



In Hindsight: Half a Century of Research Discoveries in Canadian History

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Episode 2: Great Research Discoveries

Almost sixty years ago at the University of Toronto, the survey course in Canadian history remained a compulsory requirement for all third year Honours History students. With some resentment I took it as I wished instead to sign up exclusively for courses in European and American history, and in the new areas of study just established in Russian and Latin American history. Canada it must be. Steve Traviss, a fourth-year student, had “tipped me off” that I should try to enter Carl Berger’s discussion group. Tutorials were the centrepiece of the History Department’s instruction. Already the young Ph.D. student from Manitoba had an excellent reputation for the quality of his teaching. I made it. Although I had no idea of this at the time, his tutorial contributed greatly to my shift in historical interests away from the world to Canada.

Steve’s recommendation proved entirely correct. Each week our tutorial leader introduced our group of ten or so to specific assignments on major topics in Canadian history. He assigned us original source materials as well as the necessary scholarly books and articles. Never in discussion did easy answers suffice. One always had, with one’s peers, to probe deeper and deeper into the fundamental questions he posed.

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I remember well my second term essay, as I kept a copy, and have it to this day. It concerned Goldwin Smith, an advocate in 1891 of Canada's political and economic union with the United States. Carl's handwritten comments on the title page immediately recall the stimulating atmosphere of his tutorials. He wrote: "A perceptive and analytical account—good use of the sources. My only qualification about the paper is that you don't really explore the roots of Smith's attitudes in his Victorian liberalism. Why was he so pessimistic about the Canada of 1890 when others retained their faith?" Carl always gently pushed us like that, to go a little farther, "an extra mile." I obtained "B++" for the essay. I now resolved to work like I had never worked before for the final exam. Success, I received an "A" as my final grade. As an unexpected dividend I had discovered a new historical interest, the study of my own country. But the attraction to me of world history remained intense.

Expo '67, the world's fair in Montreal from late April to late October, was extraordinary. I was so fortunate to obtain a summer job as a host at the Ontario Pavilion. In high school I had an incredible experience of visiting the United Nations, as part of the two-week United Nations Educational Pilgrimage for Youth, for senior high school students, sponsored by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and Rebekahs of America, a North American fraternal organization. I won the honour of representing my hometown, Oakville, located half-way between Toronto and Hamilton, on account of my good marks on the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs' written exam on knowledge of the United Nations. In the Pilgrimage of Youth Ontario bus, we travelled first to Kingston (Fort Henry), Ottawa (the Parliament Buildings), Cornwall (the St. Lawrence Seaway installations), then to New York State via Montreal, and then onto New York City for our week there, followed by Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., and points in-between. The 40 or so Ontario student delegates who came from across the province were paired with those from Wisconsin during

our week in New York.

We ate in the United Nations Delegates' Dining Room, "engulfed," I later wrote in a note, "in a sea of people from every country and station in life." One afternoon we viewed "a debate on colonialism." We had many opportunities to learn about the UN and all its organizations. Splitting into groups of eight we met members of UN missions. I was a member of the group that visited the Turkish and Greek delegations, with their quite contrasting views of the situation in Cyprus.

What an introduction to the world. My interest continued at the University of Toronto. My first winter, 1964/65, I worked on a World University Service of Canada (WUSC) conference on Latin America. I later served as chair of WUSC's U. of T. branch, in my final year. In my second year I had represented my college at the national Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) Conference in Montreal at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University). I still have vivid memories of the address of our key lecturer, Bernard Fall, a renowned expert on Vietnam. The details are distant, but the impression he made was lasting. He explained the blindness of both the French, followed by the Americans, in Vietnam. On assignment he was tragically killed a year or so later by a land mine in Vietnam at age forty.

Naturally I jumped at the chance of possibly working at the world's fair. Initially I tried to obtain a job in the Canadian Pavilion, but my spoken French was aspirational rather than real. No luck. Fortunately, in contrast, the linguistic standard required in spoken French for the Ontario Pavilion was not daunting. Now, in gratitude for my selection, I worked on my French all summer. My inspiration came from my dad who learned spoken French on weekends from records, the Assimil "Français sans peine" or "French without difficulty" series.

The Expo '67 summer proved incredibly valuable for me. I was so

fortunate to be included. That summer I learned to how to make myself understood in spoken French. I deepened enormously through personal contacts and visits to other pavilions my knowledge of the world. Over sixty countries participated. I also became aware of an angry Indigenous Canada. Hard to believe today that many of us had grown up in Southern Ontario without any introduction to the Indigenous peoples.

Having worked in the summer of 1966 on a railway extra gang on the prairies with young Indigenous people, I had a prior introduction to Indigenous Canada, but it was so slight. At Expo '67 the "Indians of Canada Pavilion" attracted great attention. Financed by the federal government, but with substantial involvement from an Indigenous advisory council, the pavilion's images and panels presented an Indigenous view of Canada. Bluntly and uncompromisingly, the exhibits contained statements such as: "The welfare of the Indian was regarded as proper work for retired soldiers, many of whom were kindly and well-intentioned, but treated their charges like amiable backward children"; "An Indian child begins school by learning a foreign tongue...;" "Give us the right to manage our own affairs..."

In the fall, back on campus, I recalled my linguistic experience in an article in the New College student newspaper edited by my good friend and fellow Ontario Pavilion host, Kim Graybiel: "Many memories of major mistakes rest fresh in my mind. In French the word for path is 'sentier.'" As there was a path on the northwest side of the Ontario Pavilion which led to the Canadian Pavilion, a totally understandable question from the public was, "Where is the Canadian Pavilion?" In that first week I was ready. Fearlessly I yelled out to anyone whispering "Canada," "Suivez la santé." Although I did not realize at the time, I pronounced the word "sentier" as "santé" (health). "Follow health here!" French-speaking visitors must have been surprised by my personal crusade for wellness! In the face of numerous challenges, I persevered. In

the face of frequent smiles and looks of miscomprehension I marched on. The advice of an old Acadian from New Brunswick kept me in the fight. He told me: “Don’t worry about those who laugh, they’re the real fools, they’ll never understand the difficulties of learning a foreign tongue.”

To put on the heat with my French language acquisition I had lunch every day in the nearby Quebec Pavilion Employees’ Restaurant. Reading two Montreal French language newspapers, *Le Devoir* and *La Presse*, became a religious duty. For a vocabulary upgrade I read the pocket-sized version of the Collins English-French dictionary cover to cover. By the end of the summer words became sentences, and I could convey ideas. The English accent remained but I could argue, agree, and even disagree, in more-or-less comprehensible French. Still a long way to go, learning another language is a formidable challenge, even with French which has many bridges with English. In early September back to the University of Toronto.

My last undergraduate year passed quickly with extracurricular work for WUSC, and participation in the organization of the French-Canadian Cultural Festival on campus in January. The week-long event included: two Quebec French language plays, a display of Quebec art, the showing of Quebec films, a bilingual debate between the Université Laval and the U. of T. in the Hart House Debates Room, two performances by Quebec folk singers, an address by Michel Brunet of the Department of History at the Université de Montréal (I was his host), and the Festival Banquet in the King Cole Room, Park Plaza Hotel, with Claude Ryan, then the editor of *Le Devoir*, the influential Montreal daily.

Upon completing my B.A. that spring I wanted to go on and prepare a M.A. in history, in French to obtain a better working mastery of the language, and then possibly apply to join Canada’s foreign service, or to prepare for a teaching career. The best landing spot for me, I resolved, was the History Department at

Laval. I arrived in Quebec City a few weeks just before the June 1968 federal election. Not wishing to support the new Liberal leader Pierre Trudeau, who seemed so opposed to new constitutional arrangements for Quebec, I wanted to work for the Conservatives led by Bob Stanfield. In my central Quebec City riding I went to the Conservative riding headquarters to offer my services. There I spoke with a French-speaking campaign worker, with an Irish name.

In no time it became clear I still didn't yet speak French fluently enough to be of any use. But Michel Cogger—I remember his name as he later became a prominent Quebec Senator in Ottawa—was very decent. Speaking in English he recommended that I contact Tony Price, a friend of his, who might have a short-term job for me. He operated the Musée du Fort, opposite the Château Frontenac, still in 2022 on the same site. Tony employed me for a week to write up some historical notes in English as background on the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. To this day I remember the phrase he used, that the payment would be enough to “keep the wolves at the door” until I found something longer term. It was a fun job. To help me with the project Tony gave me a copy of Canadian military historian C.P. Stacey's *Quebec, 1759, The Siege and the Battle* (1959), a gripping account. Years later Michel Cogger, now a Senator, was in the news, and I realized he was the individual who had kindly helped me in Quebec City to obtain one week's employment at the Musée du Fort. I still recall the morning of June 6 at the Musée. In a hushed voice a fellow employee told us that she had just heard on the radio that Robert Kennedy had been assassinated in Los Angeles (6 June 1968).

After my Musée du Fort employment I lined up a possible job as a “pompiste” or “attendant” at a gas station, but a few days before my scheduled interview the Gods intervened. On a walk along the Grande Allée, I saw a sign for the Berlitz language school. No experience is wasted. In the summer of 1965, I learned sales

techniques with Fuller Brush, invaluable lifelong skills! With all the confidence bestowed as a Fuller Brush Man—door-to-door salesperson—I enquired if they had any short-term positions—yes! My heavens what good fortune! I obtained a two-month job teaching English at the École Berlitz in Quebec (first month) and then (second month) in Chicoutimi. One of my students in Quebec City was the janitor at the Musée de Cire, the Wax Museum. He invited me to stay in the guest room in his top floor quarters.

According to the historic plaque on the building, I learned on my last visit to Quebec City in June 2022 that P.-J.-O. Chauveau, the first premier of Quebec, in office from 1867, grew up there. Only years later did I read Chauveau’s 1876 description of French-English relations in Canada. He compared Canada to the famous staircase of the Château de Chambord in Loire Valley in France, built so that two persons can ascend it without meeting and without seeing each other except at intervals: “English and French, we climb by a double flight of stairs toward the destinies reserved for us on this continent, without knowing each other, and without seeing each other, except on the landing of politics. In social and literary terms, we are far more foreign to each other than the English and French of Europe.” [Chauveau quoted in Mason Wade, *The French-Canadian Outlook* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965); first printing 1946, 1-2].

It was quite bizarre, on returning at night to be greeted by a cast of historic characters, all wax figures mind you, but in the dark to a young historian they seemed almost real. On the lower floors I passed characters from the history of French Regime, including the “founder of Canada,” Champlain; and the famous nun, Marie de l’Incarnation; the lionised Dollard des Ormeaux who died defending Montreal against the Iroquois in 1660. Linking directly with my reading for the Musée du Fort were two scenes of intense interest —General James Wolfe writing his last letter before he

received his mortal wound on the Plains of Abraham, and another display showing the wounded Marquis de Montcalm.

After a few weeks working on the Grande Allée, with my residence at the Musée de Cire, Berlitz sent me to Chicoutimi on the south shore of the Saguenay River exactly at the point where the deep-water navigation ends. Off I went to the Lac Saint-Jean region, northeast of Quebec. At first, I thought how extraordinary, one of their major streets was “Racine.” What a literary town I thought! Only later did I learn the namesake of the street was a Catholic bishop, not the celebrated writer. Quebec fascinated me.

All that summer my historical interests continued to shift toward Canada, away from the world. Yet the path was not straight and direct. Unexpected adventures followed, the most extraordinary I recorded in a letter to my parents back in Oakville. Africa had been a great interest in high school. My dad had encouraged me. He was a member of the Toronto-based African Students Foundation, a very small volunteer organization organized in the early 1960s to help African students study in Canadian universities. Every month or so, African students would visit our home in Oakville for Sunday dinner. A true internationalist, my dad took me when I was in Grade 10 to a meeting at Hart House at the University of Toronto to hear Tom Mboya, a dynamic Kenyan labour leader, speak. At the time Kenya was still a British colony (only becoming independent in 1964). He also drove me into Toronto on another occasion to hear the great South African novelist and anti-apartheid activist, Alan Paton, the author of *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948), speak to a large audience. The celebrated novel was set in the prelude to apartheid in South Africa.

Foreign Affairs had become my passion in high school and with the encouragement of Bob Stevenson, my excellent Grade 10 Social Studies teacher, I expanded the collection of files I had already begun to keep. I recall one of the first clippings was an account in *Time* magazine of Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev’s

September 1959 trip to the United States. In my last year in high school, in December 1963, I was part of a group of students who organized a current affairs evening on Africa. Our guest speakers were Edward Chukukere, a Ph.D. candidate in Metallurgical Engineering and president of the African Students Union at the University of Toronto; and Godfried Agama, Ph.D. candidate at Toronto in Economics and former president of the African Students Association in Montreal.

For a decade or so I received foreign magazines and newsletters, ranging from *Soviet Union Today* to mainland China's *Peking Review* and its fierce rival the *Free China Weekly* from Taiwan. I kept my international clipping files for six years. I made the last master list of all the files in my collection on 15 September 1965. In total I had 999. Shortly afterwards, after a year of introduction at university to in-depth research techniques and scholarly information gathering, I threw out the entire collection, except for one file, one of personal significance.

I wrote my first letter to the Editor of the *Globe and Mail*, the Toronto newspaper I have read over sixty years, on 26 January 1962 about "Castro's Cuba." Yes, I noted; "Castro has retained many of the repressive features of Batista's time but think of the advances—the new purpose in life to many, the new spirit in a once stagnant society." I continued that while we in Canada are "well-off and have a long history of law and settled government; they are illiterate, poor and have a long history of dictatorship or colonialism." No hint here at all in the mind of this fifteen-year-old that Canada itself had its own very long history of colonialism with the First Nations.

My month at Chicoutimi concluded with two dramatic events. A Haitian student of mine at Berlitz invited me to accompany him and his African wife and family, and the visiting Congolese ambassador (representing the former French Congo with capital at Brazzaville, not the former Belgian Congo) and his family, on our

day-long tour around Lac St. Jean. An incredible experience, one I wrote up in full for my parents. The ambassador's chauffeur and bodyguard had Native American and African American ancestry. His great-grandfather he said was a Sioux (Dakota). This combination of Native American and African ancestry would appear in my research folio a decade or so later in my research on Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, whose papers I came across at the Glenbow Archives after moving to Calgary in 1974. In the Lac St. Jean area, a region in which those of African descent were not common, the ambassador and his entourage, of whom I was one, attracted much attention. The ambassador had come to Lac St. Jean to enroll his daughter in the highly recommended Roman Catholic convent school in Alma. He said he hated the violence and hate in New York City.

Another adventure followed. Another Berlitz student, a principal of a First Nations school, invited me to travel on a logging road with his family to the isolated Manawan reserve, a community of 650, in which many still lived by hunting and fishing. Late August was the only time of the year he drove his jeep with his family to the Atikamekw territory. It was the first isolated reserve I had ever visited. People of an entirely different culture not in Africa but in my own country. The thought already occurred to me as I wrote back to my parent on August 26th, of perhaps studying the First Nations "from an historical angle."

That winter at Laval I began, in addition to my M.A. thesis, a quest to discover the real-life story of the man the *Globe and Mail* called "most famous of Canadian Indians," the day after his death on 13 April 1938. By complete chance I re-discovered Grey Owl, the Canadian writer and lecturer, in the winter of 1968/69 while preparing my M.A. thesis at Laval. I examined in my thesis the way in which French Canadian historians presented the Indigenous Peoples in their works. Then, accidentally one winter afternoon, I strayed into the literature section of the Laval Library, where I

came across numerous copies of books in French by a man named Grey Owl. This was extraordinary, as I thought that I had fully researched all works in French on the topic, certainly I had in the History section. Then it came back to me. I must have been about ten or eleven at the time when a friend of mine in public school gave a talk on Grey Owl in our oral composition class. This same mysterious individual who had captured my imagination in the mid-1950s had re-surfaced.

A Short Note on Sources on Great Research Discoveries

My memories of Carl Berger's tutorial in Canadian history are recorded in my letter of support of his nomination for the CASE Professor of the Year Award at the University of Toronto, 11 April 1994. Robert Bothwell's *Laying the Foundation. A Century of History at the University of Toronto* (Toronto: Department of History, University of Toronto, 1991) reviews the Department's first century.

I was blessed to read E.H. Carr's *What is History?* (1961) early in university. Five favourite books from my undergraduate years include Vasili Klyuchesky, *Peter the Great* (1910); Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (1948); George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin* (1960); James G. Leyburn, *Haitian People* (1941); Mason Wade, *The French Canadians 1760-1945* (1955). In my first year I remember well the veteran Canadian journalist Bruce Hutchison's *Mr. Prime Minister* (1964), a well-written introduction, just released on Canadian political history. In high school, not university, I had read the American journalist John Guenther's *Inside Africa* (1955), an important book for me, but unfortunately when I was at the University of Toronto no history courses were offered on Africa, nor on the history of the Indigenous Peoples in North America.

For the atmosphere of the 1960s, see Canadian historian Doug Owram's *Born at the Right Time. A history of the Baby Boom Generation* (1996). I learned in his book only a small minority of my age group went onto higher education (page 172): "In 1965 176,000 youth completed Grade Twelve. Only about one in six of these went on to further education." My article cited above on learning French at Expo '67 appeared in *The Gnu* paper, 4,3 24 October 1967. The story of my trip around Lac St. Jean and to the Atikamekw reserve at Manawan is based on a letter to my parents dated 26 August 1968. Sylvie Poirier provides a most useful article, "The Atikamekw: Reflections on their Changing World," in the *Native Peoples. The Canadian Experience*, eds. R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson (3rd ed., Don Mills, Ontario, 2004, 129-149).