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# PREFACE

Is there anywhere on the face of the earth a country as fortunate as Canada?

As we celebrate our country's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it hardly seems feasible. Much of Europe suffers economic distress. It is riven by nationalism, xenophobia, sectarianism, racial and ethnic tensions, and the rise of democracy-challenged, ultra-right governments—echoes of conditions that gave rise to fascism in the 1930s. The Middle East is awash with the blood of genocide. Russia is under the heels of a tyrant, guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity in arming his ally Bashar al-Assad, the Butcher of Baghdad, in the slaughter of Syria. Refugees are streaming out of Africa, impelled by hunger from global-warming drought, petty tyrants and assorted terrorists. China and its oppressive dictatorship, soon to become the world's largest and most powerful economy, could become democracy's biggest threat.

“Nationalism is on the march across the Western World, feeding on the terrors it seeks to inflame,” R.K. Rowling wrote in a fit of non-fiction, on the eve of this year's U.S. election of a president she calls “a man who is fascist in all but name.”<sup>1</sup> Deep animosities and too many voters too ready to believe such incredulous lies and fake news such as the claim that Hillary Clinton “ran a child sex ring out of a pizza parlour”<sup>2</sup> add to factors poisoning Americans democracy.

Canada stands out as one of the few islands of vibrant democracy. It is “today the most successful pluralist society on the face of the globe,” claims Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, spiritual leader and co-founder, in

partnership with the Government of Canada, of the Ottawa-based Global Centre for Pluralism.

We have much to celebrate—but no room for complacency and enough cause for humility. We have a history to be proud of but we must also acknowledge the bigotry, racism and other flaws that have blotted some of it. Our democratic institutions are as robust as the best in the world and we are a peaceful and generous people—but we cannot be blind to the bigots, racists, greedy, and ruthless still among us.

*A word about Unfamiliar History.* It is really not a proper history. It is an assemblage of items I've collected over the years—most of which I've annotated—and items I've written during a writing life that spans more than six-and-half decades. It does not completely ignore a major section of my corpus, when I was editor of Canada's leading petroleum industry trade journal, although the great bulk of it comes from elsewhere. Some of it comes from columns I wrote for the Lindsay *Daily Post*, now deceased, as are so many small town newspapers.

Selected items offer a few eclectic and totally random glimpses into the life and times of our Confederation. I hope they prove of at least passing interest to anyone with at least a passing interest in our past, students and teachers looking for different source material for our sesquicentennial, and even historians who might find some slivers of additional insight.

*A word about style.* Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and other aspects of style have all changed over the years. Phrases have become single words: business men are now businessmen in the Canadian Oxford Dictionary, and while business women were virtually unknown 150

years ago, today we benefit greatly from the rising prominence of Canada's businesswomen, among the best in the world.

The major issue of style involves the "or" versus "our" spelling, as in color or colour. John A. Macdonald despised the "or" spelling as an American abomination. Some agreed with him; many did not. Government, the business world, and academic publishers favoured the "our" spelling. Almost every newspaper and most periodicals favoured "or" spelling. The oldest dictionary I still have is the "Dictionary of Canadian English," published in 1967 by W.J. Gage Limited, of which Professor W.S. Avis of the Royal Military College was senior editor. It gave preference to the "or" spelling. The 1992 edition of The Canadian Press Stylebook, a biblical authority in the world of journalism, contained a lengthy and spirited defence of the "or" spelling. The 1993 edition abruptly adopted the "our" spelling. With much initial grumbling by newsmen, the Oxford preference now prevails wherever English words are written in Canada.

I mention all this for two reasons. First as a matter of interesting Canadian historical trivia. I also mention these style aspects to explain why you might find such variations as travelled and traveled, theater and theatre, businessmen and business men in Unfamiliar History. In any item I've quoted, or reprinted, the varying styles of the different source have been retained. In anything I've written, or in my annotations, I've followed the Canadian Oxford style. I've even grown to favour it.

A. Earle Gray

Lindsay, Ontario, December 16, 2016