



A newsletter for members of the York University Retirees' Association

Winter 2014

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Message from the YURA Co-Presidents

All good wishes for a happy and healthy and interesting New Year. We hope that the Holiday Season was enjoyable and restful – and that, in spite of the ice storm, the power was on for most of you.

The YURA calendar for fall 2013 was marked by a mixture of pleasure and business. Our trip to Niagara-on-the-Lake took place in early October when we had the delight of attending a performance of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* in a stylish production whose acting, sets, and costumes have won the admiration of critics and audiences alike. Attendance at the play was preceded by lunch at Queen's Landing. The whole day was a wonderful outing. The overseer of these events is member-at-large Jean Levy who has now been in charge of two theatre trips. She fills this role with thoroughness and thoughtfulness. The spring trip to Stratford will take place in May and we will be attending George and Ira Gershwin's *Crazy for You*.

The YURA Annual General Meeting took place on October 25 and at that meeting, Noli Swatman stepped down as member-at-large – our best wishes to her – and Gwyn Buck handed in her secretarial hat. As secretary, Gwyn filled a crucial role in the successful functioning of the Executive Committee and she did so with aplomb. We thank her for her fine contribution. Fortunately, Gill Teiman has agreed to replace her as secretary and we are delighted that Gill is with us. Our other new member (member-at-large, in fact) is Colin Deschamps whom we welcome warmly. A complete list of the current

members of the Executive Committee is found at the end of this newsletter.

The AGM also approved minor changes to the constitution that are pertinent to the nomination and election process.

A new feature of this year's AGM was the addition of a Silent Auction in aid of the establishment of a new YURA Master's Student Award. We thank Sandra Pyke for the idea and Charlene and Gene Denzel for overseeing the actual bidding. With the supportive participation of our members, the auction raised \$647 for this initiative. Our goal is to offer one annual award of \$1000 to a full-time Master's student. The award is in the final stages of academic approval. This will bring to three the number of YURA-sponsored bursaries and awards, affirming the degree to which YURA is committed to and actively supporting and increasing its initiatives in aid of student support at York.

On this subject, as you may know, YURA's annual "Showcase" is our annual fundraiser for The William W. Small Award and the YURA Mature Student Bursary. The very considerable effort of organizing Showcase was again this year in the professional and careful hands of Marilyn Cartmill and Noel Corbett. The event took place on November 20. These two people with many volunteers produced a day of tables arrayed with Attic Treasures and Baked Goods that together raised \$1300. This is a wonderful result. Showcase puts YURA, publicly and for one day, in the midst of campus bustle and helps to make us more visible on campus. We salute Marilyn and Noel for their leadership of this important project.

The final social event of the autumn involved the Dining Group and was put together by Rosemarie. We thank her for organizing the outing which is only one of several that she has arranged for YURA members. A great contribution to the association's esprit de corps.

Our campus volunteer initiative was reflected in the participation of three YURA members at the Fall Convocation ceremonies. Other such opportunities are likely to present themselves and we will keep you informed.

We cannot complete this message without wishing YURA's friend Steve Dranitsaris – a famous figure on campus if there ever was one – warm wishes on the occasion of his retirement in December. It has been through Steve and the Parking Office that the annual provision of parking vouchers for YURA members has taken place. Our sincere thanks to Steve. We hope that we can look forward to his becoming a YURA member.

We are anticipating a rewarding 2014 for YURA. As always, if you have any questions or if YURA can assist you in any way, please do let us know at the telephone number and e-mail address that are listed in this newsletter.

Happy New Year to all.

-Janet Rowe & John Lennox

In Memoriam

We have received word of the death of the following York retirees:

Mike Canzona September 9, 2013
Ross Bennett September 20, 2013
Clara Thomas September 26, 2013
Nicolina Cicchillo September 29, 2013

Heather McIndless October 22, 2013
Paul Tallis October 31, 2013
Vicky Draper December 11, 2013

Life as it was then: Reminiscences

The author of our 6th reminiscence, John Warkentin, was a member of YURA's Executive Committee, from 1993 to 2001. When he officially retired in 1993, John had been in the Department of Geography since 1963. He was born in 1928 in Lowe Farm, Manitoba, a small village located 65 km SSW of Winnipeg. It is situated in one of the flattest plains in North America. He has entitled his reminiscences, "When water and electricity could not be taken for granted."—very topical title...!

When prairie homesteaders picked a site on their new 160 acres for building house and barn, a primary concern was to locate where good well water could be readily obtained. But in Lowe Farm, (population ca. 450 with 75 households), my home until I was 15, no well water was to be found in the deep clays on which the village is sited. Water was collected from house and barn roofs by means of well-maintained eavestroughs and stored in 45-gallon steel drums. In winter, we used water from a cistern in our basement and we also melted snow. You waited until tightly packed wind-driven snowdrifts extended across parts of the yard. Then one of my more enjoyable chores was to cut blocks of snow from these remarkably compact drifts and bring them to a big tub in the kitchen for melting.

To water livestock, three ponds had been excavated at the edge of the village. On most days, I would drive our cow (we

kept only one for fresh milk) to the closest pond for water: In winter, you had to be very careful not to slip on the ice – eventually about two feet thick – in the pond. Outhouses were in use in all seasons. In winter it literally was a dash to the outhouse and back. In our house for coldest weather (and Lowe Farm is in a part of Canada where the phrase “forty-below” is not just a metaphor for frigid temperatures), we had a chemical toilet in the corner of an upstairs bedroom. As I got older it was one of my chores to keep it functioning. It is no surprise that when prairie towns succeeded in installing water and sewage systems, they would publicly burn a randomly contributed outhouse to celebrate such a transformative local achievement.

Deep wide ditches ran alongside every east-west road to convey the spring run-off as speedily as possible from this even terrain to the Red River. (For those of you who know Frederick Philip Grove’s *Fruits of the Earth*, it was set in this area.) After the first spring thaws there inevitably were a few crackling days of low temperatures, so the water in every ditch froze. We school kids would get up very early and skate for miles before school on these avenues of glistening smooth ice far into the farmlands. The skating was best early because, as temperatures rose during the day, the ice softened, and there was also increased danger of breaking through the ice. Next I want to turn to the spasmodic way in which electricity entered our lives. In most of the 1930s there was no electricity, except batteries for radios. As in most parts of rural Canada the great electrification schemes did not come into being until a few years after World War II, and then almost overnight they

revolutionized rural life. My mother for many years would wistfully speak of how life would change once “hydro” came. For lighting, all families used glass table kerosene lamps. In our home it was placed on the kitchen table where we sat and read the *Free Press Prairie Farmer* and *Country Guide*, both from Winnipeg, and the *Family Herald* from Montreal. Other families subscribed to the *Western Producer* from Saskatoon. Our news and entertainment came essentially through the radio. It is at the kitchen table that we four children did our homework. My father (principal of a school that had grown to five teachers), acquired a sturdy gasoline stationary engine, and in the late 1930s, he used it to power an electric generator. Wires were strung from our yard to the one church in Lowe Farm, and during evening services we provided the power for the light bulbs in the church, but it was too expensive an option to light our home.

Then some time in the late 1930s or early '40s the village blacksmith, a Mr. Martens, bought a large stationary diesel engine and generator, and began to provide electric power to subscribers – but at first in the evenings only. Now we had an over-head light in each room in our home. You scheduled your evening activities according to when electricity was available. A regular experience was to be reading in the evening when light bulbs began to dim at 10 o’clock. In time the hours of operation were extended, so that we had power in the mornings as well. One of the most burdensome tasks was the weekly laundry. An electric washing machine was an early purchase in many homes. But there wasn’t enough power for all subscribers to do their washing at the same time so the Lowe Farm mothers arranged amongst

themselves on what particular morning in the week each household would do its laundry. (However, there was not enough power for a refrigerator or stove-utilities we take for granted today.) All washing was hung to dry outside. In winter on frigid days all family members pitched in to help hang out the laundry quickly, and later carefully bring in the stiffly dried sheets, pillowcases and clothes.

In 1944 we moved to a much larger town, Steinbach, on the east side of the Red River, where electricity was already available. Not only that: Here there was good abundant water from community wells! At the foot of our yard we even had a portion of the small creek from which Steinbach gets its name. After the water austerity in Lowe Farm, I enjoyed messing in its shallow waters in spring and summer. Above all, I'm still nostalgic about early spring-time long distance skating in the roadside ditches adjacent to Lowe Farm.

- *John Warkentin*

Gourmet Club Outing

The Gourmet Club went on the march December 5th to the Columbus Centre for the Opening Reception of an art show created by the Curator of the Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery, Rosa Graci, who incorporated, on two floors, work done by three generations of the Swartz family – Joseph, Anne and Courtland. We were welcomed to the Centre, the art was varied, the wine was delicious and the snacks were both inviting and appetizing.

Giving ourselves sufficient time to mingle and view the art, we adjourned to the Boccaccio Ristorante, on the premises, to enjoy a meal of our

choosing in a convivial atmosphere. We gathered to break bread together, enjoyed conversation with our dinner companions and had fun sharing stories about York and about life. It was an excellent start to the holiday season and we were lucky enough to welcome some new faces to our group

- **Rosemarie Nielsen**

Happy Belated 90TH BIRTHDAY, Virginia Rock



Photo by Rosemarie Nielsen

Retirement Planning Centre: Report

The Retirement Planning Centre consists of members from: YUFA, York Administration, YUSA, YURA (myself), CUPE and CPM with Terisa Ducharme of the Pension and Benefits Office being ex-officio and 2 staff members. The main concerns of the meeting held this past year were:

1. The Effects of cuts to the Planning Centre.

These were mainly due to University Budget cuts of 3.5%. In addition to

University Funds, donations are also received from YUFA, YURA and YUSA. By June this year the YUSA donation had not been received. The YUFA donation amount was set in 1983. After salaries, the operating budget is rather small. Hence there was a \$22,000 deficit, but there is still \$16,000 in Reserve. Suggestions were made to reduce expenses by no longer printing hard copies of series, only making them available on the internet.

2. The difficulties of contacting YUSA members about their intentions to retire.

It is not possible to approach members directly about their intentions and an anonymous survey is necessary to have some idea of future retirements.

3. Web statistics to date

From April to August: monthly hits to the web site ranged from a low of 5044 to a high of 10135 with top choices for August being: Resources; Seminars; and the Pensions and Benefits Education Seminar.

Between January and March there were 6 seminars with total registration of 569. All sessions are webcast. Most popular topic is Post-Retirement Benefits, with registration approaching 200. Y-T-D consultations about retirement matters in September were 119

-Clifford Jansen

The Death Penalty in China: Interviews Before the Execution

At the end of August, I watched a French documentary about a woman television producer in a large Chinese

province who interviews persons before they are executed (the word used) after having received the death penalty. She has so far interviewed over 200 and her “show” is very popular. It is meant to educate Chinese people about the consequences of criminal acts and there is quite a moral overtone to it. The French documentary about this show followed her while she was carrying out interviews, which take place within the week before an execution. These interviews are held in a court room, or in the prison, or in another room in whatever prison the detainee is located. She carries them out in the presence of the penal staff.

The documentary also gives the following statistics: in China, up to a couple of years ago, there were about 67 crimes that led to the death penalty. In order to humanize the penal and justice system, the Chinese have recently reduced the number of such crimes to about 54. First, the presumed criminal goes in front of a judge and, if he or she receives the death penalty, then a Supreme Court with three judges (there are no juries) studies the case and decides whether to uphold the death penalty--which it generally does. Second, the death penalty has to be carried out within a week or two at most after the final sentence is pronounced.

The documentary showed some criminals just before their execution. At that point, they have the right to say a *brief* goodbye to their families and friends. The relatives of their victim can attend as well—all in public in a courtyard with the prison guards (who look like policemen in uniform) and in front of this woman producer when she is there. It was devastating to watch.

One of the presumed criminals she interviewed and followed up was a woman who had knifed her husband to death and then burnt their house. She was sobbing when explaining that she had grown tired of him beating her up constantly and just snapped. She had at the time a two-year old little girl who was taken in by her late husband's sister. At the time of the interview, the little girl was seven.

The condemned woman's case proceeded to the supreme court where the judges (two women and one man) decided to postpone her death penalty and give her two years in prison. But, if at any time she misbehaved, she would be executed. However, if she did well, after two years, she could see her child regularly, and perhaps be released. The reason for this rare "leniency" was that the judges tried a mediation process with her husband's family. Over there, it seems that if the victim's family either settles financially with the murderer or pardons him or her, they can skip the death penalty in some circumstances. We also saw the woman meet her little girl for the first time in five years. She was brought in to the prison by her aunt and did not know about the existence of her biological mother. The meeting was peaceful but very hard to watch.

All in all, for me, this was an incredible documentary, not only because of the mentality and cultural *mores* it describes but because of this captive humanity which is at the mercy of such summary judgements. So many of them, it seems, and I am sure that this Chinese producer is permitted to include only those criminals that are acceptable for the moral purpose of the program—not

persons who commit crimes against the state, for instance.

-Anne-Marie Ambert

Good Reads

Bloodline, by F. Francis, 2012, Penguin. This is part of the Dick Francis Novel series, the second since he died in 2010, and it is written by his son. There are at least 20 of these suspense novels. They are some of my favourites: they are on the small size and appear deceptively simple as each hero is a plain guy who is inadvertently drawn into a crime, often many, and humbly works at finding who-done-it. No guns, no big detective outfits or police forces. It is quite intriguing and difficult to put down before the end. It is always constructed around various aspects of the horse racing industry in England. These books can be borrowed from the Toronto Public Libraries.

The Kill Room by Jeffery Deaver, 2013, Grand Central Publishing. This is one of the "Lincoln Rhyme Novels," another one of my favourite crime series. These books include a famous quadriplegic, his assistant detective Amelia Sachs, his caretaker, and a cast of criminal investigators—with fancy equipment. The stories never follow a regular pattern and are very well crafted, albeit a bit on the complex side. These books can also be found at the Toronto Public Libraries.

-Anne-Marie Ambert

Humour Department

Contemporary Philosophers!

As I hurtled through space, one thought kept crossing my mind - every part of this rocket was supplied by the lowest bidder. John Glenn

America is the only country where a significant proportion of the population believes that professional wrestling is real but the moon landing was faked. David Letterman

After the game, the King and the pawn go into the same box. Italian proverb

The only reason they say "Women and children first" is to test the strength of the lifeboats. Jean Kerr

When a man opens a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife. Prince Philip

Wood burns faster when you have to cut and chop it yourself. Harrison Ford

Lawyers believe a man is innocent until proven broke. Robin Hall

Kill one man and you're a murderer, kill a million and you're a conqueror. Jean Rostand.

Having more money doesn't make you happier. I have 50 million dollars but I'm just as happy as when I had 48 million. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

If God had intended us to fly he would have made it easier to get to the airport. Jonathan Winters

Piou piou (sound of a little bird)

The following adorable and amusing video, sent by Rachel Lewin, has French sub-titles and is in Spanish. There may be an English version somewhere. The innocence of children...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAXLBvKalQk&feature=share>



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