

The Christmas sun rises again

Not everyone remembers the fictional Mrs Miniver, the creation of Jan Struther. She was the busy, common sense, omni-observant wife of Clem, an architect, and the mother of Vin, Judy and Toby. Their country home, 'Starlings' was perilously close to the south coast of England in wartime. When Mrs M. became incarnate in Greer Garson in the 1942 MGM film, she confronted a crash-landed enemy airman there. The Struthers columns in The Times were word pictures of everyday life - shopping in town, planning a vacation, hiring a cleaning woman.

The piece entitled "Three Stockings" begins with Toby, her youngest, waking her on Christmas morning with a "nobly" Christmas stocking in hand. It was 6 a.m. A few minutes later Judy appeared. "There was nothing for it but to switch on a light, shut the window and admit that Christmas Day had begun".

A decade before the half century, it was still the time when every such stocking had to have an orange or tangerine in its toe. Other seasonal trivia were superimposed. It was all, of course, only an apéatif. The real banquet of presents awaited downstairs where a lighted tree was reflected in the still-black window panes. It would be some time before the sun, called "the day star" in poetic language, would shine upon the 25th day of December.

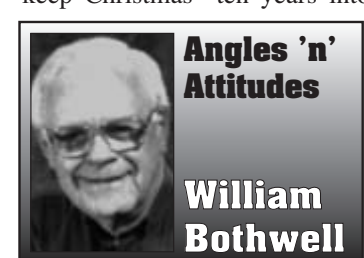
"This was one of the moments, thought Mrs Miniver, which paid off all the accumulation on the debit side of parenthood". And then she heard from the activity of "cook" in the kitchen the "blessed chink" of the cups for early morning tea.

Clifton Fadiman said in *The New Yorker* that Mrs Miniver led one to look at quite insignificant things and then, lo!, to realise that they were not insignificant at all. Neither, I should add all these years later, is anything that happens among family members, friends and neighbours as we celebrate the next few days. There is a certain mystery "deep down" Christmastime. What we do and say then is strangely revelatory of who we really are.

The born-again Ebenezer Scrooge, after going to church on Christmas morning, "walked

about the streets looking down into the kitchens of houses and up to windows. He had never dreamed that anything could give him such happiness". Then he headed for his nephew Fred's house to accept the invitation he had declined the previous day. From then on "he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge".

A reporter-photographer should drop in some year on local families to record for people a century hence how many of us "keep Christmas" ten years into



Angles 'n' Attitudes

William Bothwell

Century XXI. Would it not be interesting to see what folks in our town, maybe in your house, were doing a hundred years ago?

Scrooge and Mrs Miniver are imaginary persons. Real people have left us accounts of their Christmases. In 1847 Barclay Fox, a Quaker, noted the difference between the official celebration of an event and the unknown actual date. He wrote in his diary, "Whether this really was the day of Christ's birth is very doubtful, yet I would not give up the annual feast". Others have assured us that Palestinian shepherds are not out in the fields watching their flocks on a December night. And the earth was not hard as iron, water like a stone.

Fox concluded the entry with "I joined the Evanses at a good roast beef and plum pudding dinner". That reminded me of a three-day party at which I was a guest one year at Ingoldisthorpe Manor in East Anglia.

On Christmas Eve we attended the Mass of Midnight in the parish church atop a nearby hill. On that clear night one could see 'forever' and hear the pealing of bells from miles around. A churchwarden told me that in 1788 the Revd Charles Wesley had stood there. On his return to London he wrote a carol that began "Hark how all the welkin rings / glory to the King of Kings". The words were later altered to "Hark, the herald angels sing".

East Dereham, Norfolk, is about 20 miles from Ingoldisthorpe, as the crow flies. The vicar there, the Revd Benjamin Armstrong, wrote in his diary for Christmas Day, 1866

[cf. the Faber Book of Diaries] that he had officiated at the wedding of a young parishioner named Mahershallalabasaz Tuck. He had that extraordinary name because at his baptism his parents had wished him to be called Uz. When the priest demurred the father insisted that if the child could not have the shortest proper name in the Bible, he would have the longest.

Clearly, there must have been some premonition of the clerical protest but there was also insufficient preliminary research. The symbolic name of the second son of the prophet Isaiah was Mahershallal-hash-baz. Look it up sometime.

James Lackington, a London bibliophile who flourished about 200 years ago told of how he and his wife had only the equivalent of \$20 to spend on their Christmas dinner.

On his way to the shop he passed a bookseller's where he spent most of the money on a copy of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality*, 10,000 lines of inspired blank verse composed after the deaths of the author's wife and several close friends. It has been compared with Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

When he returned without the groceries he told his wife that while the food would have been gone the next day the book would be of enduring value. He said that after some discussion she agreed. Possibly she did.

For Christmas, 1946, Noel Coward's diary reads, "A peaceful day spent in bed talking to people on the telephone. Sibyl [Thorndike, actress], Graham [Payne, his 'companion'], Gladys [Calthorpe, theatrical designer] and I had a delicious dinner, including caviar. Later, a party at Binkie's" [Hugh Beaumont, manager-producer].

Coward's cheek and his chic, as one critic put it, his pose and his poise, included a supreme talent to entertain. In bed or on the telephone he could have entertained Scrooge's Christmas ghosts anytime before dressing for dinner.

Whatever became of the 'Commons'?

Once upon a time, long after the world was created, a strange creature emerged. Mankind arrived on earth at a time when there was plenty of fertile land providing sustenance and habitation. The land could produce the food needed. Water abounded containing unlimited sources of fish protein. The basic element for existence was the oxygen in the air. The needs for all were served by these, the commons.

The first of these to disappear from general usage was land. History informs us that when the white man arrived on this continent land was acquired for a handful of beads. The residents of this new land were quite happy with the arrangement because they had nothing to lose. It was obvious land was for everyone's benefit. They had no concept of legal ownership.

Though most of the habitable land has been converted to private use much of the northern part of the continent remained as crown land. It should be no surprise that this was taken over by a structure called government presumably to be managed on our behalf. Technically most of northern Canada is actually ours as public or common land. In their wisdom our representatives delegated responsibility for managing much of this to the private sector, or more to the point to industry. Technically only the forest was turned over to industry but trees grow on land. Control of the one in essence meant control of the other. Unfortunately 'industrial land' has meant access restrictions for residents practicing hunting, trapping and fishing.

Industrial use of our forest lands resulted in large scale harvesting of trees for lumber or

pulp and paper production. Since nature abhors a vacuum, most of the forest land regenerated to tree cover which, though often of secondary commercial value, at least served ecological purposes. Our northern forests benefited society through protection of a water reservoir, the mainstay of our lakes and rivers and particularly the Great Lakes. Via Niagara Falls we all have benefited from a supply of reasonably priced electricity. From that point of view forests continued to act as 'commons'.

For the individual however, water's greatest importance is for drinking and cooking purposes. Unfortunately this is also a valuable means for disposal of industrial wastes. Mining and pulp manufacturing processes require large quantities of water for their chemical mixes. Waste chemicals have poisoned many sources of potable water for downstream communities. Many lakes are now devoid of fish, another hardship for northerners. On a broader scale, eventual outflows have also poisoned sections of the Great Lakes.

Much of the earth's surface is occupied by oceans which at one time supported large fish populations. Governments have delegated the harvesting of fish to private companies. As fishery technology evolved the use of kilometer long nets dragged the bottom not only decimating aquatic populations but also scraped the ocean bed destroying aquatic habitat. The result: the loss of our east coast cod industry and apparently the same for salmon production on the Pacific side of the continent. Another of the 'commons' is becoming lost to mankind.

The primary human resource is oxygen. The atmosphere is another



From the Global Classroom

Doug Skeates

er dumping ground for industrial wastes causing massive pollution. The best known misuse is the production of greenhouse gases trapped in the atmosphere causing global warming. Human beings also suffer from poor air quality. The incidence of asthma particularly among young people is increasing at an alarming rate. Medical authorities attribute about 1500 premature deaths annually in the city of Toronto to polluted air quality causing respiratory diseases. Society as a whole must shoulder a large part of the blame for misuse of our most important 'common' due to exhaust fumes from vehicles.

We have been blessed with many common resources, provided for the free use of each and every one of us. Over the years we have sat back and watched the ever increasing misuse of each of them or been actively involved in their destruction. The future of mankind lies in the continued supply of oxygen, food and water. We have done our best to destroy that on which we are dependant. What does this portend for our children and their offspring?

Your Weekly Chuckle . . .

By KEITH HUNTER
Reminiscing about their wayward youth, a former hippie asked a one-time flower child, "Say, were you ever picked up by the fuzz?"
"No," she replied, "but I bet it'd hurt."

Stick to your Post!

125 YEARS AGO

Thursday, December 25, 1884

• Former East Luther councillor F. I. Holmes and his family had an experience with fire and frost Saturday night that will never be forgotten. Mr. Holmes was awakened at about 1 a.m. by the smell of smoke and the sound of crackling fire coming from the back kitchen. On opening the door he found flames racing into the log house and lost no time running upstairs with his wife to rescue the children. All escaped by jumping or being thrown to the snowbank below but Mr. Holmes was badly burned and his wife's feet were frost-bitten. The eldest boy ran half a mile to the nearest neighbour, Mr. Holborn, who came to the family's rescue with clothing and a team and sleigh. A new frame house, partially built, was damaged.

• Says the Shelburne Economist: We have to congratulate the people of Orangeville upon the appearance of The Dufferin Post, Messrs. Ketchum & McGuire's sprightly publication.

100 YEARS AGO

Thursday, December 23, 1909

• John A. Best of Whitfield will now have the pleasure of writing "M.P." after his name, having been elected by acclamation as the member for Dufferin in the Dominion House Wednesday, C. R. McKeown, W. H. Hunter, George Little, J. R. Gillespie, W. J. Dynes, G. M. Vance and H. Atkinson were also nominated but all withdrew from the field.

• Shelburne town hall was packed to the doors Tuesday evening of last week to hear Hon. Seaborn Wright, the noted Georgia Temperance worker and orator.

• John Large has accepted a nomination to contest the reeveship of Shelburne against the incumbent, Dr. Thomas Babe.

• At the last meeting of Shelburne School Board, held in the council chamber on Tuesday night, principal T. E. Langford tendered his resignation, advising the board that he had

Dipping Into the Past

Mulmur's John Best became Dufferin's MP in 1909 acclamation



received an offer from a collegiate institute at an increased salary. After considerable discussion the board approved a motion that the resignation be accepted and that the secretary advertise for applications to fill the vacancy.

75 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, December 27, 1934

• Municipal nominations in Shelburne, Melancthon, Mulmur, Amaranth, Mono, East Luther, Grand Valley and East Garafraxa will take place on Monday noon next. Because of Tuesday being New Year's Day and a public holiday, the closing hour

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It will always be 'Merry Christmas' to me

There I was, as happens every year, checking out the latest batch of "Christmas" greeting cards that came in the mail to see how many actually dared use the word "Christmas."

Precious few, as usual.

The favorite, of course, is "Happy Holidays" or "Seasons Greetings," apparently under the mistaken belief that we're currently celebrating the "winter season." It can't be spring, summer or fall, so it must be winter.

And everywhere we look we hear stories of schools telling kids they can't use the word

"Christmas" in their, ah, holiday festivals, or municipalities decreeing that the decorated tree in front of the court house really has nothing at all to do with Christmas but - in the interest of being inclusive - is a "holiday tree." Or, one which came from Oregon a few years back, a "giving tree," ostensibly - according to a city official - "to make everybody feel welcome," everybody, that is, except the vast majority of residents who declare themselves Christians and are celebrating Christmas.

But hey. Don't you know about the separation of church and state? Well, that's an American concept for starters. There is nothing in Canadian law or in our constitution, which makes such a separation mandatory, or even preferable. Indeed, our constitution - yes, the same one brought forth by Pierre Elliot Trudeau - mentions the Christian God right there in the text for all to see. Imagine.

Even in the U.S., however, the "wall of separation" written into their constitution by Thomas Jefferson was meant to protect the churches from the state, not the state from the churches. Indeed, when he was president, Jefferson attended regular church services in the U.S. Treasury, the Congress and, it's true, inside the Supreme Court chambers.

Writing a piece in the Heritage Foundation in 2004, Joseph Loconte wrote that Jefferson "considered religion, especially Christianity, essential to democracy."

In Canada - as in the United States - much of our system of governance was predicated on Christian principles and formed by active Christians. This is not to lessen the intrinsic value of non-Christians among us, only to point out that celebrating Christmas is - along with Easter - the most important event on the Christian calendar and there is no legitimate reason why it should be the regular target of liberal secularists among us.

As you read this, for example, your children are on

their "Christmas break." It is not an accident that the break comes at Christmas as opposed to, let's say, sometime in January or November.

Yes, other faiths have their celebrations as well. Nothing wrong with that.

Whether it's Hanukkah or Eid or Diwali, or any number of significant religiously based celebrations - all of them duly honored by many Canadians - that's fair enough.

What isn't fair, or legitimate, is to attempt to denigrate Christmas, to purposely reduce it to a strictly secular event, unfit for the public forum. And that's what many of the anti-Christmas crusaders actually want.

That's why so many timid people opt for "Seasons Greetings" or "Happy Holidays," instead of calling the event what it is - Christmas, a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Nobody says you have to be a religious person - let alone a devout Christian - to live and prosper in Canada.

It's just that Canada was founded on Christian principles and - despite what you read in the papers and see on the tube - the vast majority of Canadians still do call themselves Christians and would appreciate being able to celebrate such an important event without being made to feel as if they are attacking those who don't share their enthusiasm. The argument is often made that by including the religious aspects of Christmas - which, of course, is what Christmas actually represents - you are offending those Canadians who are not Christians. I have always found this argument to be insulting to Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, whatever, having never in my life - not once - run into somebody from these religions who claim they are indeed insulted by Christmas references.

There may be some who are, but that's their problem, not ours. I certainly don't feel insulted by Hanukkah or Eid. Why would I? And by the same token, why would anybody else feel maligned by Christmas?

The last public opinion poll I saw on the subject brought the following headline in the Toronto Star: "One in four don't believe in God, poll finds."

They could have said, "Three in four do believe in God, poll finds." But hey, when you're trying to lead the parade for liberal secularism, why be positive?

Makes it easier to defend those yahoos who are offended by the word "Christmas."

Never mind. I'm still including them in my annual "Merry Christmas."

'Tis the season for MPPs to wax poetic

Ontario MPPs at this time of year traditionally inflict some of the world's worst poetry on the legislature, but they now have added a way to help rescue this neglected literary form.

MPPs who feel touched by the muse and season of goodwill typically write and recite poems such as that by Progressive Conservative Jerry Ouellette, after a session that was particularly rowdy:

"'Twas just before Christmas and all through the House, the members were scurrying for the rise of the House. The Speaker said 'I know you are restless and posturing about, but it's order we'll have or I'll toss you all out'"

The poem never climbs to greater heights as it goes on about "the chamber you see, influencing generations to be," but is well-meant and no one expects it to provide the beauty or inspiration of Byron or Shelley.

Monte Kwinter, a long-time Liberal, earlier moved that the legislature create the position of Ontario Poet Laureate to promote art and literacy in the province, and all three parties enthusiastically supported it.

This may seem an unlikely initiative for Kwinter, because he was a successful businessman and held such heavyweight economic posts as minister of industry, trade and financial institutions, but he has a fine arts degree and was vice-president of the Ontario College of Art.

The MPP says he was motivated first by a love of poetry, from which he receives stimulation.

He remembers word-for-word the first poem he read as a child, the drama of Sir Patrick Spens sitting in Dunfermline town, drinking the blood red wine and answering his king's call to sail on a stormy sea in which he drowned, which is moving enough to bring a tear to many who recall it.

Kwinter believes many young people grow up communicating in high-tech, using forms of shorthand and missing a lot if they do not appreciate the written word.

He says government places high priority on building a stronger, more competitive economy and its cultural sector plays a key part and has created more jobs

recently than the economy generally.

It provides some funds, although not nearly enough, for writers and has annual awards for poetry.

Kwinter said a poet laureate could write poems commemorating important events, sponsor readings of his or her own poetry, speak in schools and other venues of the power of words and encourage creativity in using them.

He points out that legislators take a lot of pride in using words well and have a responsibility to encourage this among others.

The federal parliament appointed its first poet laureate, George Bowering, in 2002, and now has Pierre DesRuisseaux. They are not known much to the average Canadian, which may reflect reduced interest in Canadian poetry.

Several provinces have poet laureates, and Britain has had one under a variety of titles for six centuries, including Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden, Wordsworth and Tennyson, whose names are household words to many Canadians.

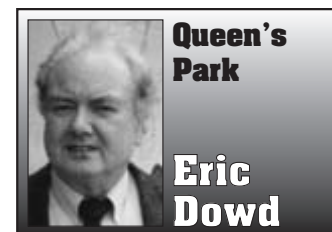
The United States Library of Congress has appointed poet laureates, again under various titles, since 1937 and they included Robert Frost.

Mike Harris, Ontario's Conservative premier from 1995 to 2002, was considered hard-nosed and preoccupied with saving money, and not versed in the arts, but knew enough to say somewhat aptly he had chosen Frost's "road less traveled by."

Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty has said he writes poems to his wife saying he misses her when he is away from home on politics, but has not made examples public.

A social services minister under Harris, David Tsubouchi, wrote poems, in one of which he described shooting and killing a mime with his finger, which worried some who interpreted it as meaning he had less respect for those on the fringes of society.

Kwinter says also that his aims do not include trying to raise the standard of the poetry MPPs contribute to the legislature. But anything he does to encourage people to read real poetry has to be on the right track.



Queen's Park

Eric Dowd

announced that Rev. Arliss Hunt, assistant rector of Trinity Church, Simcoe, has been appointed as rector of St. James Church, Dundalk, Cranmer's Church (Honeywood), St. Mary's Church (Maxwell), and St. Paul's Church (Melancthon).

• At a senior citizens' party at St. Mark's Church, Orangeville, Mrs. Frank Russell, 82, received a prize as the oldest person present.

• Kitchener experienced the worst fire in the city's history last Wednesday when a blaze swept through three downtown buildings causing damage estimated at up to \$2 million.

• You very seldom see them — the Provincial Police Night Patrol. In the dark, cold hours of Saturday morning they were on the job and then some. As Constables Bruce Mullen and Mel Crockford were starting away from the Dufferin Detachment office just north of Orangeville, at 3:30 a.m., they saw a car "take off" in wild flight from in front of the nearby service station. They gave chase and overtook the

auto in a ditch near Laurel, the two occupants fleeing through the snow into a bush. Radioing for Constables Doug Edge and Stan Dick to assist, they strung a loose cordon around the woods. One man was captured but the other escaped. Staying on the hunt, the officers found a matching footprint on the snowy floor of a telephone booth in Orangeville, and with this slim clue began checking with neighbouring municipal police.

Saturday afternoon, Brampton police reported they had picked up the second man. Two Georgetown young men were taken into custody on a charge of car theft.

25 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, December 24, 1984

• Ontario Attorney General and Progressive Conservative leadership candidate Roy McMurtry, was in Orangeville last Thursday to meet area delegates. His bus rolled into Orangeville Bottling Ltd. where Mr. McMurtry spoke with the press and local delegates.