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Community action against drug abuse

Attendance at last week's public forum on drug abuse clearly indicated an active interest in understanding the problem and in learning how to cope with and solve it.

There is help available to those individuals and families who are coping with a drug problem. In your community the clergy, family doctors, educators, policemen and employers can advise individuals and families on where to get help. These agencies deal with the effects of drugs - the social, medical and criminal problems that arise because of drug abuse.

However, the real solution to preventing drug abuse lies in trying to change the attitude of the community towards the use of drugs. Young children are more aware of drugs and drug use than we might think and they are learning about it from adults who are either directly involved with drugs or who tolerate its use in their home and community. Many children see drug use as normal behavior. What are their chances, especially when they come against pressure from their peers to try alcohol, marijuana or cocaine, of avoiding involvement.

The problem needs to be tackled on two fronts. First, in the community with education and awareness programs that are generated by the community itself - not the police or the social agencies. It must be made known that the community will not tolerate the use of drugs.

Peer pressure is a strong motivational force in society. It is the reason many people get involved with drugs and it can be used to encourage them to not get involved. Peer pressure from society, the community, has been very successful in stopping smoking in public places and in the homes and businesses of non-smokers, so it can work.

The second front is the home. Drug use must not be tolerated in the home or among friends. This may mean new friends but in the end you will be doing them, yourself and the children a favour.

Parents have to become positive role models for the children, understand why their children might become drug users and learn about preventive parenting. An organized community can help with information, peer support and access to resources.

A solution will take time and success will not be easy to measure or see. Organized, active involvement is required. The future of our dreams demands it.

Robert A. Cotton



Late April ice storm

A freak ice storm hit only one tree at a Terrace Bay home last week. The storm was caused by a lawn sprinkler left on throughout a chilly spring night.



A changing image

Okay, quick now: Sir John A. MacDonald. Sir John...A...MacDonald?

What's the "A" stand for?

No good? Alright. Name the Fenian assassin who greased D'Arcy McGee back in 1868.

Still batting zero? Try this: give me the date of the Battle of Queenston Heights.

How ya doing so far? Complete strikeout? Well, don't feel bad as you settle your pointy little head into that dunce cap with the big maple leaf on the front of it. You've got a lot of company. A veritable legion of Canucks are right now scratching their chins and smacking their foreheads over arcane morsels of Canadian historical trivia that managed to whistle right in one ear and out the other without so much as ricocheting off their cerebral cortexes.

A research company called Goldfarb Consultants recently quizzed 1,628 Canadians to see how much homegrown history they knew. Conclusion: not enough to put a bulge in the tobacco pouch of a *coureur de bois*, that's how much.

The Goldfarb survey revealed that four out of ten Canadians couldn't name the date of Confederation. The same percentage didn't know the name of our first Prime Minister -- John, A., or MacDonald.

They didn't do much better on contemporary political poohbahs. Only forty percent of students who were polled could name the leader of the federal Liberal party (Jean Chretien, as I type) -- and just a fraction over half the people could reel off the names of three Canadian prime ministers since World War II. (There have been nine counting Willie King. I looked it up).

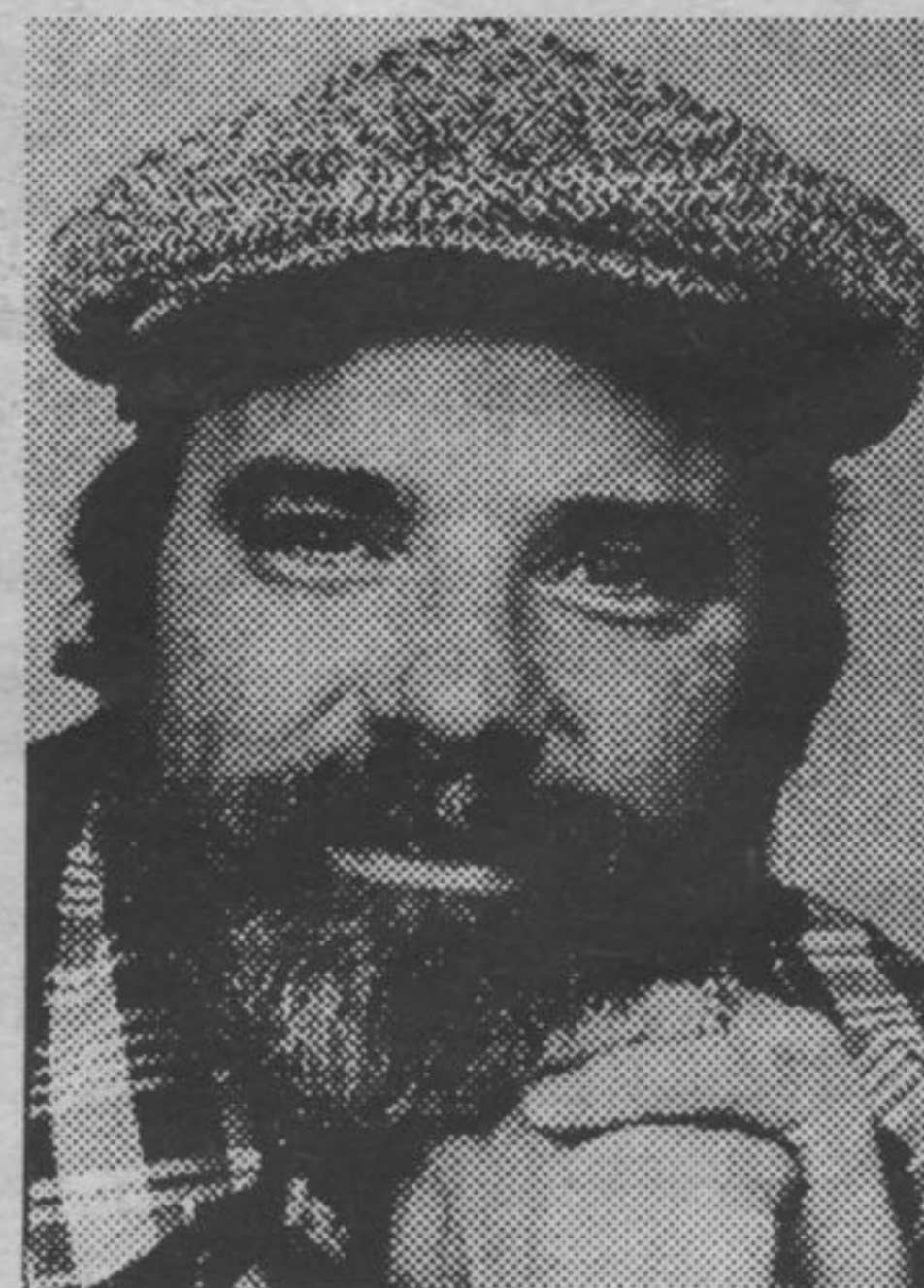
John Eagle, professor of history at the University of Alberta, has a blunt retort to the dismal findings of the Goldfarb survey. The professor says "so what?"

I'm not big at pushing a lot of names and dates" says Professor Eagle. "It's more important to know why Louis Riel was hanged than when and where".

To which I can only gasp "Amen!" and wonder with just the hint of a sob in my throat, where Professor Eagle was when I needed him -- which is to say, back about a thousand years ago when I

was memorizing dates and terms of proclamations and developing megathrob migraines in CanHistory 101.

Are there any other High School History refugees out there who still have the terms of the Rush-Bagot Treaty rattling around in their heads? Does anybody else still wake up with the night sweats mumbling "The chief causes of the 1837 rebellion were -- just a minute ma'am, it's on the tip of my tongue -- were..."



Arthur Black

I've got Red River Cartloads of historical bric a brac cluttering up the already overtaxed crannies of my mental attic. I remember the number of fur bales sent from Fort Chipewyan in 1828. I can recite the preamble to Lord Durham's report. I can even recall (God have mercy on my soul) an entire speech by Mackenzie King -- not to mention the date on which he droned it.

All of which does me no earthly good at all, because these are mere deadheads of trivia in an unchartable

swamp of forgetfulness. I have no clear idea what Mackenzie King was like, or whether Lord Durham had a big nose, or where, exactly, Fort Chipewyan actually was.

And that's Professor Eagle's point. What's the sense of recalling data bits if they don't relate to anything?

Maybe that's why the folks surveyed by Goldfarb did so poorly. It's not that they can't remember their history -- just that they remember the useless stuff.

Could be worse. A recent American survey shows that an astonishing 45 per cent of Americans polled believed the U.S. vice president was, not Dan Quayle but...Mister Rogers.

True, the folks surveyed were all American pre-schoolers, but what's that old saying about "Out of the mouths of babes?"

I know if I had to choose between Dan Quayle and Mister Rogers, America's VP would be remembered in history as the guy in the ratty-looking sweater.