

Nate Courthope and the spice boys

If someone were to ask what kind of nut could start a war, several possibilities might come to mind. Someone in Iran? Perhaps in Pakistan? Not many would think of nutmeg. Giles Milton (see below) called it "that withered little nut" It was, in fact, for a long time a prime disturber of international peace. It has been called "the nut that changed the world".

The next time you put nutmeg into eggnog or a pudding think about Nathaniel Courthope, a 17th Century British East India Company factor. He was the hero of the nutmeg wars on Run and other Indonesian islands. More about him later.

The evergreen nutmeg tree, known to botanists as *myristica fragrans*, and its product known to French chefs as *la muscade*, was native to Indonesia but was eventually transplanted by British interests to Sri Lanka and Singapore.

The tree grows 15 to 20 metres high and produces what are called 'drupes', a fleshy apricot-like fruit that is formed around a hard pit. Plums, cherries and olives are also drupes. When the nutmeg hardens into a 'nut' it can be knocked down with a long pole. Split open, the outer part makes the more powerful mace which is favoured by some people, especially by law enforcement personnel. The pit is ground to produce nutmeg. The twin products were the cause of the colonial wars.

It is strange that the tree, the blossoms of which fill the spice islands with fragrance, should have attracted so much gun smoke and the death of the likes of Nathaniel Courthope.

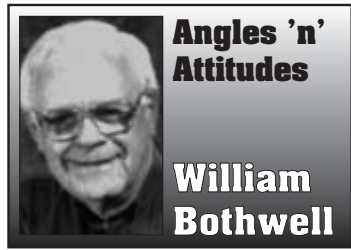
Giles Milton in *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1999) tells his story and others. Between their discovery by the Portuguese in 1512 and their capture by the Japanese in the Second Great War the islands in the Banda Sea were occupied by the Dutch and the English who together pushed the Iberians out of the spice trade.

Back then, nutmeg was "something more than a flavouring for rice pudding", says James Ferguson, author of *A Traveller's Guide to the Caribbean*. In Grenada, where nutmeg is now grown in this hemisphere, it is, he says, called "the retirement tree". Its culture provides a genteel occu-

pation and extra income for the superannuated.

In Nate Courthope's day the spice was used to make palatable meat that was past its "best before" date. It was also thought to be an aphrodisiac and to convey the benefits that Viagra provides for a certain section of the population today.

Ten pounds of nutmeg could be bought on Run or other of the Molucca (Maluku) Islands for a penny. In either London or Amsterdam it fetched two hundred times that much in shillings or



Angles 'n' Attitudes

William Bothwell

guilders. It is not surprising that European fleets and navies set out to buy nutmeg or to control its cultivation and shipping.

Governments became involved in giant joint-stock operations. The regulation and defence of trading companies became synonymous with the national interest. Courthope, an employee of the British East India Company, chartered by Elizabeth I in 1600, found himself circa 1650 having to defend the small island of Run against a superior Dutch force. The Dutch soon controlled the trade but Courthope, who lost his life in the struggle, became a legendary figure in company annals.

By the Treaty of Breda in 1667 Charles II of England (Latin 'Carolus') after whom Charleston and the Carolinas are named, relinquished all English claim to the islands of the Dutch East Indies.

England turned to oversea investment and battles elsewhere.

Dutch-English rivalry had also included a struggle to control the territory around the Hudson River in North America.

It had been explored by Henry Hudson but its mouth came to be guarded by the guns of New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island.

The English captured that settlement in 1664. By the Treaty of Breda the Dutch, in return for possession of the spice islands, gave up Manhattan. Peter Stuyvesant's town was renamed for the Duke of York, later James II.

Giles Milton, cited above, could not resist saying that England may have lost some nutmeg but she gained the Big Apple. Since then, cinnamon and/or nutmeg plus Hudson Valley apples have caused many other things to be dubbed "as American as apple pie". Well, as British-American, anyway.

Courthope learned that, in Indonesia at any rate, "you can't beat the Dutch". He contended bravely with volcanic eruptions and head-hunters, malaria, tropical storms and fellow European traders acting like savages. All the while he was introducing the natives of that part of the world to the rapacity of sea raiders from Northern Europe who seemed determined to divide up the world between them and to subject it to the bane of mercantile greed. *Plus ça change.*

The use of *myristica fragrans* and its products was not only to provide flavouring for pies and puddings. It was advertised as both a preventative of and a cure for the common cold and for the bubonic plague, the frequent pandemic that, unknown to physicians at the time, was carried by parasites on the very rats that travelled the world in the ships of the spice traders and other adventurers.

The equivalents of the modern pharmaceutical companies pushed nutmeg and other spices as such health benefits. The mega-profits from the trade financed the expansion of colonialism and built many of the stately homes of England and elsewhere.

Irma Rombauer advised those who prepare food to use nutmeg often but sparingly. After 80 years her "The Joy of Cooking" is probably the most referenced cookbook in the world. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency notes that those who are allergic to tree nuts usually tolerate nutmeg. Technically, and Giles Milton to the contrary, nutmeg is not a nut; it is a seed.

What is not generally known is that, ingested in large amounts, it has a mind-altering effect and can cause an acute toxic psychosis that may require hospitalisation.

Nathaniel Courthope's enterprise and adventures are also chronicled in John Keay's more recent *The Spice Route* (2006).

Other than Geri Halliwell, 'Ginger', Britain's Spice Girls could have chosen spicier stage names.

Shrinking before our very eyes

It wasn't such a long time ago when Anne and I spent a few years on a forestry project in Kenya, half a world away. One notable memory was attempting a single long distance phone call home at Christmas time. The operator eventually noted that despite a half hour valiant try we actually achieved about 17 seconds of "Hello, can you hear me?" "Are you there?" and other frustrating efforts to have a conversation. In Thailand a few years later we had to travel to an overseas phone station in an adjacent community to access (with luck!) one of the 6 international lines to Canada. Nowadays an e-mail is usually instantaneous and available at any time of day or night.

I was reminded of such old time difficulties as we celebrated our son's Canadian wedding reception. Colin and Yuka flew home overnight from Japan along with Yuka's parents, her brother's family and Japanese friends. We went away for 2 to 4 years in the '60's. The younger generation dropped in from Yokohama for a week's visit earlier this month. Times have changed.

One exciting aspect of this change has been the opportunity for young people to participate in far away events. I have written before of high school kids spending a few weeks living and working in third world countries, experiences not soon forgotten. Similarly two young ladies in our community had the chance to work in South America with 'Habitat for Humanity'. Our grandson is contemplating spending the winter on a Bolivian project of 'Frontiers Foundation'.

One project I am not recommending from a travel point of view is visiting the disease torn dark continent. The Stephen

Lewis Foundation is actively engaged in finding funds to support orphans in Africa. A most revealing book was written by Stephanie Nolan (Twenty-Eight, 2008). Stephanie, a Globe and Mail journalist, traveled extensively through Africa interviewing folk dealing with the HIV/Aids pandemic. The 28 interviews represented 28 million people dead from aids. Death is a grim enough story but these deaths were mostly in young adult families, fathers and mothers dying and leaving behind thousands of young people without parents.

A strong support group has developed across Canada, the Alliston and Orangeville chapters of 'Grandmothers for Grandmothers' being two such organizations. In many African families the slack has had to be picked up by the older generation caring for their grandchildren left behind after burial of their own sons and daughters.

An interesting project planned at present in Alliston is a rag-time evening by Bob Milne, a world renowned pianist from Michigan. Bob played to a crowd last fall in the Presbyterian church which raised about \$3000 for the Stephen Lewis Foundation and is expected to accomplish more this October. The foundation is a Canadian non-government organization in Toronto which so far has raised over thirty million dollars to help alleviate suffering in African communities.

An interesting brochure issued by the foundation outlines some of the projects at the grass roots level across Canada raising funds. It also details several of the African communities benefiting from this work. The Alliston 'Grandmothers Embrace' is one

had died. Mrs. Hazen told a different story, saying she had 10 children, six of whom had died through not being sufficiently nourished and the refusal of her husband to provide medical care. There was no proof that Scott knew of the first marriage, and his action in providing for the woman and her children had some elements of humanity. It was decided to allow Mrs. Hazen out on a suspended sentence, as she appeared to have been more sinned against than sinning in the opinion of the Magistrate. The case against Scott will be dealt with later.

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From the Global Classroom

Doug Skeates

outstanding example of local effort promoting several fundraising projects through the year.

The foundation has also facilitated the travel of small groups of older women visiting their colleagues on the dark continent and hosting return visits. The efforts by grandmothers is greatly to be lauded as we read in shame of governments expending billions of our money to bolster banks and industry while so many millions of people are desperately in need of help.

The Stephen Lewis project is an excellent example of the relevance of Canadians helping to counter the ills of the world. Funds from across Canada support orphanages, school programs and community efforts overseas. Of particular interest is the use of our donations to provide school uniforms and fees for so many who are doomed to a denial of schooling without our support.

News broadcasts are daily showing us that the continent of Africa is no longer half a world away. For folk in Dufferin and Simcoe counties travel and communication has brought the world to our doorstep.

Your Weekly Chuckle . . .

By KEITH HUNTER

"You're early," she said. "I told you to come after dinner."

"That's right," he replied.

"That's what I've come after."

Dipping Into the Past

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22% water, while he had eight cows. Figured on the same basis, a fine of \$30 and costs was imposed. Half of the fine will go to the factory and half to the informer.

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At a meeting of the congregation of Knox Presbyterian Church, Shel-

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They've got the formula for eventual extinction

No matter how pathetic your marksmanship may be, if you try hard enough to shoot yourself in the foot, eventually you're going to hit your target.

Take the United Church of Canada, for example. While it continues to bill itself as Canada's largest Protestant denomination - a claim the Anglicans might dispute - it has been shedding members for decades because of its' radical liberal theology and, at the rate its going, could disappear altogether over the next 20 or 30 years.

Rather than focusing on the traditional scriptures, the United Church - in concert with the rapidly declining Anglicans and Presbyterians - have apparently come to believe that targeted, left-of-centre political action is more important than spreading God's message to everyone. It's not that Canadians are giving up of God. They're giving up on the Protestant Churches.

In the 2001 Canadian census, for example, some 70 percent of respondents identified themselves as either Protestants or Roman Catholics. Roman Catholics totalled 12.8 million Canadians, or 43 percent of the population, down slightly from 45 percent 10 years earlier. The Protestant total was 12.8 million, or 29 percent of all Canadians, a drop from 35 percent in 1991, a decline that has continued to escalate since, particularly among the so-called mainline Protestant churches.

But the real story is not just in the dwindling numbers of church membership - the United Church has dropped from a high of 1.1 million in the 1960s to about 545,000 today - but also in the shrinking percentage of their memberships who actually show up for Sunday services. In the 1950s, about 70 percent of all Canadians attended a weekly service.

Now, it's somewhere between 17 percent and 25 percent, depending upon which polling numbers you read and believe.

Your correspondent, for example, was raised in the Presbyterian Church - as a kid, we went twice each Sunday - and even though I absolutely believe in God and His message, I stopped going to church years ago because I was sick of listening to what amounted to political diatribes from a minister who knew a lot less about both politics and the real world than I did.

The last time I went to church I told my minister bluntly that if I wanted to listen to NDP speeches,

I'd go to a political rally. But that's not what I went to church to hear.

And I suspect that more and more believers have also thrown up their hands, a dramatic loss of not just conservative voices but even moderate voices, leaving the churches in the clutches of the radical left-leaning zealots who, marching arm and arm with the politicized union movement, are leading those churches into oblivion.

How else to explain the fixation within significant elements of the United Church on blaming Israel for all the woes of the Middle East? To be sure, Israel - like any country - isn't perfect.

But as we saw in the publicity leading up to the recent United Church gabfest, once again a host of seriously anti-Israel and yes, anti-Semitic resolutions were being pushed by church activists. To be sure, they didn't get the church body as a whole to approve them,

but then again, the church did the old typical United Church cop-out, and rather than denouncing some rather hateful resolutions, simply set them aside for further study.

They'll be back. You can bet on it. So what does the United Church leadership think of their problems? Mind you, this is a Church which not that long ago elected a moderator who openly declared that he did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

But at least he was an ordained minister. The latest moderator, Mardi Tindal, is a lay person, and was accurately characterized in a weekend National Post article as sounding like somebody who "works for Greenpeace or at a clinic that teaches team building exercises for executives."

Typically of the breed, she has little to say about Christ - she dismisses the word "faith" as "too static..." - and poo-hooes the reality of a rapidly declining church membership.

"When we think we're looking at scarcity we tend to create the conditions that create scarcity," she said. "My inclination is to look at the abundance, people and resources, with which the church has been gifted."

Ah yes, it's the quality, not the quantity. No need to fret about a decline of about 50 percent in membership since the 1960s, not as long as the "right" - or more accurately, "left" - people are hanging in.

They've got the formula for eventual extinction, and they're sticking to it.

Columnist candidate often short on reason

No newcomer seeking election to the legislature in years has attracted as much attention as a newspaper columnist who is running for the Progressive Conservatives in a Toronto by-election on September 17, but this is not the surest indication of merit.

Sue-Ann Levy, who covered city hall for the Toronto Sun for 11 years, is running in the midtown St. Paul's riding vacated by former Liberal cabinet minister Michael Bryant.

The Conservative party is so keen to have her that its president announced she is its candidate without waiting for a nomination meeting at which others could put their names forward.

The Sun, which has never been shy about promoting its own, said Premier Dalton McGuinty and his Liberals are "scared," because Levy is tireless, afraid of no one and fights for the underdog.

The Toronto Star, which supports the Liberals, said Levy is scrappy and hard-hitting and the Liberals fear that she is "a dream candidate" who could win and hurt their image.

A different picture of Levy emerges from her columns. Her reach has extended as far as provincial politics. She has called McGuinty "car-hating," because he wants to extend public transit, and said he and Toronto Mayor David Miller are "cozy as two pigs in poop" on this issue, on which many will support the premier and mayor.

Levy criticized McGuinty for giving Toronto power to levy new taxes and Miller for using it, although it has long been recognized that the city lacked revenue sources, that reliance on property taxes provides inequities and that a level of government that spends money should take responsibility for raising it.

Levy is not always a fighter for those without power, because she has scoffed that agencies which go out on frigid nights and distribute blankets, food and a few words of comfort to people living on the streets, merely want to be trendy and "give the hardcore homeless the tools to stay on the streets."

This sounds like the former far-right Conservative premier, Mike Harris, who said in the 1990s that many

live on the streets because they choose to, ignoring the many factors that put and keep people out of their homes.

Harris's views, which offended many, are now back in style under the Conservatives' new leader, Tim Hudak, and Levy will feel comfortable among them.

But she is best known for attacking, relentlessly and unceasingly, Toronto's mayor, who no doubt deserves some of it.

Miller, a Harvard graduate, brought an intelligence to the job that was lacking in previous years, and earlier ran unsuccessfully for the New Democrats.

Levy's columns have lashed at Miller day after day, particularly on the theme that he spends too much, and they lack understanding that demands for, and costs of, city services are increasing.

Her columns are short on reasoned, constructive criticism and long on name-calling and mainly a stream of epithets directed at Miller and those around him.

She has railed at Socialist Silly Hall, His Blondness, His Blond Locks, King David and his loyal henchmen, David and his lapdogs, the spendaholic mayor, the socialist mayor and his minions, the socialists and their feckless leader, and the childish brats in Miller's regime who refuse to get their house in order. Any humour in these wears off long before you read them for the 100th time.

Levy constantly quotes Miller's opponents at city hall, lobbies representing business and the right-wing Canadian Taxpayers Federation. You would have to search hard to find any that criticize business.

She almost never finds anyone who has a good word to say about the mayor, although such people should not be hard to find.

Since Miller has won two elections comfortably, there must be reasons people support him, but if there are, Levy has never told them to her readers.

Smart voters eventually will see that someone who tells only one side of a story as too biased to be believed, and the Liberals could win the byelection if they could get enough people to read the Tory candidate's back columns.

100 YEARS AGO

Thursday, August 26, 1909

A bigamy charge before Police Magistrate Patullo has developed some unusual and pathetic features. The accused parties were John Scott, a young Englishman about 22, and Jane Hazen, about 45. Mrs. Hazen, the wife of Christopher Hazen, of Proton Station, left her husband last December and took a house in Orangeville with her two children, aged 13 and five. The five-year-old boy is deaf and cannot talk plainly. Some three weeks after the woman's departure Scott followed, and as she was destitute he boarded with her and has since provided for the family, as he was employed in a local factory. On July 12 last, the pair went to Brampton and were married at St. Paul's parsonage by Rev. Mr. Chantler. Hazen, who gave his evidence last week, swore he was married at Brussels to the former Jane Billings 21 years ago and they had lived happily until Scott appeared on the scene. One of their five children

had died. Mrs. Hazen told a different story, saying she had 10 children, six of whom had died through not being sufficiently nourished and the refusal of her husband to provide medical care. There was no proof that Scott knew of the first marriage, and his action in providing for the woman and her children had some elements of humanity. It was decided to allow Mrs. Hazen out on a suspended sentence, as she appeared to have been more sinned against than sinning in the opinion of the Magistrate. The case against Scott will be dealt with later.

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Orangeville for the West at 2:00 p.m. on Thursday last. At the Caledon Horseshoe Curve the last car left the tracks. The train was divided, the first section proceeding to Mono Road and the engine returning for the remaining coaches. The train left several hours later for the west. No one was injured.

75 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, August 30, 1934

Lifeboats were manned and 150 anxious passengers, many of them women and children, and some from Dufferin County, were speedily put ashore four miles from Midland Sunday evening when the excursion steamer Midland City went hard aground on a shoal. Their teeth chattering after a long, cold wait on the beach, returning vacationists from the boat scattered to their homes on buses while the vessel remained stuck on the sandy bottom of Georgian Bay, the stern submerged and it bow well above water. One propeller was reported to have been lost. Water lev-

els so low that former charts are all but useless were blamed for the grounding as the boat returned from Go Home Bay.

50 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, August 26, 1959

A move has been under way for some time to establish a conservation authority for the Nottawasaga River Watershed. The proposed authority would cover an area of about 1,340 square miles and include Shelburne and Amaranth, Melancthon, Mulmur and Mono townships in Dufferin.

25 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, August 29, 1984

An integration program for handicapped children will be going ahead this fall but not as originally proposed. The Town of Orangeville and Dufferin Association for the Mentally Retarded have agreed to a compromise, so that instead of a trailer for the program, room will be made available for one year in the Jean Hamlyn Day Care Centre.