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Sidewalk Talk

By Mark Van Dusen

Pass the beaver, Henry

Desecrating the flag is one thing but eating a national symbol?

Yes, I ate beaver and it was delicious.

If this sounds like the confession of a content traitor, hold on before rushing to the Mounties.

This particular beaver, name-sake of a historic river and sanctified by Act of Parliament as a symbol of a hard-working people, met its end legally, some would say honorably.

It was trapped like tens of thousands of its brethren in Canada each year, for its fur, but also so that the species will not overpopulate and kill itself.

My only sin, if I am to be accused of anything, was gluttony. It was that good. The meat was rich, dark and succulent, tasting not unlike young goose; it fell from the bone at the touch of a fork and melted in the mouth.

The whole thing was my father-in-law's idea. Now Henry Woodrooffe is a guy who firmly believes it's worth trying anything once. So when his similarly slanted son John came home from the cottage with a freshly-trapped MacGregor Bay beaver. Henry knew what had to be done:

Castorida Canadensis MacGregorianus Superioris was destined for the cooking pot.

The thing is that Henry also firmly believes that to do anything right the whole family has to get involved. And this was

the noble beaver we were talking about, once the fulcrum of our economy, emblem of the industrious and ingenious pioneer. This would take more than the normal amount of gusto.

I have this nice old Findlay wood stove, sort of a symbol to the pioneer in its own right and what better way to roast the rodent, Henry suggested. I had to agree.

So with the fire stoked up and other family members dubiously gathered, the gnawer was sent to the oven with two loaves of home-made bread for companionship. It had been prepared according to a recipe uprooted by Henry, a resourceful gastronome, and information gleaned from a few Russell residents who had eaten it before. Like so:

— Cut all of the fat from one cleaned and skinned beaver, head and tail removed. The fat is extremely rich and gamey so be sure to remove as much of it as possible.

— At the same time, ensure that the small, pouch-like scent glands have been removed from under the fore and hind legs and from along the backbone. These pungent glands are usually removed during cleaning.

— To tenderize, the beaver can be soaked in vinegar water overnight and-or boiled, covered, before roasting for 10-15 minutes in water with a liberal amount of black pepper and a tablespoon of baking soda.

— Drain, fill stomach cavity with favourite stuffing, securing with loose flank skin and butcher's twine. Place stomach-down on rack in large roasting pan.

— Cover topside of beaver with onion slices, anchoring them with toothpicks a half dozen slices of bacon. Cover, bake at 400 degrees for two to three hours or until meat falls from the bone.

Mm, mm. Served with rice and a fresh salad, it made a sumptuous meal, perhaps surprisingly so. The stew that had been prepared as a ready standby wasn't even touched!

Despite the success of the experiment, it's psychologically difficult to relate to eating beaver on a regular basis. That's unfortunate since almost all of the carcasses of trapped beaver are wasted.

Certainly, it was worth trying once, maybe even a second time some day. Wadda ya say, Henry?



Kidd eyes weather

Jim Kidd is always under the weather.

Twice a day, before he leaves for work at the Public Archives in Ottawa and when he returns home, the Russell Village resident takes weather readings for Environment Canada.

Jim has been a volunteer weather observer for the past two years, Russell's own weatherman.

While it seems unlikely for a small community to have a weatherman, Jim says the government has a network of volunteers like himself across the country.

Jim, who with his wife Betty has lived in the village for three years, is supplied with all the necessary equipment; two thermometers, a rain gauge, and a meter stick for checking snow depth. His records, along with those of other volunteers are published in the Monthly Record of Meteorological Observations in Canada and used for research purposes.

The father of five-month-old Andrew says no special training was required to land the job.

"I've always been interested in weather and wrote to Environment to offer my services. They were glad to hear from me because they were looking for a new observer here."

Although nobody kept records in the village for the 10 years prior to Jim taking over, Robert W. Gamble was Russell's weatherman from 1954 to 1964.

And, in case we need a reminder, Jim tells us we had 2,286 millimetres or 90 inches of snow this winter. The first snowfall was Nov. 10 and the last was April 15. We'll ignore those flurries May 1.

Metcalfe Students Northward Bound



GOING TO CORAL HARBOUR

Front row, left to right: Patsy Randall, Kerry Cooper, Sharon Smiley, Kathy Duncan, Bev Preston. Second row: Bruce Griffin, Karmen Argue, Peter Pyne, Michelle Gamble, Millicent Smith, Joey Zimplemann, Raymond Vidal, Robert

Zersch. Third Row: David Williams, David Anderson, Shane Patterson, Greg Scharf, John Estabrooks, George McEwen. Fourth row: Martin Patterson, Stewart Patterson, Jeff McDougall, Danny Brookson, Robbin Welk and Ross Wilson.

Twenty four Metcalfe students will journey to the edge of the Artic ice flow as part of an exchange program with Inuit students of Coral Harbor, North West Territories.

The Metcalfe group leaves for the far north May 27. The 24 Inuit students will arrive at Metcalfe May 7 for a weeklong visit.

The northern trip will include a visit to a meteorology station and a satellite phone operation as well as an overnight camping trip and social gatherings.

The Inuit, accompanied by teacher Tom Thompson who taught briefly at Metcalfe, will visit Parliament Hill, the Mint, and Ottawa museums. They'll also tour Upper Canada Village which will open especially for them.

But the northern visitors may be just as impressed by things taken for granted in Metcalfe, said vice-principal Ethelwyn Carkner, exchange coordinator.

They'll probably find television very entertaining as it's not yet

available in their home community, Mrs. Carkner noted. And they've specifically requested gymnasium time to plan basketball; there are no gyms in the northern settlement.

They're also scheduled to go bicycling which will be a new experience for many.

In addition to Mrs. Carkner, the exchange was organized at this end by teachers Rick Chataway and Joanne Baker, both of whom will accompany the Metcalfe Public School students to Coral Harbor.

A \$15,000 "Open House Canada" grant from the Secretary of State will finance the exchange. The students will travel in a chartered DC-3 aircraft.

Each Metcalfe student has been matched with an Inuit student and letters and photographs have been traded. When in Coral Harbor, the Metcalfe participants will stay with families of students they were matched with and vice-versa. All students are aged 13 to 15.