



SAMPLER

ABOUT
CANADA

Selected items from the book

*“My God, this is a
great country!”*

EARLE GRAY

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My God, this is a great country

Wonderful are the things that have been said about Canada. Also contemptuous, insulting, praising, wise, witty, hopeful and hopeless things. Things said by Canadians, and by those who help us “see ourselves as others see us.”

MY GOD, this is a great country. I chose this country, it didn’t choose me. That means I am Canadian first, then Chinese... when you choose a new country, it should come first. *Wanda Clute (1958-), a native of China, on celebrating her first 20 years in Canada after overcoming initial obstacles and difficult adjustments in a new land. Interview, Toronto Star, January 24, 1999.*

“YOU MUST COME TO CANADA. This is a wonderful place. I’m in jail and eat meat three times a day,” he tells his St. Petersburg friend. There was a long pause, and then the man in St. Petersburg asked in a surprised voice, “Meat?” Canadian convict: “Yes, three times a day.” Another pause, and then the other man, sounding almost awed, asks: “Meat and potatoes?” Canadian convict:

“Yes. You should come here and commit a crime.” *Overheard telephone conversation by a Russian gangster serving time in a Canadian jail for petty crime, speaking to a friend in Russia. John Duncanson and Philip Mascoll in “Russian mob crime soars in Canada,” Toronto Star, June 22, 1996.*

WORLD’S BEST. Canada is today the most successful pluralist society on the face of the globe, without any doubt in my mind... That is something unique to Canada. It is an amazing global asset. *Aga Khan IV (1936-), spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims. Toronto Globe and Mail, February 2, 2002.*

WORLD IMAGE. There is probably no country in the world that reflects the population of the planet more fully than does Canada. Links of family, emotion, culture, religion and ideology exist between millions of Canadians and societies abroad. *Ward Elcock, director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, in remarks at Senate committee hearings. Toronto Star, October 30, 1998.*

AS FOR OUR DIVERSITY, it is a tremendous asset. New Canadians who come here seeking opportunity have enriched our knowledge through their customs, cultures, contacts, and markets... Managing our contrasts and embracing our diversity leads to tremendous advantages for Canadian companies as they expand worldwide. *Timothy Reid, president, Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Canadian Speeches, January 1998.*

DIVERSE FEDERATION. In our own federation we [will] have Catholic and Protestant, English, French, Irish and Scotch, and each by his efforts and his success [will] increase the prosperity and glory of the new Confederacy...[We are] of different races, not for the purpose of warring against each other, but in order to compete and emulate for the general welfare. *George-Etienne Carter (1814-73), speech, Canada Legislative Assembly, Quebec, February 7, 1865.*

TOO MUCH MEMORY. Canadians, like their historians, have spent too much time remembering conflicts, crises, and failures. They forgot the great, quiet continuity of life in a vast and generous land. A cautious people learns from its past; a sensible people can face its future. Canadians, on the whole, are both. *Desmond Morton (1937-), historian. A Short History of Canada (2006).*

BLESS THE GOOD PEOPLE of Halifax who did not sleep, who took strangers into their homes, who opened their hearts and shelters, who rushed in enough food and

clothing to supply an army, who offered tours of their beautiful city and, above all, who listened with a simple empathy that brought this tough and fully grown man to tears, over and over again. I heard not a single harsh word, saw not the slightest gesture of frustration, and felt nothing but pure and honest welcome... we will always share this bond of your unstinting hospitality to people who descended upon you as frightened strangers, and received nothing but solace and solidarity in your embrace of goodness.

Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002), U.S. paleontologist and author, was one of more than 25,000 U.S. passengers stranded at Canadian airports when U.S.-bound aircraft were diverted because of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and on Washington. "Ode to human decency: bless the good people of Halifax," Toronto Globe and Mail, September 20, 2001.

FAVOURITE SONS. You call your leaders favourite sons. We go all the way and say what they're sons of. *Dave Broadfoot (1925-), Canadian actor, humourist and writer, on the difference between Canadians and Americans. Toronto Star, July 16, 2001.*

COLOUR YOUR LIFE. I sometimes wonder if the Canadian liking for bright colours isn't the outcome of that prolonged session of white during the winter months. *Lady (Evelyn) Byng (1870-1949, wife of Viscount Byng, governor general of Canada, 1921-26. Up the Stream of Time (1945).*

Manifest destiny, eh?

Manifest Destiny, the American doctrine that sought to absorb Canada within its borders, was a big factor in early Canadian-American history, the embers of which were still flickering at least as late as 2000.

TAKE QUEBEC. The unanimous Voice of the Continent is Canada must be ours; Quebec must be taken. *John Adams (1735-1826), second U.S. president, following the 1776 defeat of an invasion of Canada by U.S. armies led by Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold.*

AN INVITATION. Canada, acceding to this confederation, and joining in the measures of the United States, shall be admitted into, and entitled to all the advantages of this Union: but no other colony shall be admitted into the same unless such admission be agreed to by nine states. *U.S. Articles of Confederation, November 15, 1777.*

SEDUCTION. The people of that country [Canada] are first to be seduced from their allegiance, and converted into traitors, as preparatory to the making them good citi-

zens. *John Randolph (1773-1833), U.S. politician and orator. U.S. Congress, December 10, 1811.*

A MATTER OF MARCHING. The annexation of Canada this year as far as the neighbourhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching, and will give us experience for the attack of Halifax the next, and the final expulsion of England from the American continent. *Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), third U.S. president. Letter August 4, 1812.*

“The annexation of Canada this year [1812]... will be a mere matter of marching.”
Thomas Jefferson

SHIFT THE BORDER. Fifty-four forty, or fight. *William Allen (1803-79). U.S. politician. The Ohio Senator's slogan became the battle cry of expansionists who wanted to extend the U.S.*

border to latitude 54 degrees 40 minutes north, at the southern tip of Alaska. It was the campaign cry of James K. Polk who was elected president in 1845.

ANNEXATION. For the admission of the states of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada East and Canada West and for the organization of the territories of Selkirk, Saskatchewan and Columbia. *U.S. Congress,*

July 2, 1886. Wording of a Bill proposing the annexation of Canada.

RAILROAD FATE. The opening by us first of a North Pacific Railroad seals the destiny of British possessions west of the ninety-first meridian. Annexation will be but a question of time. *U.S. Senate, Report on Pacific railroads, February 19, 1869.*

A FEW BRIBES. Nobody who has studied the peculiar methods by which elections are won in Canada will deny the fact that five or six million dollars, judiciously expended... would secure the return to Parliament of a majority pledged to the annexation of Canada to the United States. *New York World, 1890.*

A RIPE APPLE. Canada is like an apple on a tree just beyond our reach. We may strive to grasp it, but the bough recedes from our hold just in proportion to our effort to catch it. Let it alone and in due time it will fall into our hands. *James G. Blaine (1830-93), U.S. politician, secretary of state 1881 and 1889-93. Quoted by W. E. Harris in Canada's Last Chance (1970).*

PEAS IN A POD. You know, it seems ridiculous. We both speak the same language. We think alike. We behave the same. Don't you think you would be better off as the forty-ninth state? *Dwight Eisenhower (1890-1969), U.S. general and thirty-fourth president of the United States. Said in 1965, to Lionel Chevrier, in Washington, D.C.*

Quoted by Chevrier in St. Lawrence Seaway (1959).

COMMERCIAL IMPERATIVE. Sooner or later, commercial imperatives will bring about free movement of all goods back and forth across our long border; and when that occurs, or even before it does, it will become unmistakably clear that countries with economies so inextricably intertwined must also have free movement of the other vital factors of production— capital, services, labour. The result will inevitably be substantial economic integration, which will require for its full realization a progressively expanding area of common political decision. *George Ball (1909-1994), U.S. diplomat. Discipline of Power (1968).*

NO MEANS YES. Well, it doesn't take a Ph.D. in psychology to realize that Canadians' mock horror at the thought of becoming part of the United States actually masks a deep desire to do precisely that. They protest too much. Their lips say "no, no," but their eyes say "yes, yes." *Michael Kinsley, editor of Slate, Microsoft Corporation's on-line magazine. Toronto Star, December 11, 1988.*

KAPUT BORDER. This business has become a continental game. That border is kaput. *J.C. Anderson, U.S. oil man, CEO of Anderson Exploration Ltd., on Canada's booming sales of oil and natural gas to the United States, which have made Canada the largest single source of U.S. energy imports. New York Times, June 12, 2000.*

Political lies and other myths

FOR POLITICIANS TRUTH is a secondary-order commitment. While they should not lie, their prime function in a democracy is to persuade people why a certain course of action should be pursued. In a sense their task is to give plausible reasons for hope. *Ed Broadbent (1936-), New Democratic Leader 1975-90. Speech, Ottawa, January 27, 1995.*

DAMAGING TRUTH. There is nothing more damaging in politics than telling the truth. *A political adage cited by Bill Clinton in a television interview, Good Morning America, April 2, 2012.*

PROFESSIONAL LIARS. A Senate acting as a House of Fact is essential, as an antidote for the poisoning of the democratic process by professional liars. *Philippe Deane Gigantes (1923-2004), Greek-born Canadian journalist, public servant, and senator. The Road Ahead (1990).*

FALSE PROMISES. Be lavish in your promises. Men prefer a false promise to a flat refusal... Contrive to get some new scandal aired against your rival, for crime, corruption, or immorality. *Advice from Quintus Cicero (102-43 BC) for his more famous brother, Marcus Cicero (106-43 BC), Roman orator and statesman, on how*

to get elected to the Roman Senate. Quoted by Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, vol. 3, Caesar and Christ (1944).

UNDECIDED. Mike Pearson was touring Newfoundland and there was an open-car parade in St. John's. Joey [Smallwood, Newfoundland premier] was in the back of the car with Mike, and there was a certain amount of enthusiasm being displayed on the streets of St. John's. Joey was saying, "Mike, they are all Liberals here, all Liberals." Suddenly, out of the crowd came the voice of a megaton foghorn: "Down with the bloody Liberals." A short pause, and Joey said, "I guess we will have to mark him down as undecided." *Royce Frith (1923-), Canadian lawyer and senator. Speaking in the Senate; Senate, Debates, 1991.*

THE CAUCUS AND THE CACTUS. What is the difference between a caucus and a cactus? A cactus has all the pricks on the outside. *John Diefenbaker (1895-1979), thirteenth prime minister (1957-1963). Comment to news reporters after a caucus conspiracy in 1966 cost him his position as Progressive Conservative Party leader.*

QUICK LAW. That was the fastest I've ever seen a piece of legislation passed in

this place. It just whipped by. *Rob Anders (1972-), Reform Party Member of Parliament. On legislation giving MPs a retroactive pay rise. Toronto, Globe and Mail, June 12, 1998.*

BRAIN POWER. Mr. Speaker, the honorable member said that he could swallow me. If he did, he would have more brains in his belly than he has in his head. *Tommy Douglas (1904-1986) Scottish-born Baptist minister, Saskatchewan premier (1944-61) and New Democratic Party Leader (1961-71). House of Commons, Ottawa, cited in Toronto Star, May 23, 2000.*

THE FOUNDATION of party governments is bribery, is it not? Men are party men for the spoils. They support the government of the time for the sake of the spoils. If a man “kicks” and gives an independent vote against the party he loses their patronage, does he not? Is not bribery the cornerstone of party government? *John Douglas Armour (1830-1903), Canadian Supreme Court Justice. Queen v. Bunting. Toronto Globe, December 5, 1884.*

BRIBES FOR ALL. We bribed them all, and generally acquired nearly everything in sight. We literally owned the Province. Public officials in Canada, so far as my experience goes, do not have that suspicious hesitancy in accepting money that characterizes some officials in this country. The Langevin crowd did not scruple to take all they could get. *Owen E. Murphy (1849-1901), U.S. businessman. Murphy was an associate of Thomas McGreevy, Member of Parliament*

and railway and building contractor, expelled from Parliament for political corruption and convicted of defrauding the government with bribes paid to Public Works Minister Hector Langevin and others in the government of John A. Macdonald. McGreevy was sentenced to a year in jail and Langevin was forced to resign. Interview published in New York Times, republished in Toronto Globe, November 23, 1891

A BARNYARD PLATFORM. Once at an auction sale, my father mounted a large manure pile to speak to the assembled crowd. He apologized with ill-concealed sincerity for speaking from the Tory platform. The effect on the agrarian audience was electric. *John Kenneth Galbraith (1908-2006), Canadian-born economist, author and diplomat. The Scotch (1964).*

THE IT FACTOR. When we were boys we used to stand on the corner and watch the girls go by. Some girls had IT and some didn't. Now, we could tell just like that which ones had IT and which ones didn't. And that's how you pick candidates—they've got to have IT. *George Hees (1910-1996), Canadian Progressive Conservative politician and cabinet minister. Election campaign speech, June 1962, quoted by Peter Newman in Renegade in Power (1963).*

Read 12 more pages of the most fascinating things ever said about Canada. Order the complete book.

CHAPTER TWO
Fascinating facts



NWT, Archives, Northwest Territories. G-1995-001:4493

Ibyuk, the world's second largest pingo, rises like a gigantic frost heave from the Arctic coastal plain near Tuktoyaktuk.

Big and diverse

Geography

BIG. World's second biggest country with 9,093,507 square kilometres, including 9,093,507 square kilometres of land and 891,163 square kilometres of fresh water. Only Russia is bigger. At the widest point, Canada stretches 5,959 kilometres from Cape Spear, Newfoundland to the Yukon-Alaska border; north and south the spans is 4,634 kilometres from Ellesmere Island in the high Arctic to Middle Island

in Lake Erie. More coastal shoreline than any other country: 93,724 kilometres. Atlantic, Pacific, and Hudson Bay shorelines account for 26,439 kilometres. Coastal island shorelines total 67,285 kilometres, largely in the Arctic.

WET. With one-quarter of the world's fresh water, Canada has more per person than any other country. It has the second largest total annual renewable water supply. Russia has about 50 percent more renewable wa-

ter, but more than four times as many people. Canada has an annual renewable fresh water supply of more than 3,400 cubic kilometres; Russia has 4,500 cubic kilometres.

ICY. Glaciers cover more than two percent of Canada, an estimated 146,540 square kilometres of the Arctic Islands and 48,535 square kilometres of the mainland. These are estimates only: “At present there are no reliable figures,” the national Atlas of Canada reported in 2012. But the government’s Hydrology Research Institute “is in the process of identifying and measuring all glaciers in Canada.” They need to do it quickly, since the glaciers are shrinking.

ROCKY. The Canadian Shield, covering more than half of Canada from the Arctic to the Great Lakes and into the northeastern United States, was the first part of North America to permanently rise above sea level. Its volcanic rocks are as old as 4.5 billion years. Beneath a thin layer of covering soil, the rocks hold one of the world’s richest treasures of mineral ores—nickel, copper, zinc, iron, gold, silver, diamonds—the bedrock of Canada’s mining industry.

HALF FROZEN. Almost half of Canada is frozen, covered with permafrost, ground that is permanently frozen to depths varying from about one metre to as many as 500; and up to 1,000 metres in parts of Baffin and Ellesmere islands.

PINGO! In Inuvialuktun they are known as *pinguryuaq*, says the Prince of Wales North-

ern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife. In English, they are called pingos. A pingo is a hill with a core of ice, “formed in areas of permafrost when ponds or lakes are drained. When the lake bed freezes, the ice below expands and is forced upwards.” One of the world’s largest concentrations of pingos—1,350 of the hills—dramatically dot the shore of the Beaufort Sea in the Mackenzie Delta and the adjacent Tuktoyaktuk peninsula. Eight of these pingos are in the Pingo Canadian Landmark, five kilometres west of the village of Tuktoyaktuk. The largest of the eight, known as Ibyuk, rises 49 metres from the shore and stretches 300 metres in length. It is the world’s second largest pingo, exceeded by one in Russia. Inuit have dug into pingos to make walk-in food freezers.

BOGGY. Muskeg—soggy areas of peat moss, grass and shrub vegetation—cover an estimated 1.3 million square kilometres of northern Canada, more than in any other country in the world. They are part of the country’s wetlands that are vital to a wide range of wildlife.

FOOD LAND. Only five percent of Canada’s land mass is arable land, but those 450,000 square kilometres of farm and pasture land are almost three times the total size of all of California (158,706 square kilometres); three and a half times the size of England (130,395 square kilometres); and 150 percent the size of Italy (including Sicily and Sardinia).

HOT AND COLD. In southwestern Ontario temperatures ranged from 33°C

Insulin saves a billion lives

Birth of the oil industry

The abolition of slavery, the first European overland crossing of North America, a home of liberty and freedom for American slaves delivered on the underground railway, the birth of the global petroleum industry, a billion lives saved from premature death with the discovery of insulin. These are among Canadian achievements and inventions worth celebrating.

HIGH SOCIETY. 1605. First social club in North America established by Samuel de Champlain at Port Royal, Nova Scotia. Port Royal, France's first successful settlement in North America was founded the year before but many of the settlers died of scurvy during a bitter winter. The following year, members of Champlain's morale-boosting *l'Orde de Bon-Temps* served beaver tail, salmon, moose pie, and other wild game at Port Royal's Great Hall.

SAILBOAT. 1679 January 26. On the shore of Lake Erie, the keel is laid for the first ship built to sail the Great Lakes, the 44-tonne *Griffon*.

SHIP CANAL. 1781 February 15. First lock canal on the St. Lawrence River built by William Twiss at Coteau du Lac.

FIRST CROSSING. 1793 July 22. First Europeans to cross America, north of the Rio Grande, Alexander Mackenzie (1764-1820) and eight companions marked their trek with an inscription on a large rock at Bella Coola: "Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three." The Lewis and Clark expedition across the United States followed 13 years later.

ABOLITION. 1793 August 23. Abolition law passed by the legislature of Upper Canada prohibited importing slaves but allowed owners to retain existing slaves. Slavery was abolished in Britain and its empire in 1834 and in the United States in 1863.

SMALLPOX STOPPER. 1800. First vaccination for smallpox in North America administered by medical missionary John Clinch at Trinity, Newfoundland.



C.W. Jeffreys. From the Imperial Oil Collection.

Alexander Mackenzie and party reach Bella Coola, July 22, 1793; first Europeans to cross North America north of the Rio Grande.

UNDERGROUND RAILWAY. 1830 October 28. Josiah Henson (1789-1883), his wife and four children, ferried by rowboat across the Niagara River to Kent, Upper Canada, were among the first of as many as 90,000 American fugitive slaves to find freedom in Canada by travelling secretly by night on the “underground railway,” in which they, and the “agents” who helped them, risked their lives.

STEAMSHIP. 1833 September 11. *SS Royal William*, first ship to cross the Atlantic under steam power alone, docks at Gravesend on the Thames, carrying a load of coal and seven passengers on a 25-day voyage from Pictou, Nova Scotia. The ship was built at Cape Blanc, Quebec.

COAL OIL. 1846 June 19. Nova Scotia physician, geologist and inventor Abraham

Gesner (1797-1864) demonstrates his kerosene fuel at Charlottetown. Produced initially from bitumen and coal, kerosene—a.k.a. “coal oil”—became the principal source of light for the lamps of the world for more than half a century, until the advent of Thomas Edison’s electric light bulb. In 1854, a New York refinery designed by Gesner was the first to commercially produce kerosene. Within four years some 70 U.S. coal oil plants were producing “coal oil.” The Gesner plant was still the largest, employing 200 men who refined

30,000 tons of coal a year to turn out 5,000 gallons of kerosene per day. The coal oil industry was short-lived but built the foundation for the petroleum industry. That awaited the discovery of North America’s first commercial oil field at Oil Springs in Canada West. The coal oil refineries switched to oil to produce kerosene at much less cost.

FIRST BLACK NEWSPAPER WOMAN. 1853 March. Mary Ann Shad (1823-crude oil was discovered. J.M. Williams & Co. became the world’s first integrated oil company, with crude oil production, refining and marketing. Williams & Co. (later renamed Canadian Oil Company) sold its Victoria Oil kerosene in Canada, the United States, Europe and Asia for more than 20 years before it disappeared in a merger with another firm.

UNDERSEA CABLE 1858. August 16.

First trans-Atlantic telegraph sent from Trinity Bay, Newfoundland to Valentia, Ireland, the culmination of undersea telegraph cable developed by Newfoundland engineer Frederick Newton Gisborn (1824-92).

ROWING CHAMPS. 1870 September 15.

A four-man English rowing crew defeats the much-favoured Canadians, in a race at Montreal that drew 45,000 spectators. A year later, the Canadian crew beat the English for the world title. Ten years later, in a race on the Thames, Edward Hanlan of Toronto beat E.A. Trichett of Australia for the world's singles rowing championship with such ease that the London *Times* dubbed the race "a mere farce."

RODEO. 1872 August 28.

First wild west show staged at Niagara Falls, Ontario features James Butler Hickock as "Wild Bill Hickock."

WHERE POPPIES GROW. 1915 May 3.

In Flanders Fields, the most widely known poem of the First World War, composed in 20 minutes by Dr. John McCrae (1872-1918) of Guelph, Ontario.

A PAIR OF AIR ACES. 1918 April 21.

The Red Baron, Manfred von Richthofen, Germany's top First World War air ace, shot down in a dogfight by Canadian airman Roy Brown (1893-1944). William Avery "Billy" Bishop (1894-1956) was Canada's top air ace in the war, shooting down 72 enemy aircraft, exceeded among allied forces only by French aviator Rene Fonck, who shot down 75.



The Red Baron, Germany's top First World War air ace, was shot down in a dogfight by Canadian airman Roy Brown.

MUSICAL RADIO. 1918 December. First music broadcast by radio transmitted by Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co. of Canada from Montreal to the Chateau Laurier Hotel in Ottawa.

Be a proud Canadian.

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achievements.**

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Rick Hansen wheels around the world

Thousands of cheering supporters greeted 30-year-old Rick Hansen at Vancouver's B.C. Place Stadium, May 22, 1987, as he pushed his wheelchair the final yards of a 26-month, 40,073-kilometre journey, crossing four continents, 34 countries, and five mountain ranges.

As a teenage athlete, Hansen won all-star awards in five sports. That ended two-months before his sixteenth birthday, when he was paralyzed from the waist down. A pickup truck, in which he was riding in the back, crashed, breaking his back and severing his spinal cord. After extensive rehabilitation and becoming the first person with a disability to earn a degree in physical education from the University of British Columbia, he earned distinction as one of the world's top Paralympians.

Between 1979 and 1984, he won 19 international wheelchair marathons, including the world title three times. He was the first to break the two-hour time in a wheelchair marathon. He won gold, silver and bronze medals at the 1980 Paralympic summer games; and nine gold medals at the 1982 Pan Am Games, including wheelchair volleyball, and basketball.

Raising money was never the real purpose of his epic journey. "The greatest impact," he has said, "was and always will be the human side of the mission... to inspire people... to think differently about what is



Rick Hansen Foundation
Rick Hansen in Man in Motion World Tour, Salem, Oregon, 1987.

possible for anyone when barriers are removed, attitudinal or physical."

Donations still rolled in, amounting to \$26 million by the end of the tour. Twenty-five years later, Rick Hansen and the Rick Hansen Foundation had raised and donated more than \$200 million for spinal cord injury research, and quality of life and motivational programs.

CHAPTER FOUR

America discovered



Joyce Hill, Wikimedia Commons

Replica Viking ships approach L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site in 2000 reenactment of arrival of the first Europeans to establish a settlement in North America.

Vikings in Newfoundland

Christopher Columbus was a century or so late in “discovering America,” when he arrived in 1492. Ireland’s St. Brendan, with some 60 pilgrims, sailed across the Atlantic between 565 and 572 in open ox-hide boats called currachs to a land he called Paradise, thought to be Newfoundland, according to several written legends.

The story is feasible. There is no dispute that the Irish had sailed their currachs to settle as far as Iceland. British adventurer

Tim Severin built a replica currach and sailed it from Ireland to Newfoundland in 1976-77. But there is no conclusive evidence of St. Brendan’s voyage. Another legend has Irish monks sailing from Iceland in 875 to settle first in the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, and then on Cape Breton Island. Later Norse explorers called the area the country of the white man. If the monks did settle here, they left no evidence to confirm their presence.

Vikings sailing from Iceland for Greenland were the first confirmed Europeans to sight Newfoundland, and possibly Labrador and Baffin Island, in 985 when their ship, enroute to Iceland, was blown off course. A decade later, Leif Ericsson became the first confirmed European to set foot on mainland North America, setting up a camp on what he called Vinland, somewhere near the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Ericsson and his men remained for about a year before returning to Greenland with wine, vines and lumber.

About 1,004, a flotilla of four ships, with 160 men (and at least one woman) plus cattle, landed near Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland at what is now a United Nations World Historic site, marking the first confirmed European settlement in North America.

The settlement included eight timber and turf houses (the largest 19 by 14 metres), a forge, and four workshops. Gudrid, the wife of the colony's leader, Thorfinn Karlsefni, gave birth here to a son, Snorri, the first child born in North America of European parents. The Vikings stayed at Anse aux Meadows for three or four years, and continued further exploration, before returning to Greenland.

This marked the end of Viking explora-

tion of North America, possibly because the Little Ice Age was making the region less hospitable, or because all the land the Vikings needed was available at Greenland and Iceland, or because North America seemed to offer nothing that was not more readily available from Norway.

Almost four hundred years went by before the next Europeans are reputed to have visited Canada—a century before Columbus. Harry Sinclair, the Scottish Earl of Rosslyn, with 12 ships and 300 men, is claimed to have landed at what is now Guysborough, Nova Scotia, on June 12, 1398, and spent some time exploring the peninsula. While the claim is staunchly advocated, conclusive evidence is still lacking.

After the Vikings, British-Italian explorer John

Cabot was the first to land in North America, in 1497. Christopher Columbus landed in the the Bahamas in 1492, and in South America in 1498. Cabot landed in either Newfoundland, Labrador, or Cape Breton.

Whoever were the first Europeans to visit Canada they were far from the first to “discover” North America. Native Americans arrived from Asia thousands of years earlier, and there were anywhere from 40 million to 100 million of them when the Europeans arrived.

**First Europeans
arrived
40 million years
after native
North Americans.**

The myth of the Plains of Abraham and the Conquest of Canada

British General James Wolfe is widely proclaimed as having cast the destiny of Canada with the defeat of Louis-Joseph Montcalm and the French on the Plains of Abraham, September 13, 1759. Not so. The destiny not only of Canada but North America was cast on the far side of the Atlantic, in a pair of events that many histories have ignored or overlooked.

With periodic outbreaks of peace, the French and English began fighting each other for control of North America almost as soon as their first settlers landed. The shooting started in 1613 when Virginia Company sea captain Samuel Argall and Virginia colonials attacked the French Jesuit Mission on the Île Monte Désert, off the northern end of Maine. In a second attack that year, Argall sacked every building in Port Royal—seven years after the first French settlers arrived there; six years after the first English settled at Jamestown; five years after the French at Quebec.

Now, 141 years later, the stage is set for the final conflict.

It is 1754, and the French claim the most territory. New France sprawls over the heart and length of the continent, from Labrador

and the Gulf of the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico. It is home for possibly 80,000 people: half of them in Canada, straddling either side of the St. Lawrence for a distance of 400 kilometres; the rest in Acadia, mostly present day New Brunswick; and in Louisiana with its New Orleans. The English have far more people, 1.2 million in colonies on the Atlantic seaboard between Acadia and Spanish Florida.

“A volley fired by a young Virginian in the backwoods of America, set the world on fire,” as Horace Walpole noticed. The young Virginian was 22-year-old militia captain George Washington. He came to the Ohio Valley on behalf of speculators and their Ohio Company, which had been granted 200,000 acres, nominally by generous King George II, in territory the French



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Devastation of Quebec by Wolfe's artillery during siege of 1759, as depicted by artist Richard Short.

claimed lay within their New France. To protect their fur traders and prospective settlers, the Virginians built a small fort at what is now Pittsburgh. The French sent troops to stop the English trading with the Indians and establish settlements. Washington was dispatched with a small troop and orders to restrain French obstruction, “and in case of resistance to make prisoners of or kill and destroy them.” At daybreak on May 28, the future U.S. president, his troops, and a few warriors swept down on a camp of 31 sleeping Canadian militia, killing 10.

Two years of undeclared war in North

America had started. This was the first phase of the global Seven Years' War that pitted England and its allies against France and its allies. By the time it was over, 1.4 million people were killed in fighting in North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, India, and the West Indies. Winston Churchill called it the first world war.

England and France sent shiploads of soldiers across the Atlantic to join the fight in North America. The certain losers were the First Nations. Mohawk Chief Hendrick told a conference of colonial governors at Albany:

“The Governor of Virginia and the Gov-

ernor of Canada are both quarrelling about land which belongs to us, and such a quarrel as this may end in our destruction: they fight who shall have the land.” The Europeans took no heed.

We need not detail all the North American battles—Oswego, Fort William Henry, Monongahela, Ticonderoga, Fort Frontenac (Kingston), Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh), and more—before the shooting stopped, except to briefly note two. At the instigation of New England land speculator, the British captured what remained of French Acadia, i.e., present day New Brunswick, and began the historic expulsion of more than 11,000 Acadians to distant lands. In 1758, the British captured Louisbourg, the French fortress on Cape Breton Island that guarded the St. Lawrence gateway to Canada. James Wolfe was in the thick of that action, leading the Fraser Highlanders. Wolfe and the Highlanders sailed the next year for what historian D. Peter Macleod has called, “The battle that would decide the fate of Canada and the French and British Empires in North America.”

Quebec, the key to New France, might have fallen without a shot, if a British fleet had acted more promptly to cut off a daring exploit by a Canadian butcher.

“We could perish from lack of food without firing a shot,” Louis-Joseph Montcalm, New France’s military leader warned in early 1759 as Quebec prepared for an anticipated British invasion. Food shortages seemed a graver threat than the British. Heavy rains and cold weather had yielded poor crops. There was not enough food to feed Quebec’s civilians and armed forces

until more might come in the summer from the more fertile fields of Montreal, 130 kilometres upstream. Pierre de Vaudreuil, the first Canadian-born governor of New France, asked France for a large shipment of provisions and arms. France was too preoccupied with the British navy, on the other side of the Atlantic, to offer much help.

Joseph-Michel Cadet secured the needed provisions in France, and chartered a private fleet of supply ships and two armed frigates to bring them to Quebec. Cadet learned the butcher trade from his uncle; started a butcher shop, added wheat, flour, peas, and biscuits to his business; won a nine-year contract as purveyor general of Canada. With a string of warehouses and 4,000 employees, he was possibly the wealthiest man in New France, and seemingly undeterred by any risk.

While Cadet was organizing his food convoy, British Rear Admiral Philip Durell was ordered to sail with his fleet, harboured at Halifax, to blockade the St. Lawrence as soon as the breakup of ice permitted. Wolfe was less than pleased when he learned that Durell would be in charge of the blockade, describing the admiral as “vastly unequal to the weight of the business.”

In late March, Durell sent small ships to survey ice conditions in the Gulf of St. pro

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40,000 BC to 2012

40,000 BC *Homo sapiens* reach North America. Cross Asia-Alaska land bridge.

1,004. First European settlement in North America. Viking village at L'Anse aux Meadows occupied for four years.

1497 John Cabot visits. Sees North America, possibly Newfoundland. Claims territory for Britain.

1534 Jacques Cartier lands at Gaspé. Claims territory for France.

1541 First French colony in North America. Quebec military post Charlesbourg-Royal, established by Cartier and Sieur de Roberval.

1550 ca. Basque whalers set up North America's first industrial plant at southern tip of Labrador. Produce whale oil. Red Bay National Historic Site preserves remnants of plant, housing, graves of 160 whalers.

1558 First Newfoundland settlers.

1576-78 Martin Frobisher seeks Northwest Passage, returns to London with fool's gold.

1583 Humphrey Gilbert claims Newfoundland for Britain.

1642 Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de



C.W. Jeffreys. From the Imperial Oil Collection.

John Cabot sighting North America, 1497.

Maisonneuve, establishes Ville Marie. Now Montreal.

1649 Jesuits abandon Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons. Ontario mission burned to prevent capture by Iroquois.

1682 La Salle explores Mississippi Valley.

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Spectators peered over the prison walls to see the hanging of Stanislaus Lacroix at Hull, Quebec, in 1902.

Public hangings drew big crowds of avid spectators

Public hangings were popular spectacles in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Crowds jammed public squares and prison courtyards to see murderers, thieves and rebels dangling from the end of a rope. When public hangings were abolished, avid spectators crowded rooftops, climbed telephone poles and attempted to batter down prison gates to see people killed.

Legislation banning public hangings came into effect on January 1, 1870, but it wasn't always effective. The law was some-

times bent when scaffolds were built higher than prison walls to allow public viewing. Spectators climbed telephone poles and sat on rooftops to witness the hanging of Stanislaus Lacroix in 1902, as seen in the accompany photo. When Timothy Candy was hanged in Montreal in 1910 for shooting and killing two policemen, dozens of spectators witnessed the event in similar fashion.

A sheriff or prison warden had the authority to invite spectators and newspaper

reporters to hangings, and the numbers of guests sometimes made the event quite public, in fact if not in name.

Mob riots to see double hanging

The most notorious and widely-viewed of Canada's nonpublic hangings was the double hanging of Cordelia Viau, a church organist, and her lover, farm worker Sam Parslow, at the village of St. Scholastique, 50 kilometres north of Montreal, at 8 a.m. on Friday, March 10, 1899. They had been found guilty of a particularly gruesome murder of Cordelia's husband, Isidore Poirier, a carpenter.

Not less than two hundred invited people crowded the jail yard to witness the hanging, although one newspaper account claimed, "It is certain that there were six hundred of them." Outside the prison walls, an estimated two thousand rioters tried to breakdown the prison gate to gain entrance. Police fired revolvers in the air to warn them back.

The event made newspaper front pages across Canada and the United States, and much later became the basis for a French language book and a movie. American Sunday newspapers lapped up the story in widely syndicated sensational accounts, such as that in

the *Syracuse Sunday Herald*, March 12, 1899.

At "half a minute past eight" a procession including the prisoners, the sheriff, two priests and the police escort emerged from the jail and proceeded to the scaffold and the awaiting hangman," the *Herald* reported. "It was but three and one-half minutes later when the trap had been sprung and all was over."

But not quite. Immediately following the drop, "A wild rush was made for the scaffold, and in a twinkling the black cloth was torn away and the bodies exposed to view." "Cordelia Viau's pulse stopped in six and one-half minutes;" Parslow's "in twelve and a half minutes."

The book about the event, *Le lampe dans fenêtre*, by Pauline Cadieux and the 1980 film, *Cordélia*, portrays the hanged woman in a sympathetic light and questions whether she was in fact guilty.

The last known public hanging in Canada, at least the last officially authorized as such, was the hanging of Nicholas Melady at Goderich, Ontario, for the murder of his father and stepmother on December 7, 1869. Although no longer officially conducted in public, convicted murderers continued to be hanged in Canada for at least another 93 three years.

**The first of two items from chapter seven, where ten pages
chronicle the evolution of Canadian criminal justice,
from the time you could be hanged for stealing turnips
to the abolition of capital punishment.**

Eager ladies press for close up look

Women as well as men flocked to watch public hangings in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That much is clear from photos and drawings of crowds of spectators, although the men seem to somewhat outnumber the women. None appeared more fascinated by the gruesome sight of death than the eager women who pressed in close for a detailed look at the death features of a pair of men hanged in Cayuga, Ontario. The women were admonished by the Brantford Expositor, in this item republished in the Toronto Leader, May 26, 1855.

Stand back there boys, and give the ladies a chance to see. Where and by whom, think you, was this gallant, this considerate request made? Was it at a Charitable Show Bazaar or Floral Exhibition? Not a bit of it. T'was when Blowes and King, from the scaffold in the grove at Cayuga, dropped from time into eternity. When the murderer's cap that covered the Blowes' face was torn from crown to chin, exhibiting in all its horrible distortion the countenance of a strangled human being.

"Stand back and give the ladies a chance to see," shouted a constable from the scaffold, and he waved his stick, his badge of office, to render more expressive the words. "Make way for the ladies."

The crowd divided and the ladies, with eager eyes and hasty steps, approached the dead men. The hangman, black and ugly, steeled in heart and damnable as his vocation is, shuddered at the spectacle and drew himself away in loathing.

The ladies looked upon the bodies of the murderers, gazed upon the big veins well nigh bursting with blood, the tense muscles of the face, the protruding eyes staring in all their horror out beyond the lids. The ladies feasted on the loathsome sight, and departed gratified. The ladies will speak of what they saw at Cayuga for many a day to come, and think nothing in their conduct unwomanly, bad, unfeeling or degrading.

Had we many of such mothers, daughters, sisters, we had many Kings and Blowes. Shame upon them. Thanks be to God, in Haldimand [county] there are few like them, though the few must make the many blush with shame. They have cast a stigma on the very name of woman; and every woman of feeling, tenderness, delicacy and refinement, cannot but mourn over their sisters' insensibility and shamelessness.

By all means advocate the policy of capital punishment. The Cayuga exhibition illustrates its wisdom, and establishes its effect.

VERBATIM

"A very valuable and readable book." *Desmond Morton, O.C., McGill University historian, past director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada.*

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The tragedy of the Irish refugees in Canada



Immigration ships from Britain—also known as coffin ships—brought the first cholera to North America through the port of Quebec in 1832. It continued to arrive in coffin ships for half a century, as depicted in this New York Punch drawing, July 18, 1883.

An estimated 30,000 Irish refugees, fleeing famine and disease, died in two epidemics in Canada, in 1832 and 1847.

First came cholera, the global pandemic that reached North America through the port of Quebec, spreading through Upper and Lower Canada and into the United States. Some 52,000 Irish refugees, destitute and ill, arrived that year. An estimated 9,000 or more perished in this first cholera epidemic. A number of later and smaller

epidemics brought the cholera death toll to an estimated 20,000, mostly Irish, by 1871.

In 1847, 100,000 Irish immigrants, fleeing the great potato famine, arrived. Some 20,000 of them perished, mostly from typhus.

Canadian doctors, nurses, clergy and others, sacrificed their lives in valiant efforts to care for the doomed and destitute Irish.

The story of these ill-fated Irish refu-

gees is probably the saddest and most poignant episode in Canada's history. The story is told in detail in two chapters and 10,000 words in *About Canada*.

Here are a few highlights from these two chapters.

The irony of the cholera epidemic is that it could have been stopped in its tracks if medical science knew that it was spread in contaminated water that people drank, or more rarely in food they ate. Clean, safe drinking water would have stopped the disease. But it was thought that cholera was spread in the polluted air of early nineteenth century towns. Great effort was made to clean the air, instead of the water.

That cholera might be spread in the air seemed logical, since the summer air in the towns of Canada was typically ripe with the mixed scent from outdoor privies, garbage, and manure. At Montreal, a notice posted by the Board of Health described "Low and marshy ground, stagnant waters filled with all the elements of miasma," and even in the centre of town "all manner of impurity, animal and vegetable substances in a state of putrescence, and acted on by all the fiercest power of a burning sun."

Conditions at York (i.e., Toronto) and its ice-covered harbour were described by the *Canadian Freeman* on April 15: "All the filth of the town—dead horses, dogs, cats, Manure &c. [are] heaped up together on the ice, to drop down, in a few days into the water which is used by almost all the inhabitants of the bay shore." When the ice had melted, the *Freeman* reported on May 17 that "Stagnant pools of water, green as a leek, and emitting deadly exhalations are



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A 46-foot granite Celtic cross, the Irish Memorial National Historic Site, at Grosse Île, commemorates the Irish famine refugees who died in Canada. An inscription reads: "Thousands of the children of the Gael were lost on this island while fleeing foreign tyrannical laws and artificial famine in the years 1847-8. God bless them. God bless Ireland. Erected by the Ancient Order of the Hibernians in America, 1909."

to be met with in every corner of the town—yards and cellars send forth a stench from rotten vegetables sufficient almost of itself to produce a plague, and the state of the bay, from which a large proportion of inhabitants are supplied with water, is horrible."

In Montreal and Toronto (then York), hundreds of volunteers joined citizen's committees in efforts to clean the air. "On Saturday, the Artillery went through the different streets of the town, with several pieces of cannon, and discharged blank car-

tridge, with the view, if possible, of disinfecting the atmosphere,” the Montreal *Gazette* reported on June 19. “In the evening, fires of rosins and other bituminous matter were to be seen in every part of the town.” At York, every household was ordered to burn, every day, “pitch, Tar, rosin, Sulphur and any other anti-contagious combustibles.” A barrel of tar was provided at “the Court House Yard for the use of such as are too indigent to purchase it for themselves.”

At first it was thought, or hoped, that the disease might be confined to the “lower orders,” the impoverished immigrants from Ireland, not so much because they were in ill-health, ill-fed, ill-clothed and ill-housed, but because, it was felt, of riotous drinking and “irregular habits.” The disease knew no such boundaries of race, social order or morality, striking the reputable and disreputable alike.

One of the victims was Dr. Daniel Tracy, physician, recently elected member of the House of Assembly, and editor and publisher of the *Vindicator* newspaper. Tracy published an apology for publishing a skimpy edition of the paper, because the fever has struck “several of our hands,” while he himself had “but just recovered.” The paper was published June 19. Tracy had died June 18.

THE FAMINE REFUGEES

Ireland lost a quarter of her population to the great potato famine, from 1845 to 1850. There are no accurate figures, but as many as 1.5 million perished, including many who emigrated to England, Scotland, North America, and elsewhere. Only the United

States took more Irish refugees than Canada, and the United States took care to accept the healthiest and the least destitute.

Ireland had experienced many potato famines, but by far the worst struck was the one that struck with great suddenness in September 1845. “The leaves were all scorched black,” a relief official wrote. “It was the work of a night.”

To feed themselves, the Irish peasants sold or pawned whatever they could, including bedding and clothing, leaving nothing to change from the rags that many wore day and night. But still they perished. “The people died by the roadside with grass in their mouths,” wrote Canadian Catholic historian John Gallagher.

Charles Trevelyan, the government official in charge of relief blamed the Irish peasants themselves. “The great evil with which we have to contend with is not the physical evil of the famine,” he wrote, “but the moral evil of the selfish, perverse and turbulent character of the people.” He also claimed that, “The judgment of God sent the calamity to teach the Irish a lesson.”

Denis Mahon, a major in the British cavalry who had inherited 9,000 acres and 28 tiny villages in County Roscommon, was one of the first of the landlords who evicted half a million tenant farmers and their families in the Great Famine. Mahon evicted 3,000, and sent them to Canada, promising they would be met with help upon arrival. Promised help was a great lie. Families were torn from their homes, children screaming, mothers weeping, one woman still clinging to her torn-away doorpost. Cottages and cabins were torn down; pot-

tery, beds and clothing confiscated. The homeless were left to survive in “scalps,” holes dug two or three feet deep and roofed with twigs and turf, or bigger holes covered with the timber from tumbled homes.

The famine refugees came to Canada on coffin ships, sailing vessels that carried Canadian timber to Britain, and on the westward backhaul, carried as many as 600 refugees crammed in their holds. The overcrowded coffin ships typically offered few if any sanitary facilities, little light or ventilation, and short rations of food and water. One ship had 32 bunks for 276 passengers.

Hundreds of refugees died aboard the coffin ships before they reached the Grosse Île quarantine station on the St. Lawrence River, downstream from Quebec. More died aboard the ships that lined up by the score, waiting for as long as 12 weeks before the passengers could disembark. Bodies were dumped into the river in the dark of night.

Things were better at Grosse Île, but not much. As many as 25,000 ill and destitute refugees overflowed “hospitals, schools, churches and tents,” while some of the hard-pressed medical staff literally worked to death. It was impossible to hold that many for the stipulated four-week quarantine periods. Some were released early; 4,000 to 5,000 on one Sunday in June. Two thousand of these were expected to come down with the typhus within three weeks. “Good God!” wrote Dr. George Douglas, the

Grosse Île medical director. “What evils will befall the city wherever they alight?”

Great evils, inevitably.

When an Irish woman gave birth to a baby in Montreal, the Grey Nuns placed it in a hospital room with 18 other orphans. The mother may have perished, or very possibly, struggling to keep herself alive, was unable to support her infant. It was “apparently healthy,” the Montreal *Pilot* reported. Yet it came down with the fever, affected others, and 10 of the 19 orphans died.

There were six children in the Willis family when they boarded their coffin ship at Limerick, Ireland, on April 18. Before the ship weighed anchor, one son fell ill with the typhus and was left behind for an early death. An 18-year-old son and 10-year-old daughter died on the 56-day voyage. Another daughter died at Grosse Île. At Brantford, their final destination, 90 kilometres southwest of Toronto, typhus claimed the father and the remaining son. Only the mother survived.

No one can claim to know Canada's history without knowing the tragic story of the Irish refugees of famine and epidemic, the survivors of which did so much to build the country. In About Canada, the expanded story is told in vivid terms, with some striking detail found in no other published history.

When children drank whisky at breakfast

For more than a century-and-a-half, Europeans had been killing North America's Indians by giving them fire-water—whisky, brandy, rum, port, sherry—in exchange for furs. Now, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Canada's pioneer settlers were killing themselves with their own medicine.

Alcohol consumption had reached epidemic proportions, and it was taking a terrible toll. At Ancaster, in Upper Canada, 11 of 13 accidental deaths in 1829 were attributed to excessive drinking. Inquests in the Bathurst District blamed all 20 accidental deaths on booze, according to a study on pioneer drinking habits by Rev. M.A. Garland and historian J.J. Talman.

With an abundant number of distilleries—the Bathurst District alone had six in 1836—whisky was plentiful and cheap. Farmers supplied the distilleries with grain. One bushel of grain made three or three-and-a-half gallons of whisky. The farmer received half the whisky as payment for his grain. Whatever he and his family



William B. Edwards. Library and Archives Canada. PA - 080920

didn't drink, was sold to inns, taverns and the many shops that served as drinking houses.¹

Whisky was a solace in the isolated log cabins where settlers lived harsh and lone

ly lives of incredible toil. “In many families,” wrote Garland and Tallman, “whisky was served to each member of the household every morning, and thus from infancy, the children were accustomed to its taste.” The whisky was often diluted with water, especially for young children. It was, however, considered a necessary protection against the winter’s cold or the summer’s heat, and an energizing tonic to help workers—men, women and children—meet their heavy task loads.

Whisky was also a principal product in many patent medicines. One such medicine is reported to have contained two ounces of Peruvian bark, half an ounce of Virginia snake root, and more than 50 ounces (3-1/2 pints) of whisky.²

Aside from the log cabins, the country was thickly dotted with other drinking places, in towns, villages and along the rough roads. In Lower Canada, there were twice as many bars and taverns as there were schools, Montreal’s *Vindicator* reported on March 27, 1832. There were reported to be 1,892 “taverns [and] shops licensed to retail spirituous liquors” in the province, compared with 937 schools. That was said to mean a tavern or sales outlet “for every 128 persons of a fit age to indulge in Intemperance,” compared with one school “for every 164 persons of a fit age to receive instruction.” There were, said the *Vindicator*, 154,000 children “who ought to be in school,” but only 45,000 who were.

Upper Canada seemed equally well supplied with drinking places. In 1833, there were 20 taverns on the 65-kilometre stage road between York and Hamilton. Bathurst

District, in 1836, had 65 inns and 35 shops that sold, and usually served, liquor; London, with 1,300 people, had seven taverns.

“In travelling through the country, you will see every inn, tavern and beer shop filled at all hours with drunken, brawling fellows; and the quantity of ardent spirits consumed by them will truly astonish you,” one anonymous “ex-settler” wrote.³

In many smaller villages and towns, taverns offered the only space large enough to accommodate even small crowds. They were used for weddings, funerals, meetings, elections, court proceedings (where juries were sometimes served whisky and even magistrate were known to imbibe while administering justice), and religious services.

Every event was an occasion for drinking whisky, but none more notoriously so than the “bees” or raisings at which log houses and barns were built. At one three-day raising, no more than 30 men were reported to have consumed 15 gallons of whisky—60 ounces of whisky per man.

Not every pioneer settler, of course, was a drunkard. The most successful were invariably moderate drinkers or teetotallers. And the first temperance movements were gathering forces by the 1830s. But heavy drinking would remain a costly social Canadian problem for decades.

(Endnotes)

1 M.A. Garland and J.S. Talman. *Pioneer Drinking Habits and the Rise of Temperance Agitation in Upper Canada Prior to 1840*. Ontario Historical Society, Papers and Records, volume 27 (1931), pp. 341-64.

2 Craig Heron. *Booze: A Distilled History*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003.

3 Garland and Talman, *Pioneer Drinking Habits*.

A house goes up as whisky goes down

William Thomson was unlike the troop of well-to-do, leisure class Britons who toured Canada in the early nineteenth century to write books about what they saw. A textile worker from the Aberdeen area of Scotland, Thomson supported himself during a three-year tour of the United States and Canada by working at whatever jobs he could find. One job was working at a “raising” of a log house in Vaughan Township, north of Toronto, “for a poor Irishman and his family.” As the house went up, whisky went down. Following is an excerpt from *A Tradesman’s Travels in the United States and Canada, in the Years 1840, 41 & 42*, Edinburgh, 1842.

I was on the ground early and found the settler and his wife busy cooking at a large fire, surrounded by fallen trees and brushwood. The neighbours came by twos and threes, from different quarters, with axes over their shoulders; and as they came up each got a drink of whisky out of a tin can. The stuff smelled most horribly, yet none of them made a wry face of it...

At first they went to work moderately and with quietness, but after the whisky had

been handed about several times, they got very uproarious—swearing, shouting, tumbling down, and sometimes like to fight. I then left off working, thinking I would be as safe out of the way a little; but this would not do, as they would have no idlers there.

**Many accidents
happen, and lives
are frequently
lost on these
occasions, both
from accidents
and quarrels.**

The handing round of the whisky was offered to me, but I declined the honour, being a teetotaler. So I had no choice but to commence working again, as I wished to see the end of the matter. I was sick of it before this; for most of them were drunk and all of them excited. The manner in which they used their axes was a “caution.” Many accidents

happen, and lives are frequently lost on these occasions, both from accidents and quarrels.

In all there were about 24 men, one half Irish; on the whole about the roughest specimens of humanity I have ever seen... The walls of a house, 15 by 26, and 12 feet high, were up before night, and some of the nearest neighbours were to return next day and cut out the doors and windows. When all was done they sat down, all about, eating bread and meat, and drinking whisky (I believe of the same quality as that known in Aberdeen by the name of “*Kill the carter*”).

CHAPTER ELEVEN
The first Canada Day



Queen's University Archives

Reading the Proclamation of Canada, Market Square, Kingston, Ontario, July 1, 1868. Toronto celebrated with a roasted ox, but in Nova Scotia, a Father of Confederation was burned in effigy, together with a live rat.

Cheers and wailing greet July 1, 1867

As midnight broke on July 1, 1867, there was neither peace nor quiet across the land. From Halifax to Windsor, guns boomed, bells chimed, rifles, pistols and muskets were fired, bonfires were lit, as millions of Canadians poured out into the streets of towns and villages to celebrate the birth of their new country. Scant hours later, there were parades, military reviews, speeches, picnics, cricket and lacrosse

matches, special railway and steamship excursions. In Toronto, a fat ox was roasted for the benefit of the poor, but in Nova Scotia an effigy of one of the Fathers of Confederation was burned together with a live rat.

The enthusiastic rejoicing on that first Canada Day when Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada East and Canada West were officially forged into a new nation was

not universally shared. For some in the two Maritime provinces there was bitter resentment at perceived loss of independence — and for some politicians, a loss of power and privileges.

In Canada East there were mixed feelings. Unionists saw Confederation as a bulwark against the threat of American annexation and the obliteration of French language, culture, customs, and institutions. Others feared that the British North America Act, the new constitution for the new country, gave too much power to the federal government, and not enough for Quebec to protect its interests.

From that first Confederation conference at Charlottetown in 1864, it had taken almost three years to put Canada together, and at times the whole idea was in danger of collapsing. The vision of a new nation from sea to sea to sea was far from complete. Prince Edward Island had opted out, and would stay out for another seven years. Newfoundland, too, had rejected Canada, and would not join for another 82 years. Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, and British Columbia were still to join the four million people of Canada.

Newspaper piss and vinegar

Less than two months before Dominion Day, the *British Colonist* and the *Acadian Recorder* had somewhat differing accounts of a Halifax meeting called to nominate candidates for the impending new Parliament.

The April 30 meeting “broke up in the wildest uproar and confusion,” the anti-union *Acadian Recorder* reported the next day. The names of candidates were said to have been “called out amid great hissing,”

while “disgust and distrust seemed to be the leading elements which animated the breasts of the audience. ‘Traitor’ was called out in every quarter of the Hall.” Confederation advocate Dr. Charles Tupper was said to have received “the loudest demonstration of disapproval,” but when the name of anti-Confederation leader Joseph Howe was mentioned “a large majority of the audience arose and gave three hearty cheers for the Nova Scotia patriot.”

A pack of “low and disgusting falsehoods” and “unblushing lies” was how the *British Colonist* described the *Acadian* report. Temperance Hall, said the union paper, was filled to capacity and hundreds had to be turned away. The “few obstructive” anti-unionists, in this report, “were silenced by the enthusiastic demonstrations of the mass of the friends of Union, whose rapturous plaudits cheered on the able and eloquent speakers.” As for Dr. Tupper, far from being greeted with demonstrations of disapproval, he “was received with the wildest demonstrations of applause, and listened to with the most rapt attention.” Other anti-unionists were accused of even worse, of “downright lying” and “odious, cowardly, unspeakable manners.”

Cheers and boos

On Dominion Day itself, July 1, 1867, there was cheering across the continent, mixed with a few loud raspberries.

In Toronto, the *Leader* reported, “The New Dominion was hailed last night as the clock struck twelve by Mr. Rawlinson ringing a merry peel on the joy bells of St. James Cathedral... The bells had scarcely commenced when the firing of small arms was

heard in every direction, so that both music and gunpowder were brought into requisition to usher in the great event. Large bonfires were lighted on various parts of the city... Large crowds also paraded the streets with fifes and drums, cheering in the heartiest manner.”

Great events were scheduled to start at the crack of dawn. All the troops in the city were to parade to the review grounds where they were to be “supplied with ale at the expense of Mr. Gzowski [Sir Casimir, former superintendent of public works]. In the evening there were to be military bands, fireworks and Chinese lanterns at Queen’s Park; “a picnic and festival” on the government grounds, while “A fat ox will be roasted and given away to the poor... by Capt. Woodhouse, of the schooner *Lord Nelson*.” An event held at the city’s Crystal Palace was characterized by the *Leader* as “a loathing band of so-called mothers exhibiting their offspring for prizes—a horrid and disgusting exhibition.”

In Peterborough, on the northern flank of Ontario settlement, midnight bell ringing “was a cause of alarm” to many citizens, according to the *Examiner*. “But very soon they found their fears were groundless; the cause was nothing more than introducing our citizens to Confederation.”

In Ottawa, thousands gathered as a match was struck at midnight to ignite a huge bonfire, all the city bells rang out, rockets flared,

and 100 guns of the Ottawa field battery boomed, the *Citizen* reported on July 4. There must have been little sleep for the players and spectators of four lacrosse games that started at 7 a.m. At the new Parliament Buildings, spectators and an honour guard awaited the arrival of the cabinet headed by John A. Macdonald, a gaggle of dignitaries, and Charles Monck, for his installation as Canada’s first Governor General.

Confederation, predicted the *Ottawa Times* that day, will solve “a great problem” with which “the whole world is intimately concerned—whether British constitutional principles are to take root and flourish on the Western Hemisphere, or unbridled Democracy shall have a whole continent on which to erect the despotism of the mob. The issue is one of national existence combined with the enjoyment of national liberty, against the universal rule of an unrestrained Democracy.”

In Quebec, the *Journal des Trois Rivières* viewed the bells and guns as a proud announcement that “we have taken our place among the nations of the earth.”

Montreal greeted July 1 at 4 a.m. when the guns of the Montreal Field Battery “boomed forth a royal salute,” followed two hours later by more salutes from the guns at St. Helen’s Island. The *Gazette* called it “the greatest day in the history of the North American province since Jacques Cartier landed at Stadacona.”

Far away from the new Dominion, at the

Up to Canada to determine if British principles are to “flourish... or unbridled democracy shall have a whole continent on which to erect the despotism of the mob.”

tip of Vancouver Island, Victoria's *Daily Colonist* greeted July 1 as a "memorable day for British North America." Its publisher, Amor de Cosmos, was apparently breaking with his long-time mentor Joseph Howe. Canada, de Cosmos predicted, will "play an important part in the world's history," guided by "a ministry composed of the best and greatest minds on the continent." Confederation had "given the deathblow to Annexation." All that remained to make the country complete was the construction of a railway to the Pacific coast and the admission of British Columbia into confederation "as rapidly as possible."

Mourning in the Maritimes

In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, there were a few muted cheers and some loud sobbing.

In Halifax, the *British Colonist* greeted the day with a rambling headline: "DOMINION DAY. UNIVERSAL REJOICING. Gorgeous Decorations. Enthusiastic Celebration of the Inauguration of the Dominion of Canada. Grand Display of Fireworks. Illumination, Bon Fires, &c. NAVAL AND MILITARY REVIEW."

The *Morning Chronicle* published an obituary.

"DIED.

"Last night, at twelve o'clock, the free and enlightened Province of Nova Scotia. Deceased was the offspring of Old English stock, and promised to have proved an honour and support to her parents in their declining years. Her death was occasioned by unnatural treatment received at the hands of some of her ungrateful sons, who, taking advantage of the position she afforded them,

betrayed her to the enemy. Funeral will take place from the Grande Parade this day, Monday, at 9 o'clock. Friends are requested not to attend, as her enemies, with becoming scorn, intend to insult the occasion with rejoicing."

In Saint John, "There was nothing uproarious about the demonstrations" that marked July 1, the *Morning News* reported. "Everything was conducted in an orderly and becoming spirit, gratifying to the friends of the Union and at the same time not calculated to create an undue feeling of unpleasantness in the minds of those who have opposed the measure from a conviction of its unsuitability for our people."

According to Timothy Anglin's *Morning Freeman*, some of those politicians who had sought union for their own aggrandizement were rewarded, and some were disappointed. While Confederation Fathers James Mitchell and Leonard Tilley got cabinet posts "with salaries and pickings worth \$8,000 to \$10,000 per year," "poor Dr. Tupper had to relinquish all idea of taking immediate possession of the seat in the cabinet of the new Dominion which was the prize he so coveted that he sold his country for the chance of winning it."

Elsewhere in Nova Scotia, July 1 was "by no means a day of rejoicing," in the view of the *Yarmouth Herald*. "There was a burlesque celebration in the morning," but numerous flags were reportedly flown at half-mast. "In several localities men wore black weeds on their hats," while at Milton, an effigy of Tupper "was suspended by the neck all afternoon" and in the evening "burnt side by side with a live rat."

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Earle Gray is a former editor of *#1 Magazine*, public publisher, and author of Earle holds numerous writing awards, including a lifetime achievement award from the Petroleum History Society (Canada) and the Samuel T. Pees ward from the Petroleum History Institute (United States). A native of Medicine Hat, Alberta, Earle and his wife Joan now live in Lindsay, Ontario. Having lived half his life in the two western provinces and half in Ontario, and travelled extensively from the Atlantic, to the Pacific to the highest reaches of the Arctic, he claims the title of a pan-Canadian.



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