



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

## MONTHLY LETTER

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### *Canada's Memorials*

ANY country that is alive to its future should be interested in its past, but we are tempted by the pressures of the present to relax our grip on remembrance of what has been.

Someone has said that the greatest mistake made by the contemporary generation — any contemporary generation — is that it does not read the minutes of the last meeting. It starts its course with the handicap of having to learn all over again in practice what it could have learned readily from the records of its ancestors.

Our past is preserved in memoranda made up of stonework and earthwork, weapons and utensils, pictures, sculpture, scratches on rock and scribbings on paper. We cannot save everything, and everything is not worth saving. What we save must have significance. It may be a painting in an ancient church, or a bullet scar on a wall, or the signature on a document, or a frayed map, but it must have meant something in its day.

We do not go back to our memorials to raise their broken walls as shelter for our families and parliaments today, but so that we may learn from them, so good in their time, what principles their builders used that are useful in our new circumstances.

#### *How recent is our past!*

The past of other continents is a mine of fossil facts. Here in Canada our past is more recent. Other nations are proud of a history that goes back to the night of time; we belong to the sunrise. But our little past is just as vital in our present as is their great past.

The builders of early Canada were not equipped with the prodigious knowledge of engineering and manufacturing that we possess today. They were doing something for the first time. Within their means and technical understanding they did it well.

This is the importance of our memorials, not that they are old, but that they were new. Every fort that was built, every portage that was broken around a water-

fall, every palisade erected by an adventuresome community: every one of these was an advance, a broadening of horizons, something daringly new.

#### *Historic buildings*

Nearly every town and city in Canada has at least one building that was the scene of human adventure and significant events.

John P. Kidd, Executive Director of the Canadian Citizenship Council, who has been active in preserving Canada's memorials, wrote not long ago: "If one were to think of efficiency in terms of dollar value and of consumption of oil for heating and wages for cleaning and painting, then no doubt the modern kind of building is more efficient. However, if you think of it in terms of the culture and memories of a young nation with perhaps a thousand years of history ahead, then what price will you put on modernity?"

A picture publication of Standard Oil Company (Kentucky) prints photographs every month of historic buildings in the *Scenic South*. A recent issue includes pictures of Shaker residences, relics of a strange sect that lasted from 1805 to 1910; of the slave quarters where "Uncle Tom" lived; of an iron furnace built in 1791; of the house where the man who wrote "Home Sweet Home" was imprisoned as a suspected spy, and of a reconstruction of the first house built in Kentucky.

Some may say that we in Canada have nothing like these; but we have! In the heart of Westmount is a farm-house that remained in the same family for 285 years; its basement has embrasures through which the men fired at raiding Indians, while their women-folk and children took refuge in a sealed-off room. At Lake Memphremagog is a stone house built by brothers who came here at the time of the American revolution. Lachine Manor, built almost 300 years ago, has been converted into a museum.

The Montcalm house in Quebec, reputed to be the residence of the great French soldier and his death place after the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in

1759, was rescued by the local planning commission from wreckers just a few months ago. Ross House, the first official post office in western Canada (1855) was saved by efforts of the Manitoba Historical Society. The house in which Sir Wilfrid Laurier was born has been acquired as a national memorial. The York, Ontario, Pioneer and Historical Society has preserved a curious early 19th Century building, the Temple of Peace, as a museum.

Château de Ramezay, built in 1705 in what was then the fashionable part of Montreal, is a treasure house of antiquities. Here were held the levees of the governors-general and intendants; here were planned the expeditions to fur fields, the voyages of discovery, the military expeditions. In 1775 the Chateau was headquarters for the Continental Army under Montgomery, and to it there came in the following year Benjamin Franklin and other envoys seeking to persuade the French-Canadians to revolt against British rule.

Canada has many forts, well-preserved and carefully tended, from Fort Anne on the east coast, the site of a French settlement 15 years before the Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock in 1620, to far western forts that belong to the past century. These structures justify their preservation, because it was in and around them that the course of our history, perhaps the course of world history, was changed.

### *Antiquities*

The impression of an event remains longest when it has been recorded through most sense avenues, and so those who seek to preserve our history in significant form should lean to the preservation of actualities. Few history books have power to kindle emotional interest, but few persons remain unstirred when they tread a path that Champlain trod, climb the gully that Wolfe climbed, touch the walls that Madeleine de Verchères defended, look westward from the rock at Bella Coola whence Alexander Mackenzie, first of men to cross the continent of North America, sighted the Pacific.

Cairns, tablets and monuments should be the last resort in marking historical places, except to tell the story embodied in the original stonework, earthworks, buildings and trenches when these can be preserved. "This stone was raised by Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville" is infinitely better than: "Near this spot a fort was built . . ."

When we have around us the foundations of buildings, or the furnishings of houses, the chairs and beds and pots and pans, used by the people of the 17th and 18th centuries, those people cease to be shadowy abstractions and take on the dimensions of warm and vital human beings.

Sir Leonard Woolley tells in his report on his excavations at Ur of the Chaldees two poignant instances

that bring alive in our minds that long ago age. In Queen Shub-ad's grave, the fingers of a girl harpist were still touching the strings of her lyre, and, more intimate still: "One girl was not wearing her silver hair-ribbon — it was in her pocket, tightly coiled up, as if she had been late for the funeral and had not had time to put it on."

Archaeology is coming into its own in Canada, with expeditions from several universities going into the field every summer. Clay pots have been found in North Simcoe which prove that there was a civilization in that area at least 2,500 years B.C.

Since 1934, skilled archaeologists of the federal government, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the University of Western Ontario have been directing the task of uncovering the sites of Indian villages and of the first European outposts in Ontario. At the site of the first Fort Ste. Marie they have discovered what is probably the first waterworks, canal and sewage system constructed north of Mexico.

Out west, Manitobans treasure the bells of Red River, from the 100-pound church bell sent to the baby settlement by Lord Selkirk in 1819, through a long line of school bells (one of which had formerly been used as a fog warning) to the chimes of St. Boniface, which, incidentally, crossed the Atlantic five times, caused the first recorded strike in this country, and inspired a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier. Calgary has its first schoolhouse, a typical foot-hills cabin of the early days, and a red river cart, visited by thousands of people every year. The Pacific coast is restoring its Indian totem poles.

These things have been saved by the vision and effort of people aware of the significance of the past, not only because of its material influence upon our present way of life but because of its inspiration. The antiquities are not worth much money (our forefathers had small riches) but they are beyond price as part of our heritage.

The letters and documents preserved in the Canadian Archives, in museums such as Bytown Museum in Ottawa and Château de Ramezay in Montreal, and in university and private collections, recreate in warmly human terms the people who wrote and used them.

### *Landmarks and monuments*

In commemorating great men and women there is one difficulty: by the time they make their mark on the world in science, literature, politics or war their birthplaces have changed hands, the furniture of their youth has been disposed of and scattered. In such circumstances, just the same as when ancient buildings have fallen before the march of progress or fire, we must resort to markers.

Enough information, printed so as to be legible without effort (which cannot be said for the plaques now widely used) should be given so that the reader learns not only the significance of the site but its drama, too. For example, there is a cut-stone monument in Lachine to commemorate events connected with the massacre of the inhabitants by fifteen hundred Iroquois in 1689. Why not erect a large map, showing the comings and goings of that fearful night, how the Indians loaded their canoes with victims, flaunted their victory in the face of the supine governor at Montreal, and tortured them at fires within his sight? All this is eloquently told by Thomas B. Costain in *The White and the Gold* (Doubleday Canada Limited, Toronto, 1954).

In addition to historic sites and other material remnants there are antiquities of another sort, folk-songs. Our history is told largely in songs our ancestors sang, songs that were, especially among French-Canadians, as familiar as bread.

Dr. Marius Barbeau spent more than forty years collecting Canadian folk-songs and folk-lore. The National Museum, where he served officially from 1911 until his retirement in 1948 and unofficially thereafter, now has a collection of 195 Eskimo folk-songs, more than 3,000 Indian, close to 7,000 French-Canadian, and some 1,500 old English songs.

These are songs that beat time for the paddles of early explorers and the coureurs des bois; they enlivened the scene wherever the raftsmen and lumberjacks appeared on eastern rivers; they set the rhythm for winnowing in the barns, spinning, beating the wash, and rocking the cradle by the fireside.

Dr. Barbeau has written dozens of books on the subject, obtainable from the National Museum of Canada, Ottawa. One, *Folk-Songs of Old Quebec*, tells the story of these old songs, and gives the words and music of fifteen. Arthur Lismer contributed seven drawings.

### *Need for imagination*

We in Canada need to use imagination in naming roads and trails, beaches, portages, and natural features of the landscape.

"The Road to the Isles" is a far more dramatically fitting name than "Canso Causeway" for that new link between Cape Breton and the mainland; it carries echoes of the Scottish homeland from which this land was settled. Ontario had a happy thought when it named its main roads "The King's Highway" and the road from Toronto to Niagara Falls "The Queen Elizabeth Way."

Let's go on from there. At Georgian Bay, Ontario, there is excellent opportunity to use the Indian legen-

dary figure Kitchikewana as the central figure for the fascinating legends that abound in the islands. From Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe there runs the Trent waterway — why do we not make attractive use everywhere along it of the fact that this was the ancient Iroquois trail, travelled by Indians, missionaries and adventurers in the great days of French occupation and English exploration? Why not mark at several points the road that runs along the Ottawa River from Montreal to recall the stirring story of Adam Dollard, Sieur des Ormeaux, and his gallant band of sixteen French youths. "This road," the signs might say, "follows the river up which Dollard and his sixteen youthful volunteers paddled their canoes on their way to battle a thousand war-mad Iroquois descending upon Montreal. They held out against the Indians for two weeks. Every one of the little band was killed, but the Indians retreated." No single plaque by the roadside does justice to this great Canadian epic.

Forts and battlefields should have large maps showing the battles that took place there, the movements of the opposing forces. There is no room on these maps for stodgy particularity: draw the picture in sweeping strokes. Give visitors, the fifth or seventh or tenth generation descendants of the brave men who fought there, a guide so that they may walk where their forefathers marched and countermarched, and reconstruct in informed imagination the brave deeds that were done there.

### *National memorials*

The Canadian Historical Association has as one of its objects "to promote the preservation of historic sites and buildings, documents, relics and other significant heirlooms of the past." Like so many similar organizations, it has been handicapped by lack of money, but it has, nevertheless, achieved greatly. In recent years the Association has concerned itself with publication in permanent form of information about historic sites.

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, first set up in 1919 to act in an advisory capacity to the government, has been instrumental in placing about 500 markers commemorating events or persons connected with the history of Canada. Structures of historic interest have become national historic parks and museums, from the great Louisburg fortress on the Atlantic to Fort Langley on the Pacific.

Canada is moving in the direction of a National Trust, like the National Trust for Scotland, an independent body founded in 1931 to save from destruction buildings and lands that are of architectural or historic interest. A speaker said recently: "An occasional growl from a trusty watchdog has a salutary effect."

Speculation about a National Trust for Canada resulted from the visit here of the Earl of Wemyss and March, Chairman of the Scottish Council. His illustrated talks told convincingly the Trust's story of achievement.

The Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth, said to the National Trust for Scotland last September: "In our desire for progress, and our hurry to achieve it, there has been a danger that some of the treasures of the past might be allowed to decay, or even to be destroyed, either through indifference or through ignorance of the issues at stake. The work of the Trust is to protect this heritage so that our children may enjoy the beauties of the past and learn through them the stirring history of their country."

### *Local responsibility*

If we are to preserve our memorials there is needed a hard core of local enterprise and its spreading halo of enthusiasm. It is not enough to admit a need for something: broad local citizen interest must be bolstered by activity.

Every town and city has scenes, buildings, and articles of historic interest. There is romance in the oldest tree, the first school, the first industry, the blacksmith's shop and the birth-place or home of a famous son.

Space does not permit us to give details of the splendid work being done by historical societies in many provinces and communities: Ontario, Manitoba, Toronto, Fenelon Falls, Grimsby, Dundas, Niagara, Essex County, York County, and the Canadian Railroad Historical Society all wrote us telling with pride of their accomplishments and plans.

Just as an example of what can be done by a combined effort of local, provincial and federal people, consider Huronia, where in 1610 the white man made his first appearance in what is now the province of Ontario. Here, in three centuries, the human race progressed from the stone age to the machine age. Those years cover three important stories: that of the Huron Indian, that of the French missionary, and that of the war of 1812.

The first white man in Huronia was Etienne Brulé, sent there by Governor Champlain to learn about language, customs, resources and geography. In 1615, a French missionary celebrated the first mass in Ontario at the Indian village of Carhagouha, and in 1649 the Iroquois put to death at the stake two Jesuit priests. In the American war of independence, an American commander besieged a blockhouse near what is now the beautiful Wasaga Beach; the British scuttled their ship the "Nancy" and sank two ships of the American force: today, the hull of the "Nancy" is in a museum on Nancy Island, and the ribs of one of the American ships are preserved in a park at Penetanguishene.

All these, and much more, made a past worth preserving, so in 1941 a group of business and professional men organized the Huronia Historic Sites and Tourist Association. It sponsored archaeological research, marking of sites, restoration of buildings, and promotion of the district as a place to visit. By 1947 there had been established at Midland a museum that attracted 17,000 paying visitors in four months. Co-operation between the Midland Y's Men's Club and the University of Western Ontario resulted in reconstruction of a Huron Indian village.

At the east end of Huronia is the residence of the late Stephen B. Leacock, which it is hoped to preserve as an historic literary shrine. In Orillia the historical society has been instrumental in marking the houses, stores, etc. mentioned by Leacock in his book *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*.

All the story of the development of Huronia as a centre of historical and tourist interest is told in J. Herbert Cranston's book, *Huronia, the Cradle of Ontario's History* (Huronian Historic Sites and Tourist Association, Barrie, 1950, 25¢)

### *Retrospect and Prospect*

The exploration of the past we have glanced at should be a strange and wonderful experience. Many things happened, or almost happened, that give us food for thought today. Every act in that past was an experiment, the result of which we experience.

Today is the time to preserve our memorials, while they are still available. As the Queen Mother said: "Once gone they can never be replaced, and each one of us is the poorer for their loss." No chromatic brilliance of the future should dazzle us into seeing only dull grey in our past.

To be successful we need the energetic co-operative effort of national, provincial and local people. So much has been lost, so little remains, that decisive action is imperative.

The cost need not be great, and it can be equitably divided according to means. Buildings and sites of national importance can be preserved by the Government of Canada; those of provincial significance by the provincial governments, and local sites can be marked by municipal authorities and the co-operative effort of community organizations.

Here is one area of our social life in which we can let ourselves go in uninhibited enthusiasm. The political and sectional differences of bygone years have ceased to agitate our minds. In our conception of a united Canada all our past belongs to all of us. Passion and prejudice and mythomania could have no better monument erected to signify their demise than this: that Canadians should work together to commemorate the struggles and achievements of their forefathers.