several youth organizations in the city. The kids come in groups and are introduced to the play by a peer and accompanied to the performance by a member of the arts community, who answers any questions they might have. "Soulepepper has made a firm commitment to the audiences of the future with its innovative programs that introduce young people to classical theatre," says Barbara Heydk, president of the Imperial Oil Charitable Foundation, which this year contributed $10,000 to the company's Come Free program. "The program's we're supporting is more than just giving kids a free ticket to a show. It's a rich, meaningful educational experience and it's right in with this company's emphasis on young people and education."

It seems impossible that Soulepepper might one day have its own full-time program; it also seems that Soulepepper might be the best actor in Canada. (Note the negative slipped in there; critics are cautious.) Long known as an actor's actor, Mattamoros burst through as an unerringly versatile player with extraordinary powers of reinvigoration and indelible sharpness of outline. "Creating Dieg in all those roles was entirely planned," says Schultz, whose own appearances were confined to the lead in Platonov and an Our Town cameo. "We wanted him to be recognized as a major actor." Matamoros says that he found the experience thrilling - and would never do it again.

This year, both Schultz and Matamoros turned to directing. Twelfth Night and Romeo and Juliet respectively (the latter was subsequently cancelled as a result of a lead actor's injury in a car accident by which Schultz had promised that this was the year they would get round to Shakespeare. Other directors of the summer's repertoire were old friends and inspirations. Phillips returned to start the season off with The Mill on the Floss; Marton restaged Platonov (only seen for a few performances last season) and also directed a revivification production of Molieres The School for Wives, dark, without being morbid; and Daniel Brooks made the logical move from Beckett to Harold Pinter with Benegal, Pinter's three-handed play about adultery. All this is at Harbourfront, but early in 2001 Soulepepper will return to the Royal Alex with A Flea in Her Ear by Georges Feydeau, the French playwright whose ferociously ingenious farces are the classical theatre's favourite light entertainment. It has been a season of consolidation and advance.

ADMINISTRATIVELY, SOULEPEPPER HAS NEVER been a 12-person cooperative. That may once have been the dream, but in practice it was unwieldy, and some members of the group were always off doing other things, and anyway, Schultz soon emerged as the driving force. He's the one who's usually in the office. During the 1999-2000 season he was billed as co-artistic director, with Leblanc, Matamoros and Palk listed immediately beneath him as co-artistic directors. Now there has been a further reshuffle; Schultz still in charge, Matamoros as deputy. In addition, Schultz is billed as coproducer, the other coproducer being an experienced, though still young, theatre administrator, Diane Quinn.

Artistically, the company has reached out far beyond its original membership. Despite all that intermarriage, and despite a few suspicious mutterings from the theatre profession at large, Soulepepper does not function as an incestuous group, sharing the juiciest roles in the world repertoire exclusively among its own members. Their regular enlivenment of Philips, Martin and Brooks confirms that, on the one hand, some other actor-centred companies, Soulepepper's members are not afraid to hire strong outside directors with individual styles and visions. They also hire strong outside actors, in fact, they have employed the best in Canada. Brent Carver, well known for his...
Realizing the Promise

For as long as this country has existed, the oil industry has been involved in almost every facet of Canada's life, says Robert Peterson, Imperial Oil's chairman.

In June of this year I had the privilege of addressing a plenary session of the 16th World Petroleum Congress, held in Calgary. It was the first time the international conference, which is held every three years, had taken place in Canada. I was asked to speak on the subject of Canada's petroleum industry.

My aim was to give the audience a brief history of the Canadian industry from its rough-and-tumble beginnings to its high-tech present. It is an exciting and colourful story that includes such highlights as a number of short-lived “booms” in Alberta’s Turner Valley in the earlier part of the 20th century; construction of the Camel Pipeline from Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories to Whitehorse in the Yukon during the Second World War; and other tales of exploration and accomplishment in Canada’s vast and often harsh terrain.

Preparing this address led me to reflect on the contribution that Canada’s petroleum industry has made over the last 140 years or so to the development, growth and rising prosperity of our country and its people.

To begin with, the availability of petroleum fuels, lubricants and other products has helped provide the fundamentals of modern life for all Canadians. By maintaining supplies of plentiful, affordable fuels for heat, light and transportation, lubricants for vehicles and machinery that produces almost everything from furniture and appliances to food and clothing, and petrochemicals for applications as widespread as crop fertilizing, health care, insulation, electricity transmission and packaging, the oil industry contributes materially to virtually every walk of Canadian life and every individual Canadian.

The development of the industry itself has also significantly accelerated the settlement, industrialization and economic progress of some regions of Canada. Western Canada is the most obvious example, but there are others. Major oil and natural-gas-producing operations in Canada’s offshore East Coast are currently benefiting the economies of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. And if development of natural gas resources in the Beaufort Sea-Mackenzie Delta region of the Northwest Territories eventually proceeds, it could create new jobs and wealth for this remote frontier area.

I believe we can all take pride, too, from the fact that from the very beginning, Canada’s oil industry has made a number of major contributions to the oil industry worldwide. In fact, it was a Canadian medical doctor and geologist, Dr. Abraham Gesner, who in 1846 developed a process that allowed kerosene and lubricating oils to be produced from coal and asphalt and, later and more economically, by distilling crude oil — an advancement that laid the foundation for petroleum refining as we know it today.

Until that time, the principal fuels for industrial heat and light were coal and coal gas, while domestic lamps primarily used whale oil. It was the demand for kerosene, a more plentiful and considerably cheaper lamp fuel, that provided the first impetus for a petroleum industry.

It was also a Canadian, James Miller Williams, who drilled the first oil well in North America — at Oil Springs in southwestern Ontario in 1857. Many believe the continent’s first well was drilled by the American Colonel Edwin Drake in Pennsylvania in 1859, but the record shows that Williams beat him to it by two years.

Williams’s first well was essentially a hole nearly 15 metres deep, in which oil rose to within three and a half metres of the top. By 1860, 10 hours of hand-pumping would produce 17 barrels of oil, enough for Williams to operate a local distillery from which he sold kerosene for a dollar a gallon. He also sold crude oil to other distiller-refiners, dozens of whom soon set up operations in and around the southwestern Ontario town of Petrolia, which, as more oil discoveries were made, became the centre of the early
Canadian oil industry. Williams changed $8.5 a barrel for small orders and $5.60 a barrel for large ones. It's interesting that the price of crude oil dropped dramatically during the next year or so—to just 25 cents a barrel by 1982—as discoveries of more oil fields in Pennsylvania led to the continent's first "oil boom." Then when the Pennsylvania fields proved less profitable than expected, the price was reduced to $3.50 a barrel by 1865. But in 1886 it plummeted again, this time to 50 cents a barrel, before stabilizing at about $1.50 a barrel by 1872. This was the beginning of the industry's long experience with oil prices—accompanied by wide fluctuations in the prices paid by consumers for the end products—had been established.

Another early Canadian contribution came when a team of drillers in the Petrolia area found that a drill bit suspended from ashwood poles drilled faster and straighter than a bit suspended from a cable, which had been the norm. With modifications, this new system became known as the "Caldicott rig" and was widely used around the world.

With the advent of the internal combustion engine—strictly one of the most efficient and useful inventions that humanity has ever devised—and the automobile, the oil industry in Canada and around the world was suddenly faced with a new demand for oil. And Canada had already put in place a system of pipelines and railroads to transport the oil to market.

In the Jean de Chalic basin off the coast of Newfoundland, the Hibernia project has shown that crude oil can be successfully produced and brought to shore in water depths to two thousand feet and beyond deep offshore structures. And the Sobey Offshore Energy Project is now producing natural gas from beneath the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Nova Scotia. This is a significant milestone in the development of the offshore oil industry in Canada and is a significant achievement for the Canadian oil industry.

Moreover, the price of oil increased dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s, leading to a series of price hikes and a significant increase in the demand for oil. This led to the development of new technologies and methods for producing and refining oil, as well as the discovery of new oil fields in Canada and around the world.

In conclusion, the oil industry in Canada has a long and storied history, marked by significant contributions to the development of new technologies and methods for producing and refining oil. The industry has also been a significant source of economic growth and development, providing jobs and revenue for communities across the country.
Good Morning, Ms. S.

Vibrant and charming, Big Tancook Island Elementary is one of the country's few remaining schools where one teacher does it all.

BY HARRY BRUCE

Elizabeth Sutherland has traveled by ferry between Chester, N.S., 50 kilometres west of Halifax, and the two Tancook Islands off the south shore of Nova Scotia roughly 7,000 times since 1982. The most horrifying of these 10-kilometre voyages, which usually take 50 minutes, was one she endured in the darkness before a January dawn in 1996. She had risen at 5:30 a.m. so she had every weekday since she'd been going to Big Tancook, where she is the sole teacher at the island's school — and walked to the government wharf to catch the 7:05 a.m. sailing of the William G. Ernst.

Lashed by a North Atlantic storm, the waters ahead changed around like confused armies. The roaring wind tore the tops off whitecaps and hurled them at the vessel's bridge. Beloved by the Islanders for its reliability, the 18-year-old Ernst could carry two automobiles and 146 passengers (plus four crew members), but on this hair-raising trip, as on so many calm ones, the sole passenger was the woman the Tancooks know as "Ms. S."

As the Ernst backed into Mahone Bay, past Zincks Head, Meiners Island, Quaker Island and Coachman Ledge, the sea not only poked the ferry downward and tossed her bow into the sky, but also violently rolled her from side to side. The vessel picked up a pupil at Little Tancook and headed for Big Tancook. Between those last specks of land before the open Atlantic, stormy weather breeds notoriously treacherous waves, and Ms. S. was more than a little fearful — she had seen Titanic the night before.

Half an hour later, however, she was presiding over dozens youngsters inside a room of greenness: Big Tancook Island Elementary.

Settled in the early 1700s by 50-odd families of German and French Huguenots, Big Tancook, with an area of only about 225 hectares, supported more than 300 people in 1911. They grew vegetables, kept cattle and, exploiting their German heritage and the island's cabbage-friendly soil, made sauerkraut for export. The islanders were subsistence farmers and fishers. They built schooners and whalers in small shipyards for themselves and to sell. The fishery remains the most important industry on the Tancooks, but it's declining, and as a result, so is the population. Only about 35 people live on Little Tancook, and although the population of Big Tancook swells to around 260 in summer, the number of year-rounders is less than 200. The islands have electricity and telephones but no doctor, dentist or drugstore. They have the Internet but no newsstand, motel or service station. They have transportation but no movie theatre or tavern; they have replaced the salt of their fishing vessels, but the inhabitants still have no fire protection service or sewage treatment facilities.

Big Tancook does boast a bed and breakfast, seasonal restaurant with craft shop, general store and museum, Baptist church with cemetery, full-service post office, recreation centre, emergency-response vehicle operated by island volunteers and a whole lot of elderly cars that cattle along a few kilometres of dusty road. And whether fog envelops Big Tancook or the sun shines on it from a clear blue sky, it is simply beautiful.

Old logging roads have become enticing paths. The storms of the evergreens that still cover half the island mingle with the smell of wild roses, and the crashing ocean to create a fragrance no commercial perfume could ever match. For beachcombers, Big Tancook offers a bonanza of shells, sea urchins, crabs, starfish, dried seaweed, fossils and pyrite. Laid out on an old teacher's desk that serves as the school's science center are examples of these treasures that Ms. S.'s pupils have collected.

Having been out there on the ocean for generations (Tancook gets its name from Olmanson, Mi'kmaq for "facing the open air"), the islanders have a rare way with all-in-this-together spirit. Among them she can, Ms. S. told me aboard the outbound ferry one fine June morning, repair just about any piece of machinery. If the school refrigerator or furnace breaks down, she need make no
one phone call. Problem solved by a volunteer or two. Islanders also come to school to help the children with reading and art and join Ms. S. and the young ones on field trips to the mainland.

The mother of Josey Stevens, a student, plays guitar for the children and teaches them to sing and dance. June Clohotar, wife of Terrance Clohotar, the "captain-in-chief" of the Ernst, is the school's paid cantanker and student supervisor (baby-sitting the girl from Little Tacook until 4:30 p.m. ferry), but she's also Ms. S.'s unpaid all-around helper, driving her to and from the ferry dock and, on Fridays, bringing her a lobster sandwich for lunch.

Ms. S., who grew up in a close-knit family in the village of Goshen in eastern Nova Scotia, "I really spoiled." On the morning I spent at the school, Ms. S. was wearing a blue-jean dress and earrings of Celtic design. She's a trim, lively, good-natured woman with short dark hair, expressive dark eyes and a flair for rapid-fire conversation. Much as she loves her school and the islanders, the absence of on-the-job professional companionship sometimes makes her lonely, and it's easy to believe she's cheerful confession that at every teacher's conference she attends on the mainland, "I never shut up."

Big Tacook Elementary may be considered a one-room schoolhouse, but it is by no means old-fashioned. And in actual fact, while there is only one teacher, the plain beige building that sits on a hill not far from the fishing boats at the public wharf has two washrooms, Ms. S.'s tiny office, a classroom about as big as your average summer cottage and a second big room for arts and science studies. This last room houses kitchen equipment, a reference library, two world globes, the piano, gym mats, a box full of basketballs and soccer balls, a television set and VCR, a photocopier and four computer terminals. The youngsters use the computers regularly, and the older ones, none more than 11, have e-mail "pen pals" in places as far away as Hungary and Mexico.

While Brittany Heisher, Emily Cross, Michael Cross, Rebecca Baker and Todd Weinholzer took unsupervised turns at the computers on the morning I was at the school, most of the educational action occurred in the classroom. For me, a white-haired 65-year-old who's spent time in the crowded, regimented and pressure-ridden Toronto classrooms of half a century ago, the mood among Ms. S.'s charges was a wonder in its informality and freedom from fear and the kindness of the children towards one another.

In my boyhood schoolrooms, rows of desks, as precisely lined up as infantrymen in a Roman phalanx, faced the teacher, and every morning each youngster sat at his or her assigned desk, hands clasped together on the wooden surface in the prescribed manner, to await the arrival of the commander in chief. When the teacher strode into the room, all rose, took one step forwards and charmed good morning. Let the day begin – a day to either follow orders to the letter or suffer verbal abuse from the teacher or even the dreaded scold.

Big Tacook Elementary isn't alone in its gentler approach to learning – many schools today strive for an atmosphere of nurturing and understanding. In size, however, makes it easier to achieve. A beige carpet runs from wall to wall in Ms. S.'s classroom. Under tall windows with cherry blue frame, I sat beside a teddy bear from a small sofa. On the bear's lap sat a smaller teddy bear and on the smaller bear's lap a hand-printed sign: Spunky Out. I turned it over. Spunky is Spunky is a neighborhood car who has adopted the school as her home.

The morning begins with Ms. S. sitting on the floor with her back to one corner of the room. Seated cross-legged in a semi-circle before her were the five youngsters in the lower grades. With Ms. S. they discussed the school's "news of the day" and then, in big coloured letters, wrote it out: "Today is Thursday, June 3. It is cloudy. We are going on a school trip tomorrow. We are going to a zoo and bowling. We are going on a bus. Mr. Bruce is here doing a story on us." The group recited the days of the week and months of the year in English and French and identified geometric shapes. Meanwhile, desks not in military rows but in groups scattered about the room, the nine-to-11-year-olds in grades 3, 4 and 5 worked quietly by themselves. As long as they were quiet, they did not have to ask permission to leave their seats. In my day, whispered consultations with a neighbour about the work at hand – or about anything at all, for that matter – were a crime against society. But these children wandered over to one another's desks and discussed their work. "Have I got this right, Brittaney?" "Can you help me with this, Michael?"

When Ms. S. left the younger children to escort an older girl to a computer in the next room, she gave them reading assignments and said, "If you run into any problems, get one of the big kids to help you." Ms. S. says that if the children did not perform as a kind of educational cooperative, no one teacher could ever run a multipurpose program. "You just can't be in six places at once," she explains.

At Big Tacook school, the older children behave almost as surrogate parents to the little ones. They help them put on their galoshes in winter, for instance, and help keep an eye on them in the school until during recess.

Later on, each child wrote an essay about what he or she expected to be doing in 20 years and then fielded questions from the others about the decision. Emily Cross, doctor. Kayla Conrad, farmer. Sheena Heisher: teacher. Brittany Heisher: cartoonist in Hollywood. Rebecca Baker: singer. Todd Weinholzer: soccer player. Michael Cross, 15, wrote that he'd be a baseball player "and my brother will be in jail." Michael's right-eyed older brother insisted that he would be an astronaut, he would live in Halton because it's not far from Tacook, which he would visit for fun, "and my brother will be in jail."

"Can I be in jail?" Michael asked. "I'll be playing baseball."

"Will you kill him out?" a girl asked the would-be astronaut.

"Yes."

"What will you do with him?"

"I'll send him to the moon."

Gently interrupting the giggling, Ms. S. murmured, "Let's not get too silly."

This is a school in which the children work hard but have fun, and the teacher faces few disciplinary problems.

For me, the most inspiring aspect of daily life at the school was the children's habit of bustling one another's self-esteem. The whole class, including me, sat in a circle on the carpet, taking turns picking up cards whose hidden side showed animals, vegetables, fish and furniture that we were to name in French. When Josy had trouble with "knee" (la jambe), I could feel the nine others thinking, "Come on, Josy, you can get it."

"La porte?" she finally blurted, and everyone slapped for her. My face turning red under Ms. S.'s puzzled gaze, I actually failed on "chair" (la chaise). The kids felt sorry for me. After that, I scouted on "canon," "blue," "butterfly" and a few others, and each time I got a round of applause, just to make me feel better. When I announced that "fire" was "brûle" rather than "gère." Ms. S. asked, "Will we give it to him?" They did.
Looking back, I realize that Joey, six, and L.A. 65-year-old stranger, were the only ones whose performance in French was shaky enough to arouse encouraging hand-clapping, but during other lessons that morning, a couple of kids with learning disabilities also won applause for coming through with the right answers. I remembered how the more mature youngsters in the school yard of my childhood tumed the slower learners, branding them as stupid.

These children’s respect for one another stems from the family atmosphere of the Tancook Islands but also partly from Ms. S’s teaching philosophy. The hand-printed rules on the washroom door include: be kind – no hitting, shoving, pushing, grabbing, pinching, elbowing; Show respect – no making fun of people, no name-calling, keep quiet in class; Play nicely – do not throw objects, no play fighting, do not be noisy; Speak properly – no foul language, use indoor voice, no rude language. Would that every adult followed these rules. Perhaps the difference between Big Tancook Elementary and many other schools is that the children seem to abide by them. "When you have such a small school it’s easier for the teacher to have an influence," explained Ms. S. modestly. "It also means the kids have more influence over their peers. The fact is most kids want to be good, and if you treat them with respect and the rules are reasonable, they’ll follow them. When a child with behavioural problems comes along, the other students tend to help him or her behave appropriately. Our small student population means there’s not a disruptive group to feed off, and difficult children have no choice but to fit in with the other kids if they want friends.”

"Every child learns differently," Ms. S. told me. "Some are visual learners, some auditory, some tactile. If you have them for six years, you get to know the right way for every one of them. There’s another benefit to me having them for six years. According to the system, they have to know certain things in specific years, but I don’t have to worry about that. They have to have it. The Nova Scotia map in grade 5, well, I can start them in grade 3, 4 or 5. "Children get lost in big classes. It’s not the teacher’s fault, but if you put 35 or 40 kids in one classroom, how can you possibly make sure they all learn to tolerate, independent, self-starting, and organized? If they’re shy, they sometimes get overlooked, but how they feel they can speak up, and I notice if they don’t, and am able to help them. They may be shy with strangers like you at first, but as you probably have noticed, only at first. They’re not lacking in confidence."

At noon, it was time to go. I told the children to keep up the good work in French and how lucky they were to be attending such a school. The Ernst wouldn’t leave for Choover until 13:30 p.m., and haring tossed down only one Tim Horton sour-cream doughnut since rising at 6 a.m., I was ravenous. The local restaurant had not opened for the season, so I walked across the island to Karras’s General Store. It had just reopened after being closed for two weeks and had no bread, so I bought milk and cookies and trekked back to the wharf.

By two o’clock, I was out on Mahone Bay, and for the first time since coming home from school in Toronto on those afternoons of more than half a century ago, I munched assorted cookies while sleeping milk. I felt peaceful and contentedly sentimental about a little school that I wished I’d attended in the 1940s. It had been a morning to remember.

In Closing

A Truly Canadian Millennium Project

LAST March, on our way to Mount Tremblant, my family and I made a detour to the National Capital Region to visit a park on the shore of the Ottawa River. "We came all this way to see this," said 12-year-old Morag incisively as she surveyed the tiny park.

"You’re going to write about this park, Mommy," commented nine-year-old Gideon through his laughter. "It’s going to be a really big story."

My son’s laughter subsided somewhat when I told him that it would be here, in Jacques Cartier Park, on September 9 that Canada’s largest millennium project (and the world’s longest recreational trail) would be inaugurated.

This ambitious project got its start in 1992 with the founding of the Montreal-based Trans Canada Trail Foundation, whose job it is to create the work of the many local groups across the country that are developing the trail in their areas. "The Trans Canada Trail isn’t being built entirely from scratch," explains John Bellini, executive director of the foundation. "It will hit together pre-existing trails with new roads. Much of the trail, including all of the Newfound-land and P.E.I. sections, will run along former railway corridors. And in some places, local groups have arranged for it to run through private land." When complete, the 16,000-kilometre trail will stretch across Canada from Cape Spear, Nfld., to Victoria. It will have an arm reaching north from Calgary through the Yukon to Tuktoyaktuk in the Northwest Territories, with a branch extending east through Nanaimo to Chesterfield Inlet on Hudson Bay. In all, more than 800 communities will be linked along the way. The trail will be used by bikers, equestrians, cyclists, cross-country skiers and, where desired locally, snowmobilers. Some people will go out on the trail for the first time, while others will use it for major excursions, either camping or lodging in the communities the trail passes through. The trail will bring tourists to villages and towns across the country," he says. "And with them will come business opportunities for those communities."

But the trail is about much more than business. It will encourage physical activity and heighten environmental awareness. It will also, it seems to me, provide a way for tourists to penetrate the country as they have never done before.

"Although the trail’s been inaugurated this year," remarks Bellini, "it will be only by about 50 percent complete. If we can manage to raise the necessary funds, it should be finished by 2004."

The public is being invited to "try" sections of the trail for $40 a metre, which entitles donors to have their names or those of others inscribed on pavilions along the way.

The millennium celebrations surrounding the trail include the Trans Canada Trail Relay, in which more than 5,000 Canadians from coast to coast are carrying water from each of the three oceans touching Canada’s shores to Jacques Cartier Park, where, at the inaugural ceremony, all the water will be poured together. Later, the water will be displayed at the Museum of Civilization as part of its millennium exhibit.

The first water was drawn from the Arctic Ocean at Tuktoyaktuk on February 19. With the temperature hovering around -40, Junior Rangers used sealskin bags to draw the water through a hole in the metre-thick ice.

Beating the water through the sparsely populated tundras, particularly during the early months of the year, was a challenging task. Accompanied by a team carrying food, water, winter camping equipment and medical and safety supplies, each of the relay participants transported the water from foot to 40 kilometres on foot, on skis or by dog sledding. As the water reached communities along the way, celebrations were held.

With similar pomp and ceremonies, water was drawn from the Pacific Ocean near Victoria on April 7 and from the Atlantic Ocean at Cape Spear on May 5. Through the spring and summer, the water carriers made their way from the three oceans across Canada — through northern tundras, western mountains, prairie, lake- land, forest, along Maritime coasts and the St. Lawrence Seaway — towards the little park beside the Ottawa River.

It is a real consideration with a relay of this magnitude, comments Bellini. For this reason, more than 50 vehicles (supplied by DaimlerChrysler and funded by Imperial Oil) are involved in escorting the water carriers. "Fortunately, everything has gone smoothly so far," he says.

It is LATE JULY as I write these, and I am sitting by a window looking out at Lake Nipissing with CBC North playing on the radio in the background. Getting up to make a mug of tea, I hear the announcer report that the Trans Canada Trail is being promoted by Markham, Ont., just outside Sudbury, today. The value and significance of the trail is brought home to me: it is connecting us all together — the North and South, East and West, rural communities and urban centres, people as varied as the landscape the trail crosses.

And it occurs to me that for a country whose early years were marked by the construction of a massive railway, the building of such a trail seems to me a more appropriate way to celebrate the coming of the new millennium. — Sam Lauley