

*The Dalton
Camp Award*

2005

The Dalton Camp Award

Presentation of the 2005 DALTON CAMP AWARD
Banff World Television Festival
June 13th, 2005

Presented by Friends of Canadian Broadcasting



www.friends.ca



The Dalton Camp Award

FRIENDS OF CANADIAN BROADCASTING announced the creation of The Dalton Camp Award in December 2002 to honour the memory of the late Dalton Camp, a distinguished commentator on Canadian public affairs, who passed away earlier that year.

The Dalton Camp Award is available to up to three Canadians each year, the winners of an essay competition on how the media influence Canadian democracy. Each Award consists of a cash prize of \$5,000 as well as a bronze cast medal by Canadian sculptress Dora de Pédère-Hunt.

Friends' goal is to encourage young Canadians to reflect and express themselves through original essays on the link between democratic values and the quality of media in Canada.

The Selection Committee is chaired by Jim Byrd; the other members are Knowlton Nash and Maggie Siggins.

The winners of the 2005 Dalton Camp Award will be announced at the opening session of the Banff Television Festival on June 13th, 2005. They are Kurt Peacock and Megan Wennberg. Friends of Canadian Broadcasting is pleased to publish their essays herein and on Friends' web site: "friends.ca", where details on the 2006 Dalton Camp Award can also be found.

Friends of Canadian Broadcasting wishes to thank the Banff Television Foundation, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Canadian University Press, St. Thomas University and The Toronto Star for their cooperation regarding of The Dalton Camp Award.

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The Medal

DORA DE PÉDÉRY-HUNT is Canada's foremost medal designer and sculptress.

Among her designs are the dollar coin and a cast medal of Norman Bethune presented by Prime Minister Trudeau to Mao Tse-tung in 1973.

She recently received the J. Sanford Saltus Award Medal for 2003, the American Numismatic Society's prestigious medal for signal achievement in the art of the medal.

The Winners



KURT PEACOCK is a researcher and historian living in Saint John, New Brunswick. He has previously written for the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, and the *Telegraph Journal*. He is currently working with Vibrant Communities Saint John, a community initiative designed to reduce poverty in Canada's oldest incorporated city.



MEGAN WENNBERG is a freelance writer, photographer and filmmaker living in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Megan has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Mount Allison University, and a Bachelor of Journalism from the University of King's College. Originally from Saint John, New Brunswick, she has lived and worked across Canada.

WINNING ESSAY BY

Kurt Peacock

Dalton Camp would never have written like this:
The Decline of National Reporting in Canada

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BY KURT PEACOCK

THE TINY NEW BRUNSWICK VILLAGE OF CAMBRIDGE-NARROWS, A LOVELY PLACE WHERE DALTON CAMP SCRIBBLED DOWN SOME OF HIS BEST OPINIONS ON POLITICS IN CANADA, HAS A POPULATION OF LITTLE OVER 600 PEOPLE. IF CAMP HADN'T MAINTAINED HIS KINSHIP FOR THIS HAMLET WHILE WRITING FOR SOME OF CANADA'S LARGEST DAILIES, IT IS LIKELY THAT NO ONE OUTSIDE OF SOUTHERN NEW BRUNSWICK WOULD HAVE EVER NOTICED IT EXISTED.

This is sad, because Cambridge-Narrows – just like hundreds of small communities across Canada, from Nanaimo to Moose Jaw, Wawa to Dildo – is filled with engaging opinion-makers, compelling stories, and fascinating debates on politics both local and national in nature.

These communities are not Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary or Vancouver. But they are vibrant, and they are as willing to participate in any national dialogue as the big (and growing) metropolises. They are too often ignored by the national media, and as a consequence they are considered irrelevant by a national government whose leadership is increasingly beholden to the opinions of the big urban thinkers.

This is not to lament the decline of small-town Canada, or ignore the economic and cultural importance of Canada's cities. (I myself live in the dynamic city of Saint John, which has always been one of Atlantic Canada's most important urban centres.) This essay is instead meant to protest the way in which Canada's national media has ignored the daily news coming out of entire parts of Canada, a process which has, in effect, turned our country into one of a hollow central federation made up of many mutually suspicious solitudes.

A national media that only pays attention to the outlying regions, the secondary cities, and the seemingly sleepy towns whenever something horrendous (such as a random crime, or destructive weather pattern) or bizarrely trivial (religious imagery at a Tim Hortons) occurs is not a national media at all. It is instead a media of a few secondary metropolises in the Northern half of this continent, dependent on press releases from the Toronto Board of Trade and copy from the American news wires and a few overworked CP stringers to fashion together what is called Canadian news.

While such a description may seem stark, consider how my home province of New Brunswick has recently been treated by the country's three most important dailies: The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, and the National Post. Over the past year, these 'national' papers had

little to say about New Brunswick politics – with the exception of lazy horse-race reporting over which NB Premier will eventually become Canada’s Prime Minister – or the changing shape of the provincial economy. Instead, these papers found that New Brunswick was truly newsworthy only in the case of the second-language student at UNB who faced expulsion over giving orders to his guide dog in French.

This bureaucratic snafu, which was quickly corrected by UNB officials, nonetheless captured the imagination of central Canada’s media. So bizarrely stupid was this story – not unlike the years-ago holiday brawl over Elmo at a Fredericton Walmart – that you could almost see Toronto editors yelling: “Stop the presses! Someone in New Brunswick did something weird! Let’s run it instead of that story on Iraq!”

A quick internet search of New Brunswick-themed articles at the major papers suggests that UNB should abandon its academic programs entirely, and focus instead on performing stunts for the benefit of news-starved Toronto reporters. The fact that the UNB rugby team running naked on a field (November 2004 edition) is apparently more newsworthy to the *Globe and Mail* than the pioneering work UNB is doing in early childhood development shows just how often New Brunswick is thought of in the country’s most rigorous news rooms.

The *Toronto Star*, perhaps the most Toronto-centric of the major dailies, at least attempts to publish a story about NB every once in a while through the writings of their Atlantic bureau. But their Atlantic columnist, the Halifax-based Kelly Toughill, plays to prejudices already well-bred among many central Canadians: specifically, that Maritimers care about little else than an alphabet soup of federal programs, from ACOA to EI. A late September 2004 column by Toughill, simply titled *Atlantic Premiers Protest*, tells a lot about how Toronto’s media looks at Maritime politics. Our leaders whine, are wine and dined, and then handed a cheque from Ottawa. No need for nuance there.

According to a large segment of Canada’s print and digital media, the Maritime provinces are deemed to be about as significant to any national debate as Delaware and Rhode Island are to the United States. At least our cross-border cousin, the state of Maine, has L.L. Bean and a decent university hockey tradition to appease the American press. To most of Canada’s scribes, Atlantic Canada is known chiefly for our lobster, our snowmobile accidents, and the odd Christmas toy tussle at Walmart.

The central Canadian media appears to have changed little from the ill-informed, rowdy body that Dalton Camp had the misfortune to herd in the 1957 election, and later write about in *Gentlemen, Players and Politicians*. The myths still exist, easier to allude to in a lead sentence than to challenge in a truly investigative piece. Never mind past New Brunswick exports like Dalton Camp, Alden Nowlan, the hobbit-like Churchill confidante Max Aitken, or Sussex ginger ale. Ignore the Atlantic co-operative movement, the region's anti-nuclear movement, or the fact that the Atlantic provinces are now more urban and diverse than at any time in history. Focus instead on the old news staples of blighted potatoes and dying fish, parish-pump patronage and colourful premiers.

But this is not a Maritime complaint. The same characterizations can be directed toward the way the national media treat rural Quebec, Northern Ontario, the Prairies, and the Northern Territories. To most of Canada's media, the real action is in Ottawa and Toronto, with some juicy stories to be found in Calgary, Vancouver or Montreal. Every other part of Canada is just a few acres of snow.

Given the demographic trends that exist in Canada, the media focus on the big five cities is perhaps inevitable. But this does not mean that it is proper, and it certainly does little to improve the quality of democratic discourse in Canada.

By ignoring (or worse – trivializing) entire parts of the country, the national media is in effect encouraging the national government to do the same thing. Important national files – like immigration – are handled through the lens of opinion-makers in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, where local governments are feeling the pressure of too many new settlers. In the rest of Canada, meanwhile, the immigration totals of the big cities are envied, and a number of smaller communities are keen to implement ambitious settlement strategies. Their unique ideas are too often dismissed in Ottawa, in large part because immigration is considered a file that is only relevant to Canada's big three cities.

Similar distortions can be found in the way the central government handles economic issues – and how the Canadian media covers these issues. In the last decade, the oil sands of Alberta, the auto factories of southern Ontario, and the aerospace plants of Quebec have all received significant government investments (some would say bail-outs). The rest of Canada generally isn't so lucky. In smaller Canadian communities,

various bureaucratic agencies are created to maintain the livelihood of farmers or fishermen, or prop-up dying industries – these programs generally receive a great amount of scrutiny and ridicule. In actual fact, they are little more than table scraps, handed out by Ottawa after the real economic decisions have been made in favour of vote-rich provinces.

But all is not lost. Some elements of Canada's media – such as CBC's *The National*, with its ever-changing line up of *Road Stories* – do indeed attempt to remind viewers that Canada is a massive country, with thousands of different communities that are ready to contribute to a national dialogue. Local papers and radio stations – which often cover their little section of Canada in a much better way than any reporter in Toronto covers theirs – can now be found through the internet. And thanks to the ease of desktop publishing, neighbourhood papers – in some cases glorified zines, found at the local coffee shop – seem to be proliferating. All of this suggests that a person can find out a lot about Canada by looking at its media, but only if they are ready to start small, visit lots of coffee shops and have a good dial-up modem.

We've regressed a good deal from the time that Confederation was debated on the front pages of the *Saint John News* (or any other of Saint John's multitude of nineteenth century newspapers). We're nowhere near the sort of national debate that was once generated by J.W. Dafoe's *Winnipeg Free Press*. And there is no question a great deal of work has to be done before the Canadian media becomes truly national in scope.

But let's aim for it, at least. Reporters won't necessarily have to know the difference between Saint John, New Brunswick, and St. John's, Newfoundland. They'll just need to know that for Canada to work, both communities should matter.

WINNING ESSAY BY

Megan Wennberg

Judging democracy by its weakest link:
when *here* becomes their

Judging democracy by its weakest link: when *here* becomes their

BY MEGAN WENNBERG

CANADIANS VIEW DEMOCRACY AS WE VIEW VAST OPEN SPACES, RUGGED MOUNTAIN RANGES, DEEP FORESTS AND ENDLESS OCEAN. IT IS AN INHERENT PART OF OUR LANDSCAPE THAT IS EASILY TAKEN FOR GRANTED, BUT NEVER COMPLETELY IGNORED. WE UNDERSTAND DEMOCRACY AS AN ABSTRACT CONCEPT DENOTING CERTAIN FREEDOMS THAT, ALONG WITH HUMOUR AND POLITENESS, HELP SHAPE OUR NATIONAL IDENTITY.

Democracy gets little airtime in the mind of the average Canadian until it is threatened. In recent years, the threat has been growing. It is evident in an unprecedented concentration of media ownership by a small number of corporations, including Bell Globemedia and CanWest Global Communications Corp.¹

Media concentration does not signify the end of democracy, but it limits the diversity of voices fundamental to a healthy democratic society. Across the country, ownership wars are waging between independent publications and the corporations who seek to obtain them. One such battle was recently fought, and lost, in Saint John, New Brunswick.

A SAD DAY FOR SAINT JOHN

On October 28, 2004, residents of Saint John, New Brunswick woke up to the news that *here* newspaper, the province's only alternative weekly, had been bought by the Irving family, the province's most powerful corporate entity with industries spanning oil and forestry, real estate and newspapers. *here* was now in the crowded company of every English-language daily paper in the province, as well as the numerous weeklies, periodicals and radio stations owned by Brunswick News, Irving's media arm.² As news of the sale spread, an angry tide of frustration and disbelief swept the phone lines, web forums and street corners from Quispamsis to Grand Bay and beyond.³

It's no wonder people were upset. Saint John is a small city on the Fundy Coast known for beautiful heritage buildings, fog, backwards water, the Irvings, and a doggedly unpretentious nature. It does not conjure images of vibrant cultural life, booming economic growth or outstanding intellectual achievement. And yet, for four and a half years Saint John was able to do what few contemporary cities of its size have done: sustain an independent alternative newspaper.

here was born in April 2000 as a love letter to the city of Saint John. In choosing to start an independent paper, *here's* creators (Mark Leger, Janet Scott and Judith Mackin) told the legions of Saint Johners situated

outside the scope of traditional news coverage that their stories were important and people would care about reading them. *here* sought to provide an alternative source of news, and to offer fresh perspectives on the community's social, political, economic and cultural life. But most importantly, *here* challenged Saint Johners to care about themselves and their city.

People responded. Beginning as a bi-weekly publication, copies of *here* were snatched off newsstands in a frenzy of anticipation, and dog-eared copies littered the city market, coffee shops and bars. Readers approached *here's* editor and writers on the street seeking conversation and continued debate, and young people began talking more about the issues affecting their city.

As a beginning publication, *here* wasn't always good – like many new business ventures it got off to a sputtery start – but locals were quick to forgive lapses in quality (writing, layout, photography) for the promise of what *here* represented in spirit. *here* was young; it was liberal; and, most importantly, it was independent.

Irving is the largest non-government employer in New Brunswick, and employs roughly eight percent of the workforce in Saint John.⁴ Kenneth Colin (K.C.) Irving moved the company's operations from Bouctouche to Saint John in 1924, and Saint John is home to a number of major Irving operations, including a famously foul-smelling pulp mill and Canada's largest oil refinery. Saint John and neighbouring Rothesay are also home to several of the Irvings themselves.

Forbes magazine estimates the Irving family's wealth at \$4.4 billion US, making theirs the 117th largest fortune in the world.⁵ In a province and city so firmly dominated by one economic power, the need to feel independent boils fiercely beneath the skin.

here tapped this passion when it began publishing in Saint John five years ago, and it sought to continue in this vein when it expanded into Moncton last spring, with plans to move into Fredericton as well.⁶ In an interview in Rothesay on March 26, 2005, *here* co-founder and former editor Mark Leger (he resigned February 10 and *here* was still without a full time editor at the end of March) explained the expansion as a decision grounded both in financial necessity and in the desire to unite New Brunswick's three major centres with one strong alternative voice.

Issues of *here* are now published in all three cities, but they are no longer independent. In what he calls a "strategic error," Leger says *here's*

owners underestimated Irving's reaction when *here* moved to Moncton, the headquarters of Brunswick News. Within five weeks of the paper appearing on Moncton streets, Brunswick News had launched its own alternative weekly, Metro Marquee.⁷

According to Leger, the Marquee fought aggressively to secure advertisers, offering heavily discounted or free ad space. Boasting considerably deeper pockets than *here's* four owners (Leger, Janet Scott, Judith Mackin and Stephen Yaffe), Brunswick News made it next to impossible for *here* to compete. "We looked at their ad rates the first week [Metro Marquee] came out," says Leger, "and said 'we can't do it. We can't print the paper for that.'"

Opting to sell rather than face financial ruin, *here's* owners approached numerous organizations, other publications and the federal and provincial government, but, says Leger, "nobody was going to buy into that paper knowing the Irvings were trying to take it down." Swallowing their pride, *here's* owners approached Brunswick News about buying the paper, and on the afternoon of October 28 they signed ownership of *here* over to Brunswick News Inc.

Seven months after expanding into Moncton on April 1, *here* surrendered to the competition. In an attempt to ease the blow, Brunswick News management (including vice-president of Brunswick News Victor Mlodecki and Al Hogan, *here's* new general manager under Brunswick News) assured Leger "things would stay essentially the same."

A joint press release issued by *here* and Brunswick News on October 29 states: "Brunswick News has promised to carry on *here's* tradition of offering a fresh perspective on local issues. The new management group also recognizes the newspaper's solid name and reputation and will build on this by replacing Moncton's weekly newspaper, the Metro Marquee, with *here*."⁸

Despite assurances, the paper has changed significantly. On a structural level, Brunswick News switched from a 'full-time model' to a 'freelance model,' whereby writers lose job security but the publication saves money. As another cost-saving measure, *here's* Saint John office recently moved from its centrally located uptown accommodations into the basement of the Telegraph Journal (the Irving owned daily) building. Irving also owns its own press, and Brunswick News is able to print papers for significantly less than the fees paid by *here* when it was independent.⁹

According to Leger, Brunswick News is also keen to "merge promo-

tions and advertising with editorial in a way I'd never witnessed before." The day before production for *here's* December 9 issue, Leger says a senior editor for Brunswick News contacted him with instructions to run a cover story on the band Sum 41. The band wasn't scheduled to play at the Moncton Coliseum until February, but it appears that Brunswick News was more interested in helping SRO Entertainment Ltd. sell advance tickets than in running a relevant story.¹⁰

Leger refused to run the ad/cover. "When I behaved as an editor protective of his product they backed down," says Leger. But a story on Sum 41 written by Canadacast News Service ("people looking for a seat may want to consider buying themselves an early Christmas gift or adding them to their holiday wish list.") appeared in the December 9 issue of Moncton's *here* all the same.¹¹ Calling this incident an example of the "natural give and take between editor and publisher," Leger says the responsibility for determining content ultimately comes down to the strength of the editor.

But an editor can only do so much, and in the case of *here's* sex column Leger found himself trapped in a losing battle.¹² "They decided to kill the sex column before they bought the paper," says Leger. "But they didn't tell me." According to Leger, the decision to chop it came straight from J.D. Irving (president of J.D. Irving Ltd, Irving's forestry, food processing and transportation arm) himself.

While *here's* sex column was hardly a shining beacon of exemplary journalism, it acted like a canary in the coal mine confirming readers' worst fear: The Irvings directly control what goes in their papers. This isn't necessarily the case – "they don't seek to overtly control the news," says Leger – but by getting their knickers in a censorial knot over sex advice, readers felt the chill of corporate interference.

"The end of the sex column isn't the end of the day," says Leger, "but readers think if J.D. ends that, what else is he doing? It kills readers' faith. And I couldn't get them [Brunswick News management] to get that. They'd be, like, 'That slippery slope, that's silly.' But readers don't have the privilege of being inside the newsrooms, so faith and trust are really important because they don't have those glimpses. You have to stand your ground on everything or they don't trust you."

News publications enter into an unwritten contract with readers to deliver fair, accurate and relevant information. If readers perceive that a publication is breaching that contract they lose trust in its ability to

report credible information. Saint Johners have lost faith in *here*, and *here*, as a result, has lost readers.

here's lost readership is not quantifiable in terms of decreased circulation or lower pick-up rates. It exists in the intangible realm of public sentiment. But mention the words '*here*' and 'Irving' in a room full of Saint Johners, and the invisible quickly becomes audible through outraged condemnations and vehement proclamations that "I never read [*here*] any more. It's not relevant to me."

"You can't own the mainstream and the alternative," says Leger, "It's not possible. The Irvings are going to have to define that paper for themselves now. It's on to a new phase of its life, and it's not reasonable to think it will go back to the way it was. It will have to win back readers in its own way, and I'm not sure how they're going to do that."

If the months since the sale are any indication, the new *here* is set to focus primarily on entertainment, moving away from community issues and more towards pop culture. This ties in well with Brunswick News' corporate imperative to ensure profitability, as it secures two separate demographics – one for its dailies, and one for *here*. "When we had *here* it was an independent entity," says Leger. "Now it's part of a family of media outlets. They're going to look at it as part of that family. They won't want one poaching off the other or pulling away part of its readership."

AN ORIGINAL VOICE IS GONE

The Senate Committee on Transport and Communications is currently holding hearings on the state of the media in Canada, with specific examination of media ownership issues. While community newspapers might seem inconsequential when compared to national dailies and 24-hour news broadcasts, as a direct line into the hearts and minds of local readers across Canada, they are on the front lines of democracy.

When Brunswick News bought the rights to publish *here*, they bought the responsibility to continue fostering Saint John's diversity of interests, events and perspectives. In failing to do this, they have cost Saint Johners an important voice, and weakened the spirit of Canadian democracy.

- 1 CBC Radio One, "Media Concentration and Voter Information," excerpt from *The House*, March 12 2005. Document located at Friends of Canadian Broadcasting: http://www.friends.ca/News/Friends_News/archives/articles03260501.asp (March 2005).
- 2 38th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION, EDITED HANSARD · NUMBER 025, November 16 2004, MP for Southwest New Brunswick Greg Thompson states: "In New Brunswick media concentration is a big issue. Irving Group, one of the strongest and largest corporations in the country, owns all the daily English language newspapers in New Brunswick. It owns several weekly newspapers and periodicals and in addition to that, numerous radio stations. It is media concentration at its worst." http://www.parl.gc.ca/38/1/parlbus/chambus/house/debates/025_2004-11-16/hano25_2000-E.htm (March 2005)
- 3 www.giraffecycle.com, October 29, web forum moderated by Matthew Wilson. On October 29 the Saint John based web forum [giraffecycle.com](http://www.giraffecycle.com) erupted with comments from upset locals and out-of-towners alike lamenting the sale of here to Brunswick News. The forum has since been reconstructed, but messages posted on October 29 are archived on the old forum: "Here News Just Got Bought Out by Brunswick News" http://www.giraffecycle.com/oldforum/index.php?DATEIN=tpc_ywuwohhih_1099053545. Comments concerning the sale are also available on the Moncton based forum www.monctonlocals.com "Irving Empire Gobbles Up Here Magazine," <http://media.locals.ca/localsconf/viewtopic.php?t=14354&highlight=moncton+marquee> (November 2004).
- 4 "The Irving Empire looks to the next generation," *The Globe and Mail*, March 26 2005, p. B1, B4.
- 5 Forbes.com *James, Arthur and John Irving* <http://www.forbes.com/static/bill2005/LIRWZIM.html?passListId=10&passYear=2005&passListType=Person&uniqueId=WZIM&datatype=Person> (March 2005).
- 6 Mark Leger, interview with the author, Rothesay, New Brunswick, March 26 2005.
- 7 *here* expanded into Moncton on April 1, 2004. Brunswick News launched Metro Marquee on May 6, 2004.
- 8 Atlantic Community Newspapers Association newsletter of October 29, 2004 *here newspaper under new management* http://www.acna.com/Members/various/november04/here_brunswick-news.html (March 2005).
- 9 Mike Parker, *here* columnist and assistant editor, interview held in *here's* offices, Saint John, New Brunswick, March 26 2005.
- 10 Mark Leger, March 26 2005.
- 11 "Sum 41 determined to rock Moncton," *here*, December 9 2004.
- 12 www.monctonlocals.com, November 1 2004, post by former Metro Marquee sex columnist Heather Narduzzi: "I had a meeting with my editor at the Marquee on Thursday. I get in there, and he says, 'So I've got some bad news.' Then he brings out an email from the editor-in-chief of the T&T (Times and Transcript, Moncton's daily paper, owned by Brunswick News), and says, 'This is delivered by Al, but it comes straight from the top, meaning the Irving family themselves.' Then he reads me the email: 'Subject: Platonic Relationships. Please have Heather switch her column IMMEDIATELY to a relationships column. Not sex. No more sex. Think celibate!'" <http://media.locals.ca/localsconf/viewtopic.php?t=14493&highlight=narduzzi>



