

Townships Sun

THE SUN!
IT JUST DAWNED
ON ME!

FLYING IS
FOR THE BIRDS!

Bernard Epps, His Legacy

THIS
IS A
SIGN!

FIFTY
50
YEARS

OH BUOY!

RATS!

I'M GONNA BUY
A COPY
FOR MY MUM!

GET TWO.
SHE CAN
READ IT
TWICE.

Eastern Townships Life & Culture: Past, Present, Future
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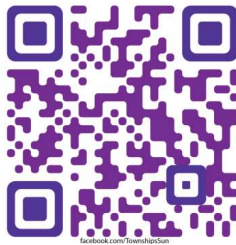


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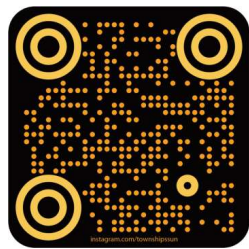
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FRONT COVER — by Xania Keane

This collage celebrating Bernard Epps shows Epps's cartoon characters from previous issues of the *Townships Sun*, and photos (clockwise, from lower left): Bernard Epps (1) in Black Cat Books, by Brenda Jandron; (2 & 3) with daughter Jennifer; (4) with wife Susan and daughter Jennifer. (Photos 2-4: Courtesy, Jennifer Epps)

***Xania Keane** is a mixed-media artist who lives in Newport, QC. She worked as a writer and a touring musician for many years, and recently started painting again.*

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We Are Grateful, We Are Changing

by Marie Moliner

September 2024 brings several significant changes for the *Townships Sun*, at the midpoint of our 50th anniversary celebrations. We are saying goodbye to several key members of our Board: David "Skip" Wright, our dedicated publisher; Janet Angrave, our longest-serving Board member; Angela Leuck, Shoreline Press publisher and generous volunteer caterer, Beverly Taber-Smith, our insightful restaurant reviewer; Ana Martinez, youth Board member, stepping down to pursue her studies in Toronto; and author Jane Baird Warren. We owe them all a great debt of gratitude!

Janet Angrave

Special thanks go to Janet Angrave, whose meticulous proofreading has ensured the quality of over 5,000 pages of the *Townships Sun* since she joined the Board in 1997. Formerly a cherished English teacher at Alexander Galt Regional High School, Janet's legendary attention to detail has been invaluable in maintaining the high standards of our publication.

David "Skip" Wright

Our publisher, David Wright, deserves immense thanks. Affectionately known as Skip, he revived the *Townships Sun* in 2000, prompted by a call from his mother, Thelma, advertising rep, who was concerned about a lack of volunteers. Embracing the challenge, Dave took on the roles of volunteer editor, and eventually publisher. Marion Greenlay, our long-time financial officer, fondly recalls Dave's unique approach to problem-solving, noting his ability to resolve issues with a personal touch.

Often supported by his spouse, Diane, Dave's leadership has been pivotal in guiding the *Townships Sun* through various challenges, including funding applications and transitions in Board membership. His dedication has earned him

numerous accolades, including the King Charles Pin presented by MP and Minister of Revenue Marie-Claude Bibeau last fall, and the 2024 Donald Patrick Award from the Borough of Lennoxville for his extensive community contributions. As highlighted in the *Sherbrooke Record*, "Since taking the reins of the *Townships Sun* in 2000, Dave has been a cornerstone of local media and environmental initiatives."

He's not afraid to roll up his sleeves, either. "When the *Townships Sun* organizes events, Dave is always the first person to arrive and the last one to leave," observed Angela Leuck. "He's set up more tables and stacked more chairs than anyone I know!"

Dave's collaborative spirit and commitment have been instrumental in the magazine's success, elevating it to an award-winning publication. Reflecting on his 24 years with the *Townships Sun*, Dave notes, "It's the stories about our close-knit English-speaking

Townshippers' heritage that matter. We believe in them and share them with new people."

Dave, we celebrate your immense contributions and wish you enjoyable hours of golfing and bird-watching as you continue your volunteer work as president of the St-Francis Valley Naturalists' Club.

We Are Changing

Regarding the *Townships Sun's* new look, we've drawn inspiration from our Special Summer Edition featuring the finalists of the Townships Young Voices. We welcome your feedback on these changes.

Finally, we invite you to join us at our Annual General Meeting on Friday, September 27 (see page 27). This event will be an opportunity to bid farewell to our departing Board members, welcome new members, and launch the third edition of Townships Young Voices. We're excited about the future and hope to see you there!



Photo: Marie Moliner

Townships History Quiz

by Jazmine Aldrich



The Canadian volunteers and home guards here repulsed the Fenian invaders on the 25th May 1870. (P110 Bernard Epps fonds, ETRC)

1. In the 1970s and 1980s, Bernard Epps researched and wrote about the Fenian battles which followed the American Civil War. Where was this photograph taken, depicting a monument commemorating a famed Fenian raid?
 - a. Pigeon Hill
 - b. Eccles Hill
 - c. Limestone Ridge
 - d. Trout River (Huntingdon)
2. Bernard Epps knew many homes throughout his lifetime. Which is the correct order of the places where he lived?
 - a. Whitstable, Ohio, Lennoxville, New York, Kingston
 - b. Whitstable, Kingston, Lennoxville, New York, Ohio
 - c. Kingston, Lennoxville, New York, Ohio Whitstable
 - d. Whitstable, Ohio, New York, Lennoxville, Kingston
3. One of Epps's best-known publications is *The Outlaw of Megantic*, which tells the tale of Donald Morrison. In his 1985 book, *More Tales of the Townships*, whom does Epps label as "The Murderess of Inverness"?
 - a. May Tisdale
 - b. Sara Lamb
 - c. Irene Ottman
 - d. Charlotte Lamb



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CANTONS - DE - L'EST



Jazmine Aldrich is head archivist at the Eastern Townships Resource Centre. She has also worked with archival organizations in Quebec and Ontario.

ANSWERS: Page 20

COMMUNITY FORUM

RE: Townships Young Voices Special Edition (July/August 2024)

Just received the *Townships Sun* in the mail. Easily the best-looking issue that I've ever seen! Visually stunning—can't wait to read! Cover artwork is beautiful—and the layout so professional. Well done!

—Chris Pollard, Hatley Acres

Congratulations on the special *Townships Sun* TYVoices issue. Ross and I are lapping it up! Without consultation, we found we had, immediately upon opening the magazine, read Priscilla Allatt's "Home: My Massawippi Lake." It's a lovely, expressive, evocative memoir and salute to a historically pertinent body of water. Our Massawippi Lake!

—Esther Saanum, Canton de Hatley

North Church Cemetery on the North Road to Hatley Village

The Old North Church Cemetery is the oldest of three cemeteries in Hatley Township. It was restored in 1990 and the Old North Church Cemetery Association was formed to continue with its maintenance and to do genealogical research for the families of persons buried there.

At the present time, after 33 years, only three members remain. Our finances barely cover the cost of mowing. With low interest rates over the past 10 years and more, our cash flow has been gradually diminishing.

Please consider helping us care for this precious place. More information is at TownshipsSun.ca/The-Hatley-North-Church-Cemetery/.

—Isabel Thwaites Nelson, Gwendolyn Conner McKnight, and Janet Little McLellan, Old North Church Cemetery Association, North Hatley (jamcclellan490@gmail.com)

Where Have All the June Bugs Gone?

I have asked around in my neighbourhood of Mansonville (Potton), Quebec, and, like me, others have reported no more than the occasional sighting of a singular june bug. I did not even have that pleasure. No bumps against the window pane in the evening, no rescues from watering cans. Nada.

I love their humming that hails the promise of lazy summer nights, and in recent years they appeared more and more often in May rather than in June.

So where are they? Are they another victim of climate change? Do they require harsh cold winters? Did last year's crop of june bug babies suffer from the very late and heavy frost?

I miss those little guys. Will they be back? Who might have the answers to my questions?

Love your paper,

—Almut Ellinghaus, of Dunkin, Mansonville, Potton

Editor's Response

Thanks so much for your letter! June bugs and other insects; golf greens and lawn grass: These are topics we hope to address in upcoming issues. Letters to the Community Forum are very welcome! Keep them coming to editor@townshipsun.ca.



That Fellow Epps!

by John Mackley

I grew up hearing about the history of my ancestors and the importance of my Scottish and Swedish heritage. I was taught that my progenitors, like those of many of the current inhabitants of North America, sailed across perilous seas in small wind-propelled ships. They sought freedom, opportunity, and better lives for themselves and their descendants.

Although my grandparents' generation eventually found their way to the far west of the United States, fate brought me back east to the Eastern Townships of Quebec. The region, I soon learned, thoroughly exuded history and culture.

While I was working at Uplands Museum in 1999, I happened to meet an extraordinary man by the name of Bernard Epps. We bonded over trays of hors d'oeuvres. I had heard that he wrote for some local publications. On another occasion, my then-wife and I visited his home in Lennoxville to deliver an old computer he said he could use.

At the time, I had no clue about the projects he had on the go, but I clearly recall the lack of empty table and floor space in his small apartment, it being occupied by history books, old newspapers, maps, charts and reams of documents and hand-typed manuscripts, the product of a small gray manual Remington typewriter.

I learned that he had lived for a time in Gould Station in Bury, not far from where I lived, and was well acquainted, not only with my neck of the woods, but with the greater part of the Eastern Townships. He was extremely well read and liked to converse long and in great detail about Townships history, geography, and folklore.

He was eager to take the leap into the 20th century, and began right away to teach himself the workings of the computer, on a quest to streamline his writing and advance his many projects. It was a rare quality, particularly in the late 1990s, for someone not to be at least somewhat intimidated by la toute nouvelle high technology.

From the time of our initial meeting, my ears perked up whenever his name was mentioned in casual conversation. I was honestly taken aback by some people's comments that seemed to imply "that fellow Epps" could not possibly be a credible historian.

It turned out that he was more widely known for his humorous cartoons and commentaries in the *Townships Sun* and *The Record*, and his fiction, than for his more serious historical works.

Many I talked to had jumped to the conclusion that since he wrote such colourful fiction and fanciful stories, it only stood to reason that his descriptive prose must have been embellished; he must be "playing fast and loose with the facts."

From what I had seen of his work, I felt that nothing could have been farther from the truth. But I found even more objectionable the throw-away line that often followed, "Besides, what can you expect from someone from away?"

"From away!?" Hold on a minute there, bud! What do someone's origins have to do with the quality or veracity of their work?

Historically speaking, unless we have indigenous ancestry, we are all "from away." That's just a fact. Neither arriving in the Townships recently nor having ancestors who did two hundred years ago bestows ownership of the historical narrative of our shared heritage.

I can't help but wonder if perhaps some folks took Bernie's tongue-in-cheek, self-deprecating letters to the editor way too seriously.

I'm speaking of those by "Angus McAngus." This pseudonym resembles the real name, Angus McKay, of the writer and poet who went by the pen name, "Oscar Dhu," and whom Bernie often quoted.

Under the name of Angus McAngus, Bernie penned a series of letters for the *Townships Sun*, in which he complained vehemently about "that fellow Epps" and pointed out his occasional errors before someone else could!

Yes, he was a character, a truly unique and fascinating one at that. Nonetheless, he was also a diligent historical researcher, scholar, and an excellent writer of stories and books.



John Mackley lives, loves, laughs, and writes in the Eastern Townships.

Crossword Fun *in the Townships Sun*

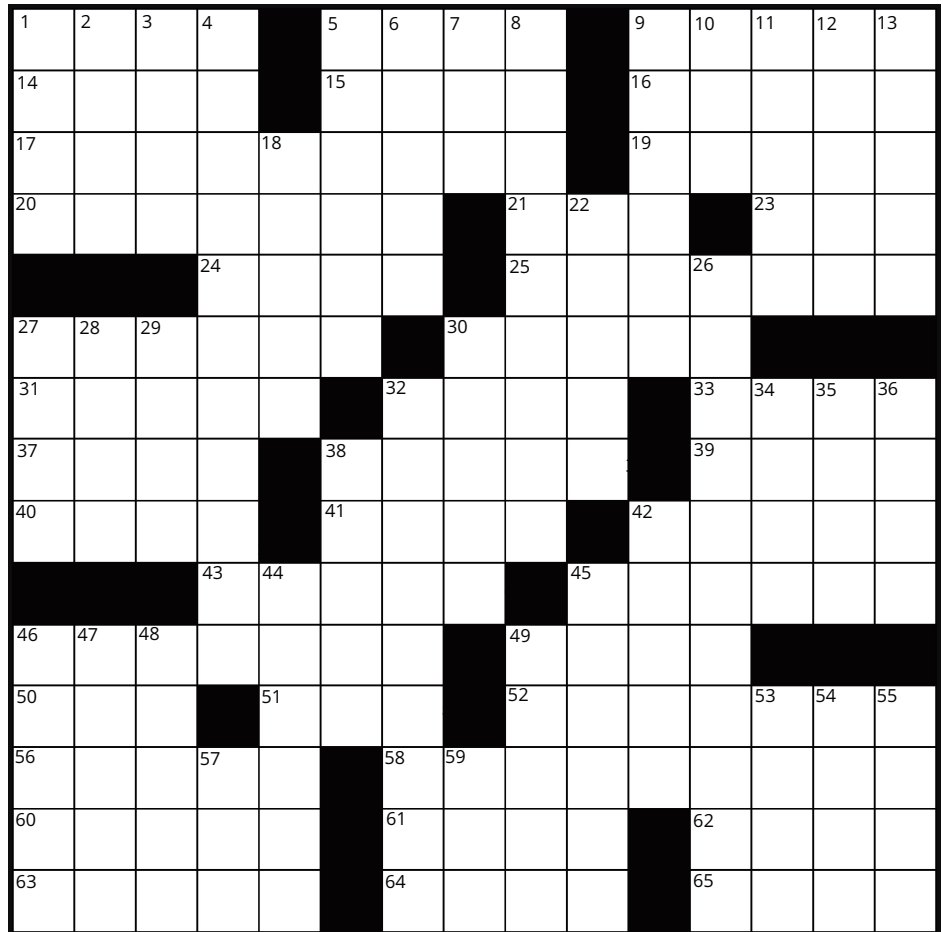
Our Bernie!*

CLUES – ACROSS:

1. Baked treat for birthdays
5. One who has committed murder is said to carry the mark of ____.
9. Discard
14. God who presides over Valhalla
15. Combining form meaning “cultivation”
16. Describes smoky flavour of certain whiskies.
17. *First word in title of Bernard Epps’s 1967 book (see also 56 Across)
19. *With 46 Across, Bernard Epps’s preferred subject matter
20. Raise to the peerage
21. South Korean auto manufacturer
23. Chemical formula for hypiodous acid
24. Shout words of support (for)
25. *With 58 Across, region Bernard Epps lived in, wrote about
27. Bad booze
30. Albeit (informal spelling)
31. Israeli-Canadian novelist Ravel known for *A Wall of Light*
32. Crude person
33. Polyhydroxybutyrates are known as these.
37. Fertile soil consisting of clay, silt, and sand
38. Small donkey
39. Your vulnerable point is your Achilles ____.
40. In heraldry, a border within the edge of the field of the shield
41. Combining form meaning “bone”
42. Lariat
43. Agreement superseded by the USMCA (initialism)
45. *Bernard Epps’s book about Donald Morrison is *The _____ of Megantic*.
46. *With 19 Across, Bernard Epps’s preferred subject matter
49. Containers for ashes
50. Former Japanese band Yellow Magic Orchestra was known as this.
51. President of World Athletics; gold medalist at 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games
52. Shabby blanket for old, tired horse? (Two words.)
56. *Third word in title of Bernard Epps’ 1967 book (see also 17 Across)
58. *With 25 Across, region Bernard Epps lived in and wrote about
60. Maker of prestigious cycling clothes
61. “____ your pardon!”
62. Bailey who pitches for the Twins
63. Initial stage (of a disease, for example)
64. Team
65. Conflicts

CLUES – DOWN:

1. Liturgical cloak for Catholic and Anglican clergy
2. To a loud noise, you might say, “What _ ____!”
3. Where pottery is fired
4. Of a body part, swollen or fluid-filled state
5. At a dealership; where the merchandise sits (two words)
6. Covering at end of a shoelace



7. Initialism for Iran’s full name
8. Rock that can be mined for silvery-white metal (two words)
9. Make a _____ (conspicuous effect)
10. Officer responsible for company’s day-to-day running (initialism)
11. In *A Study in Scarlet*, this word found in red at the crime scene is recognized by Holmes as meaning “revenge” in a certain foreign language.
12. For breaking news, an anchor might say, “_____ time, we had learned the following.”
13. Tower supporting overhead power lines
18. Approximately
22. Combining form meaning “physician”
26. Hit parade program (three words)
27. In real estate parlance, one who changes cities because of work
28. How Americans spell the word for “smell.”
29. Greenish-blue
30. The body’s main artery
32. Expose people pretending to be Abominable Snowmen?
34. Recover from disease or injury
35. Trial stage

36. Cabbage salad at a BBQ
38. Ms. Derek’s hairdo had she undone her braids in *Ten*?
42. Steps on a ladder
44. Headwear with a slogan for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez?
45. Colour that blends red and yellow
46. In Canadian usage, electricity supply
47. In informal convo, start of answer to question (two words)
48. Daytime television
49. _____ mother: former phrase for unmarried pregnant woman
53. In Islamic law, refers to unjustly acquired income: usually interest on loan
54. Imitator
55. Galvanic skin responses – short form
57. Definite article
59. Sash worn with Japanese clothing

Rina Kampeas is a retired freelance translator and a diaspora Townshipsper who enjoys solving crossword puzzles. She is exhilarated by the opportunity to construct them for the Townships Sun.



by Steve Luxton

Townshipper of Uncommon Resolve

I met the Eastern Townships writer Bernard Epps for the first and only time in a now extinct Lennoxville café. It was the early 1970s.

I had heard of him, but it was Ian Tate, another gifted, though oral, Townships storyteller who introduced me. There was an exchange of “hello’s,” and then a few inconsequential comments, with Epps’s, as I recall, delivered somewhat perfunctorily.

In hindsight, I realize we had much in common—both of us being born in England, Canadian naturalized, and drawn to the “writing life.” I had just graduated from an American creative-writing program and was commencing a college-teaching job in the town. Still, our encounter was a brief one, ships passing in the night.

Epps, nevertheless, did make a memorable impression on me. Across the generic plastic table, I saw a lean, somewhat shambling figure clad in blue jeans and carefully rolled shirt sleeves. He had long, weathered cheeks and a retreating hair line. He was pretty tight lipped.

I must confess, on this first encounter he made me somewhat nervous. He struck me as one not only accustomed to a robust outdoor life (with his tonsure-like bald patch, he looked a bit like a vigorous ex-monk), but who possessed an unusual degree of independence and determination.

I learned, likely from my friend Ian, that Epps had published two novels and wrote regular columns and articles for *The Sherbrooke Record* while living on a farm he owned in Gould Station, Bury. At that time, the Eastern Townships was one of the back-to-the-landers’ preferred destinations. Many of them were making a go at it in the area between Sawyerville and Scotstown. I presumed Epps was part of that influx.

In a way, he was. He had been a highly trained draftsman working in the U.S. at Grumman, the aircraft manufacturer, but was a deep lover of the natural world and desirous of a more elemental, direct relation to it.

He also had an additional motive for turning his back on city life and attempting to achieve a viable living while doing so. This was a dream that, at the time I met Epps, I, too, shared—yes, we also had this in common: to escape the nine-to-five energy-hemorrhage of an urban-based job and to pursue the “writing life” among what we believed would prove the less engulfing routines of country life.

But, whereas I, not particularly practically nor agriculturally inclined, chose to finance this alternative path by acquiring a teaching job at a college, Epps clad himself in overalls and rubber boots and set about running his father’s farm.

Jennifer Epps, Bernie’s daughter, explained that her dad’s father, Ernest Epps, came to the Townships from Ohio (and before that, Kent in England) because the land was cheap enough in the Townships for him to buy his own farm.

My impression of the writer as a person of unusual will and determination was on the mark.

She believes her grandpa bought the farm in Gould Station around 1958; her parents moved there in the summer of 1966. Her dad kept it about 30 years.

All things considered, he pursued his artistic mission in a self-reliant, tough, even heroic fashion. Attempting to be a productive writer while depending on farming was, by the 1970s, barely sustainable. As far back as the teens of the twentieth century, the American poet Robert Frost tried it in New England, but finally gave up after failing on three or more properties! Because Frost failed to spend nearly all his days working his fields, his neighbours dissed him as “lazy.” In fact, he spent his stolen hours writing.

But Bernard Epps stuck to his choice of a rural life and kept up his writing, supplementing his often paltry remuneration for his artistic activity by working for neighbouring farmers. Arguably, he mostly succeeded at his challenging vocational project.

In the Lennoxville café that day, my impression of the writer as a person of unusual will and determination was on the mark.

Burrowing into Bernie's Notebooks

A few weeks ago I visited the Eastern Townships Resource Centre at Bishops University and, in an almost entranced state, burrowed into its collection of Bernard Epps's papers.

I discovered manuscripts of novels, published and unpublished, short stories, various poems, newspaper articles, journals, day-by-day notebooks, clippings of reviews — in short, the voluminous paper trail of a hard-working, organized professional. For example, in his years of successive notebooks, he faithfully jotted down descriptions of the literary labour he'd accomplished that day, plus the exact number of words written, often accompanied by exclamations of delight when he had had a productive day with a large word count.

Bernard Epps was a dedicated artist.

That his writing was a personal mission and serious literary commitment was also clear in his journals and notebooks. Like his move to the country, they possessed an idealistic and romantic component. As I've said, during my encounter with him in the Lennoxville café, he seemed verbally frugal, with a tight rein on his feelings. But delving into his personal jottings and memorandums, I got the impression of a much more spontaneous, expressive, soul!

Regarding an overview of Epps's artistic career, I think the fact of the struggle between his idealistic but earnest

He Faced a Career Crisis

Of Bernard Epps's three novels, *Pilgarlic the Death* (1967) was accepted for publication by Macmillan of Canada — despite also being a far cry from the plot-centred structure and often reality-based characterization of most of the period's literary fiction. This might have been because, in that era, large and predominantly commercial houses were allowing their hair to grow a bit. But also, no doubt, the writer went some way to providing a literary novel with commercial appeal.

Perhaps Epps's best known work, *Pilgarlic* is a comic tale of daily life and events in a remote Eastern Townships-like village and region, inhabited by characters who are eccentric and grotesque, but fondly and amusingly so. The novel celebrates the wonder and invincibility of the natural Life Force and asserts the insignificance, in its face, of Death, individual or otherwise (the "Pilgarlic" of the novel's title is dialect for a pitiable person). The work is a rural Gothic fantasy and hymn to the individualism

desire to be a professional but "serious" or "literary" writer, with its almost inevitable challenge of making a living, casts a revealing light on his activities and output.

A couple of his early short stories were published in *Manhunt*, a popular U.S. crime fiction magazine. Clearly, he commenced his career without a lofty repudiation of commercial publication and its cheques. But then, subsequent projects such as novels — *Pilgarlic the Death* (MacMillan of Canada, 1968; republished by Quadrant Editions in 1980), *Rib of Eve* (unpublished) and *Dropping Out* (unpublished) indicate he aspired to greater artistic heights and the carrying of heavier, deeper freight.

A notebook reveals this: in a jotting to himself, Epps articulates this high ambition and mentions the famous psychologist Carl Jung and his theory of archetypes. Epps clearly desired to be appreciated as a "serious" writer while also making a living at it.

The two unpublished novels bear this out. *Rib of Eve* is decidedly neo-primitive and myth-informed, and *Dropping Out* is a semi-autobiographical story of a man and his wife, who, in a sort of back-to-the-land "survivalist" epic, depart city-life and come to occupy a remote, uninhabited farm. While they are often excellently written (the publishers' rejection notes make a point of commending the writing), they are a bit off the beaten track for a trade publisher and its customary market.

and traditionalism of a vanishing, earlier country life. That said, its exaggerations are also, at times, the somewhat sentimental representation of a contemporary imagination seeking refuge from the chilly assault of modern mass urbanization. My wife, the writer Angela Leuck, was distressed by the masculinist archotyping and stereotyping of women in some passages. Still, *Pilgarlic* is a lively, rollicking read.

Epps's journals are unclear about how many copies were sold. But released, promoted, and distributed by a substantial Canadian publisher, the novel must have helped pay some of his bills.

Epps, notwithstanding his literary ambitions, had to appeal to a paying market. What next, then? Happily, his succeeding project, *The Outlaw of Megantic* (1973), continued his run.

Despite a tragic ending in which the hero-protagonist succumbs to tuberculosis while imprisoned, this work

THE WRITING LIFE OF BERNIE EPPS

possesses some of the characteristic elements of the Western genre. In a fashion, Epps returned to popular fiction (as in *Manhunt*), where, as a young writer, he had commenced his efforts.

The book is a treatment of the oft-told local tale of the 19th century “Megantic outlaw” Donald Morrison, a member of a closely linked, back-country Scottish emigrant community. When the family farm was wrested from his naive, too-trusting father by an unscrupulous moneylender, Morrison determined to right the monstrous wrong. After slaying, in self-defence, a police-hired bounty hunter who had boasted he meant to kill him, Morrison took to the woods. There, aided by his sympathetic Caledonian community, he evaded official pursuit for an officially embarrassing long time. Finally captured, to pile injustice upon injustice, Morrison was sentenced to 18 years of hard labour and an almost inevitable early death — despite the jury’s strong recommendation of clemency.

In retelling the fast-paced tale of the Megantic outlaw, Epps employs skilled novelistic techniques. Characters are embodied with expert descriptive strokes, key moments are rendered as dramatized scenes, and the dialogue is natural and revealing. It is a good, page-flipping, popular-style read.

In one of his notes or in a newspaper interview, the author confesses he conceived and pursued the project, in part hoping it would earn money.

And it did. It was picked up by McClelland & Stewart, the foremost Canadian publisher of the day, and, Epps re-

His Inestimable Gift to the Townships

Likely because of his will power and determination, Bernard Epps succeeded.

The fresh subject he found was the history of the Eastern Townships! When I told my friend John Mackley that, to me, Epps had seemed very short on words, John informed me that, on the contrary, Epps could positively gush if the subject was history, especially local history. In fact, much of the subject matter of his imaginative writing had involved history.

As for the fresh mode of publication: newspaper and magazine columns and articles.

Which paid. Regularly.

And so, Epps set about writing of the area’s history in the *Townships Sun* and the *Sherbrooke Record*. It transpired that he was also an excellent journalist with a clean, attractive style, who penned scores of articles. They had a read-

corded in his journal, sold 50,000 copies! Its substantial earnings no doubt made the writer very happy and may have prompted him to spend his energies on more literarily inclined endeavours.

However, sadly, if that was the case, it was not with much sustained financial success. His archive at the Eastern Townships Resource Centre contains only unpublished creative works, besides those in magazines. Some of these manuscripts were *The Queen’s Hat* (1968), *The Ballad of Johnny True* (1971-1975), and *Bull* (1975-1983).

It might be concluded that at this point, like the heroic outlaw Morrison, Epps, after a surprisingly long defiance of the odds against succeeding in his challenging chosen path, had finally exhausted his run of luck. At this juncture in his writing career, his fictional endeavours, whether purely literary or melded with the popular, seem to have dropped off. The logical explanation for this is surely the pressing need for money.

Epps faced, I believe, a career crisis.

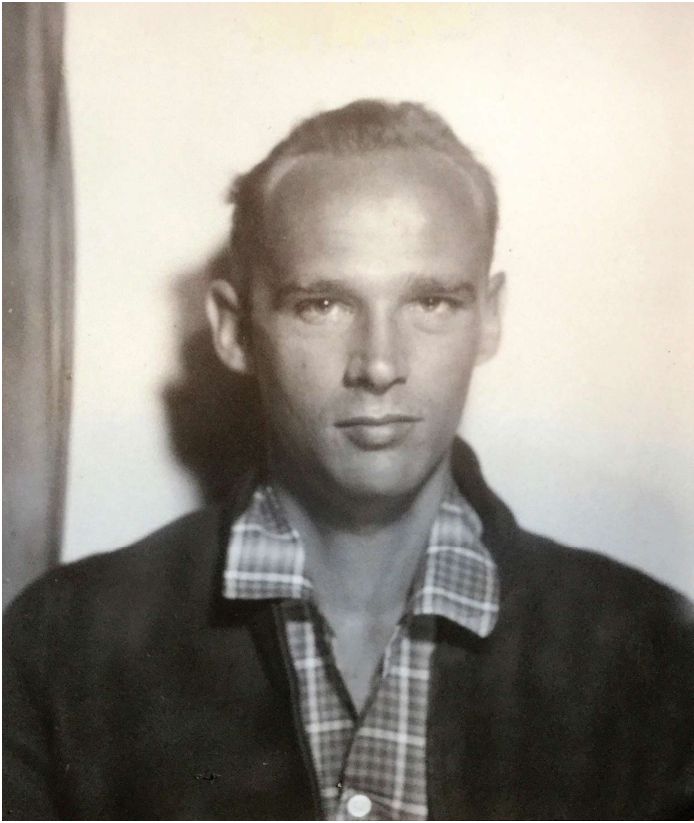
During this demanding period, he took on a paying commercial project (*Second Blessing, a history of Sherbrooke Hospital, 1977-1988*) and, with hopes of more popular publication, set about several works of general history that apparently failed to interest publishers.

If he was to maintain his rural style of writing life, he had to search around for a more popular subject matter, mode of writing, and means of publication. No easy challenge.

er-gripping energy that revealed his deep enthusiasm for the historical subject.

So successful were they, in fact, that he expanded on many and produced two books: *Tales of the Townships* (1980) and *More Tales of the Townships* (1985), both published by Sun Books, the book-publishing arm of the *Townships Sun*. These collections of short, entertaining essays tell of the better-known heroes, villains, and oddballs that have inhabited our unusually storied region. They vividly describe the lives of such figures as the Magog-born Wild Western adventurer Buckskin Joe Hoyt, the brilliant shyster and counterfeiter Stephen Burroughs, the perfidious, murderous Dr. Neill Cream.

Epps had hit upon a second calling.



Bernie Epps as a young man, in a photo booth
(Photo: Courtesy, Jennifer Epps).

Adventure Volume 1: A History to 1837. In his introduction to the book, he thanks the Canada Council, which must have provided financial support.

In this meticulously researched work, as the extensive bibliography attests, he writes a history of the Townships from its days as an Abenaki-owned and hunted primeval fastness to its invasion by a voracious settler society that took few economic prisoners.

Like his collections of stories, it too is a great read — as surely will be the forthcoming *Volume 2* that takes the story to the close of the 19th century and records the remarkable Eastern Townships events and personages of the latter part of the Victorian century. Once more, it is full of storytelling at its best. (In the introduction to *Volume 1*, Epps starts

off by asserting, “history isn’t boring; historians are boring.”)

Epps, because he does not claim the status of being an academic historian, is in both volumes able to acknowledge big sociopolitical occurrences as well as to note fascinating small events, often equally telling. For example, he recounts the tale of the wife of a Lennoxville tavern owner whose arm had to be amputated after she was mauled by a tiger belonging to a menagerie passing through town! I had no idea entertainments of this kind travelled along — no doubt horse-drawn — the Townships’ rudimentary roads back in the 1820s. Did the woman attempt to stroke the beast? It seems like something from Epps’ fantastic, Pilgarlic-oriented, gothic imagination.

Elsewhere, we are presented with excerpts from the written laments of the unhappy Reverend Charles Caleb Cotton to friends in England expressing his deep loneliness in Dunham Township and continuing failure to find a desirable, “finished” woman for a wife.

Though pressed by the imperative of making a living to shift away from imaginative writing to storytelling about local history, Bernard Epps can hardly be said to have fallen short. On the contrary, faced by challenging economic circumstances, he continued energetically down his chosen, rural-based path and discovered an additional metier and source of more regular income.

In doing so, he again demonstrated his formidable resolve and deep sense of artistic commitment. His life achievement was not only a personal one, but one for the English-speaking Eastern Townships! In writing and spinning stories of the region’s fascinating history in an accessible, entertaining and faithfully accurate fashion, his contribution to the English language culture of our region is inestimable.



Steve Luxton is a Townshippier poet, writer, retired college professor in Montreal and Lennoxville, and walker of country roads.

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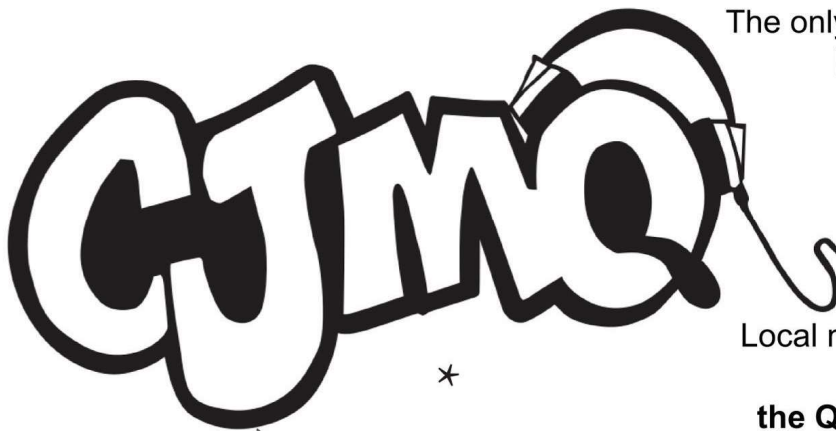


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Do Ukulele Players Have More Fun?

by Bernard Epps

"Listen," said the little man with bright eyes who lives inside my head, "you're a stranger here, right?"

"No stranger than anyone else," said I.

"Worse," he insisted. "You're a Sassenach!"

"So?"

"So what makes you think you can write the story of Donald Morrison, a story rooted deeply in Scottish tradition, a tale very dear to the hearts of your friends and neighbours, a legend that has taken on, over the years, something of the lustre of Holy Writ?"

He is a pitiless little man who watches everything I do, and mocks nearly all of it. He pays no rent on the skull space he takes up either. I've often threatened to evict him, but writing is a very lonely business and he's often the only company I have.

"Arrogance," I said. "Ignorance," I said. "Hunger."

"And it's been done several times already," said he. "And by people infinitely closer to the Gaelic enclave than you will ever be. Once by Oscar Dhu," he said. "The Bard of Gould."

"So what did Oscar do?"

"Once by Henry Kidd who was born and raised here."

"And who did Henry kid?"

"To say nothing of the film produced for CBC."

"Right. Let's say nothing of that!"

"You don't even know how to write books!"

"Get stuffed," I explained, and went to work.

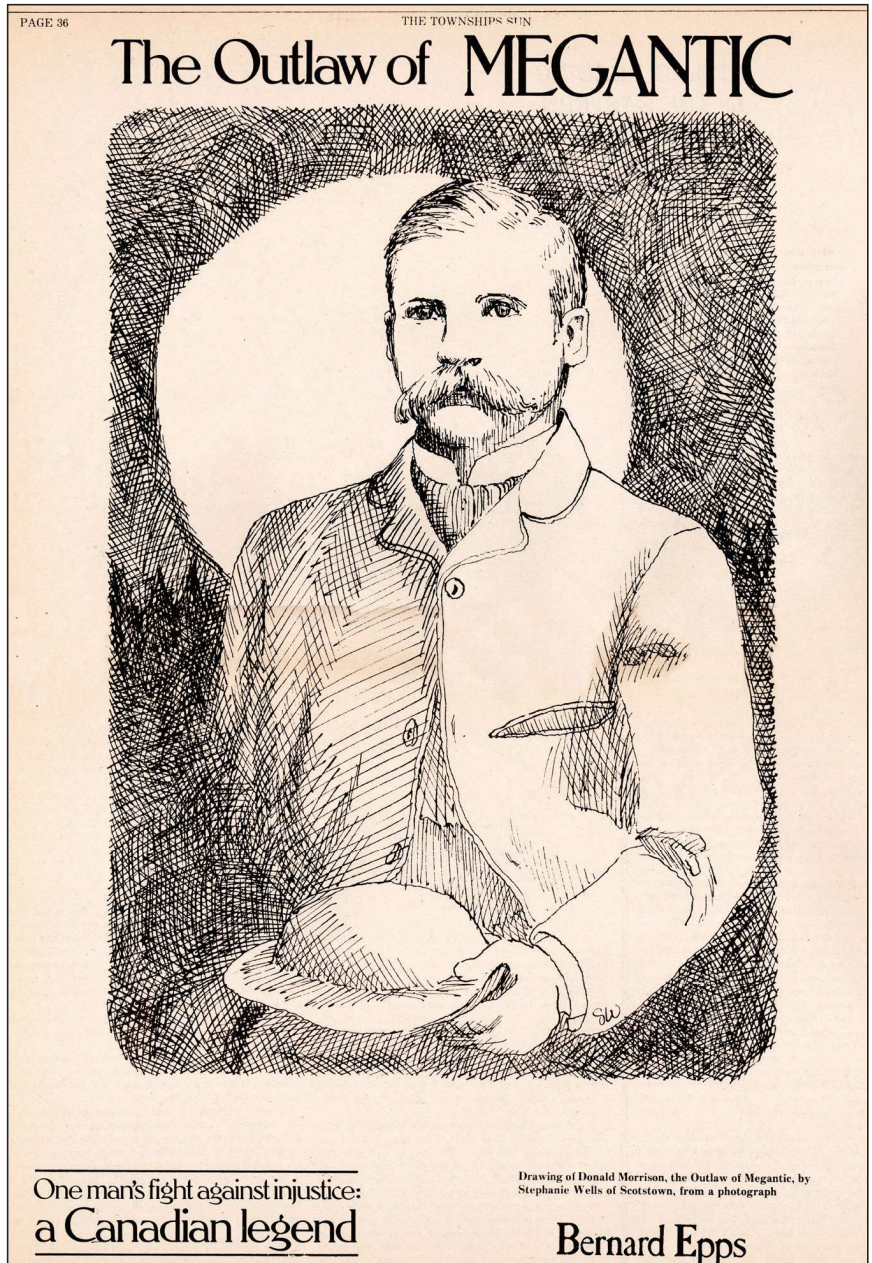
It was November of 1971. It was snowing outside. I had enough in the savings bank to keep us fed until spring and a thousand sheets of virgin paper all ready to despoil and so I went to work.

The first step was to assemble the facts, and that was not easy. Black Oscar wrote his book while Donald and most of the protagonists were still alive, and changed the names or slurred events to protect the guilty. He was also writing not just Donald's story,

but an extended hymn to the pioneers of Gould and environs. Being a poet, he was more interested in rhythm and rhyme than in cold, hard facts.

Henry Kidd collected anecdotes from the people involved in the story and jumbled them all together as best he could, but he had no way of checking his facts or recognizing the sequence of events. A close study revealed his book to be shot through with contradictions and errors.

The History of Compton County (1896) by L.S. Channell, contained a brief summary of the story, which began by claiming that Donald was nuts. Another source—*Mélang-*



es historiques dans et autour des Cantons de l'Est—turned out to be a paraphrase of Kidd's book with errors aided and abetted through translation and sheer carelessness. All this despite the impressive credentials of its author, Mgr Albert Gravel, Sherbrooke archivist. Yet another—*Sherbrooke : découvertes, légendes, documents, nos rues et leur symboles* by Louis-Philippe Demers, Director of Tourism for the city of Sherbrooke—seemed to be a summary of Gravel's summary of Kidd's assemblage. I was getting further and further away from the facts.

"So why don't you give up?" asked Bright-Eyes, "and learn to play the ukulele or something?"

"Because I'm a writer," said I, and listened to him laugh.

Fortunately for Donald, his adventures had caught the eye of leading newspapers of his day. Reporters followed the manhunt avidly and filed stories at the slightest provocation—twice a day sometimes. Fortunately for me, these old newspapers have been handily preserved on microfilm. After leafing through each page of hundreds of newspapers—from the time of the gunfight in 1888 to the day of his funeral in 1894—I finally had a sequence of events which was, if not exactly Gospel Truth, at least something to weigh other evidence against.

Then came the business of judging and comparing, dramatizing and distilling, the work of words.

Six months later, the manuscript had gone through six drafts—the virgin paper violated again and again. Novels are never so much finished as abandoned, and I gave up the writing and rewriting in May of 1972.

It had stopped snowing.

McClelland and Stewart accepted the manuscript right away. They assigned an editor to work with me in poring over each page, hunting up spelling mistakes and punctuation errors. Galley proofs came to be studies for typefaces and typesetter's errors. Page proofs arrived and the whole thing was examined again. By the time advance copies of the finished book arrived in the mail, a full year had passed.

That summer, the book was chosen as an alternate selection for the Literary Guild of Canada. Magazine advertisements began to appear and copies even showed up in a few bookshops.

That autumn, the publishers decided it had inspirational value and reprinted it as a special paperback for school children. Donald's adventures were now a prelude to meaty questions printed in the back.

"How does the author use connotation in his descriptions of people to create character?"

"How is the morality of Megantic in 1885 different from

Dear Sirs,

I am enclosing a small sum to help in writing *The Townships Sun* which I enjoy reading very much and especially the last one with the write-up of Donald Morrison. The Megantic Outlaw, who was my mother's brother. She, Christie Morrison, the oldest of the family of six — Christie, Malcolm, Murdo, Katie, Norman and Donald. I was born the year Donald was captured in 1888. So I only remember when his remains were brought to Milan to my home. After he had died of T.B. in St. Vincent de Paul Hospital, Montreal, his remains were laid to rest in Gisla Cemetery three miles from here.

My father, Alexander Macdonald, gave Murdo and Sophia, my grandparents, a piece of his land for them to live on, where a log cabin and barn was built by the neighbours when they had to leave their home at Megantic. They kept one cow and my uncle Norman, who was a bachelor, came to live with them.

My grandfather was nicknamed "The Tailor" as he had a sewing machine and a patron for heavy factory woollen cloth; he made pants and frocks for the neighbours. Donald's mother done his laundry for him. He called this night for a change of clothes and his lunch scones, I suppose. They were watching for him and as he came out of the house, he had to climb a rail fence; there he was shot in the leg. They took him to Megantic by waggon, a distance of 15 miles, from there by train to St. Vincent Hospital, then The Trial, etc.

I found Mr. Epps' book on the Outlaw of Megantic very interesting and very good ... wondered, being a Sassenach how he could manage the Gaelic and our customs so well.

I still live with my son Donald on the old homestead where this all happened.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Christie MacArthur, Milan, Que.

(Letter from Donald Morrison's niece, published in the Townships Sun of January/February 1976)

the morality of today? Which code of living is superior?"

(My little man enjoyed these questions no end. He thought that if the author had to take the test, he'd have to stay after school and brush up on moral values!)

Reviews began trickling in from papers all across Canada—dozens of them, many from towns I'd never heard of.

The *Victoria Colonist* said, “Epps has created a Canadian hero more exciting than Billy the Kid, Davy Crockett and George Washington rolled into one.”

The *Hamilton Spectator* said, “It is a warm and interesting tale and the author’s writing style is unique.”

The *Winnipeg Tribune* said, “Bernard Epps’ simple but effective narrative has brought to life the colourful and tragic story of one man’s battle against injustice.”

The *Daily News of St. John’s Newfoundland* said, “*Outlaw of Megantic* leaves me with the feeling of having plowed through one of the more simplistic books of the ‘adventure for boys’ school.”

The *Vancouver Sun* said, “Rich in pathos as well as adventure, the book is a memorable contribution to modern Canadian literature.”

“Exactly what,” said the little man with bright eyes, “is a memorable contribution to Canadian literature worth? Cash money?”

“You can’t price literature like groceries,” said I.

“Why not?” he said and chuckled into his beard.

I thought about that for a little while.

“All right, Bright-Eyes,” I said. “We’ll just find out, shall we?”

And I took my royalties and went out and bought two pairs of socks and a pocket calculator.

The calculator—a miniature miracle of agitated electrons—reported plainly that the writing of memorable contributions to modern Canadian literature pays exactly—twenty-six weeks seven hundred seventy-six pages plus carbons less tax times the square of the hypotenuse carry one—exactly \$52.76 per week.

Or \$7.54 a day. Or 63 cents an hour. Or \$1.70 per page. Or .003 cents per word.

The socks hid my skinny ankles while I went off to Montreal in search of a job.

“So why don’t you take up something more profitable?” said the little man who still would not let me be. “Like needlepoint?”

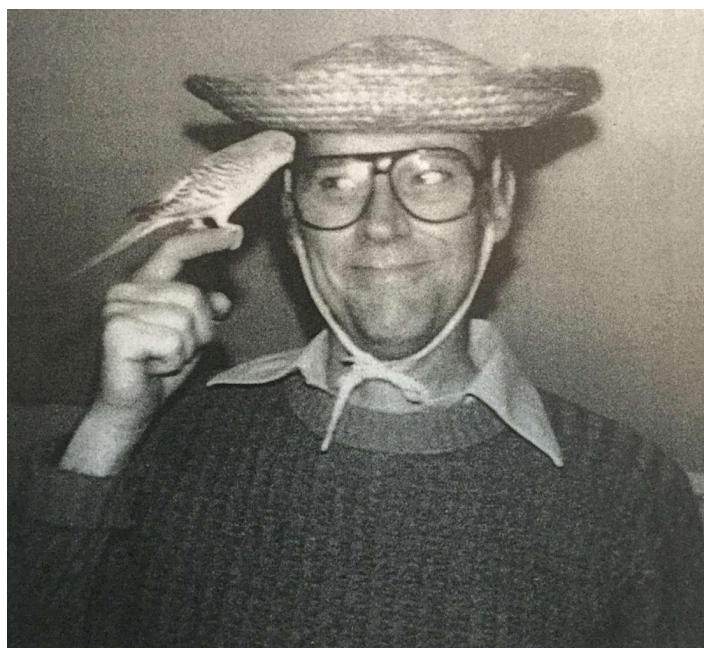
“Ah,” said I, “but look at the fringe benefits.”

“Such as?”

“Immortality.”

“Yes, yes! Go on!”

“Fame.”



Bernie Epps and budgie Wiggins (Photo: Jennifer Epps).

He had no answer to that for a change. He was laughing too hard.

“Girls.”

He stopped laughing.

“Girls?”

“Sure,” said I. “You remember the sweet young thing at that radio station in Ottawa?”

It was during a promotional tour the publishers had arranged with radio, television and newspaper. I forget the station, but I remember the girl. She was a strawberry blond. I was dressed for the interview in a borrowed tie and there was a shine on my suit brighter than the shine on my shoes. She was in a sweater and faded jeans and her feet were bare. She had such pretty toes.

“And she was living with a ukulele player!” crowed the little man with bright eyes and went off in a cloud of laughter.

I thought about that for a long time.

If I can just save enough money from my next book, I’m taking lessons.

Bernard Epps wrote this article from his home, Lindisfarne, in Gould Station, in the Township of Bury. It was first published in the *Townships Sun* (November 1975) to introduce the serialization of his book, *The Outlaw of Megantic*. This version has been slightly edited for clarity and length.

Mystery in the Archives

by Angela Leuck

Mystery in the Archives. Sounds like a fun summer read while relaxing on the porch, don't you think? Rather, it was a real-life mystery right here in our own Eastern Townships Resource Centre.

In January of 2023, the ETRC received a request from a researcher looking for *Volume 2* of Bernard Epps's *The Eastern Townships Adventure*. Bishop's University's library had *Volume 1, A History to 1837*, but they didn't have *Volume 2, 1837 to 1900*.

A search of the Epps' archive revealed a typed manuscript of a second volume, but no book. Further research unearthed a notice in *The Record* suggesting it was published in 1999. Yet, the book was nowhere to be found.

Perplexed, ETRC staff reached out to the *Townships Sun* to help solve the mystery. Since Epps had died in 2007, *Sun* editor Rachel Garber contacted his daughter.

In the midst of California floods in January 2023, Jennifer Epps emailed, "Dad would be so happy that someone is inquiring about the *Eastern Townships Adventure Vol. 2*. I don't know why it wasn't published before his stroke, because it was finished. He would have loved for it to be published." So, for more than 20 years, the manuscript had languished, all but forgotten, in the ETRC archives. But no longer. As is so often the case, timing is everything.

With the 50th anniversary of the *Townships Sun*, the *Sun* board was on the lookout for something big to mark this important milestone. Publishing the rediscovered second volume of Epps' historical magnum opus struck everyone as the ideal project!

Then ETRC Executive Director Jody Robinson, Rachel Garber, and myself as head of Shoreline Press quickly agreed this would be a joint publication between our three organizations. Such community collaborations are not unprecedented here in the Townships. A good example is the 1999 bilingual *Anthology of 20th Century Poetry of the Eastern Townships*, published by the ETRC along with Véhicule, the Montreal English press, and Tryp-tique, a French one.

We also decided to publish both in a two-volume set. Volume I had already been published in 1992 by Pigwidgeon in Ayer's Cliff; the press had long since ceased operation. The search for funding

began in earnest. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Bélanger-Gardner Foundation, which not only provided the grant requested, but allocated additional funds to distribute books to 30 libraries throughout the Eastern Townships. This was a resounding confirmation of what we believed to be the value and importance of Epps's historical writing for the identity and culture of the Townships' English-language community. For its part in the manuscript development, the ETRC also received support from Quebec's Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise.

After nearly two years of work, the two-volume set of *The Townships Adventure* is nearing completion. For me, personally, it has been a very exciting experience. While I have published novels, memoir, and poetry by Townships writers, this was my first foray into the realm of written history. It was great to work alongside both of my partners. Jody Robinson and her colleagues at the ETRC contributed their high level of historical expertise, while Rachel Garber and others offered their personal knowledge of Epps as *Sun* editor and long-time contributor.

Our goal has been not only to provide a fully edited version of Epps's great historical work, but to provide, as well, a sense of his overall contribution to Townships history and culture. Because Epps remained at a distance from academia — he is above all a popular historian — it has been difficult to get a true sense of his stature. By expanding *The Eastern Townships Adventure* to include contributions from such outstanding academics, researchers, and writers as Marc Boucher, William Floch, Jack Little, Royal Orr, Joanne Pocock, and Scott Stevenson, we have begun the process of conveying and evaluating the scope and depth of Epps's oeuvre.

Later this year, the new two-volume set of *The Eastern Townships Adventure* will be available in an attractive and accessible form. We are confident it will be of interest to present and future generations of English-speaking Townshippers who want to find out more about their own fascinating and inspiring story.



Angela Leuck owns Shoreline Press, and is a member of the *Townships Sun* board of directors.

A Meandering Voilà!

by Jody Robinson

As I write this, the project to publish Bernie Epps's *Eastern Townships Adventure, Volumes 1 & 2*, is finally rounding a bend onto the homestretch.

When Rachel, Angela, and I first set out on this project in early 2023, I think we all anticipated that it would be pretty straightforward: take Bernie's texts, add some images, and print. *Voilà!* — two newly printed books for the *Township Sun's* anniversary!

Ultimately, it hasn't quite been that linear, due partly to competing obligations and, significantly, to the hiccups created when taking a machine-printed book and typewritten manuscript and turning them into digital files (woes of lost formatting!). Beyond discussing content, layout, and illustrations, our meetings have had the unintended by-product of giving each one of us a chance to reflect deeply on Bernie's craft as well as on the layered history of the Eastern Townships.

Having worked in Townships history for the better part of two decades, many of the people and events recounted by Bernie were already familiar to me. It has been a treat to see the region's early history told in a more global way and free from academic jargon. More precisely, I am so used to reading histories and original documents of a specific town, person or event, it is easy to forget how intertwined so many of these people's stories really are. Working on the *Eastern Townships Adventure* volumes has been a beautifully grounding experience, a reminder that our histories did not occur in a vacuum. International, national, and local events were continually affecting who came to the Townships and why, what they did when they got here, and the factors that made them choose to stay or go. I wouldn't call it a domino effect; it is more like a tangle of yarn. You're not quite sure where the beginning or end is.

The detailed process of double-checking original sources has also made me appreciate just how much time Bernie dedicated to researching and pulling it all together. I am *just* old enough to have done historical research in the pre-digital era, when microfilms reigned supreme. What Bernie accomplished is no small feat. It's one thing for me pull up a specific issue of a historic newspaper with a few key strokes and mouse clicks, and en-

tirely another to stare for hours at microfilm, looking for just the right quote to illustrate the people and the feelings of a specific moment in the past.

These original, contemporary quotes bring such richness to the text. As a historian, I usually read



Microfilm reader for articles and daily papers, *Hai-fa University library, in the 1980s* (Courtesy Wikimedia Commons).

works of history and wonder: what did the original source say and how has the writer interpreted it? With *Eastern Townships Adventure* we are not left to wonder; Bernie has deftly interwoven original quotes with his own narrative to give us the best of both worlds. Truly, there is nothing better than reading the words of someone who lived two centuries ago. It gives us the chance to understand how they viewed the world around them — a real privilege — and gives us a sense of their feelings.

Ultimately, our project to bring Bernie's histories of the Townships back into the community became much more involved and meandering than anyone expected, but has given each of us unexpected opportunities to really sit with Eastern Townships history as seen through Bernie's eyes. Now, with the end in view, I am so looking forward to readers becoming similarly acquainted with and amused by the characters that Bernie has brought to life in *Eastern Townships Adventure*.



Jody Robinson worked for the Eastern Townships Resource Centre from 2006 to April 2024 and continues to tumble down all sorts of Townships history rabbit holes.

Over Bernie's Shoulder

by R.A. Garber

My own Eastern Townships adventure began in 1996, just in time to see Bernard Epps on the streets of Lennoxville. I knew he was involved with the *Townships Sun*, but I did not realize how intimately his wit, wide-ranging interests, and fearless mind rhymed with the magazine in its early years.

That is, not until we undertook the *Townships Sun's* 50th Anniversary project to scan all 50 years, 525 issues, and 14,135 pages of the issues. Reviewing these pages, I came to see his identity as inseparable from that of the *Sun*. I laughed again and again at his salty, self-deprecating wit, evident in both word and image. Under the pseudonym of Angus McAngus, he railed at "that fellow Epps," giving himself some backhanded jabs.

Being from away, he boldly wrote Townships-based stories. I imagine he even relished ruffling the feathers of "born-and-bred" Townshippers who had skin in the stories about their ancestors; Epps's tales had a propensity for unearthing human foibles and scandals. (He seemed to enjoy sparring with critics who objected to what they saw as the sexist tone of *Please Sir, I'd Rather Be Ravished*, the title of his little book of poetry.) But beneath the jousting—or let's say roasting—he was in love with the Eastern Townships. As a writer, he was an omnivore. No topic seemed beyond the scope of his scrutiny. Then I discovered his two-volume *Eastern Townships Adventure*. I confess I am not a history geek. I'm more interested in the personal stories and feelings of ordinary individuals than the engines of war. But as I read his *Adventure*, I discovered a most uncommon "history."

First, Bernie used his fine sense of irony and satire to cut bigwigs down to human size, and elevate the little guy to heroic, sometimes tragic, heights. Then he braided all these personal stories together so that indeed, the whole becomes one grand *Adventure* rather than disparate adventures.

Finally, he interwove original writings from those times — personal letters, official documents, newspaper stories — among his own words. He consulted and quoted from myriad first-hand and contemporary accounts of pre-1900 events in the Townships. He privileged primary sources — those pearls of great price for a good researcher, whether journalist, novelist, or historian.

Dear Mrs. Rowell,

I heartily agree that this article was both distasteful and crude. Since its publication, I've been trying to discover the author of this disgusting article submitted under my name - so far without success. The only thing I've managed to find out which may throw some light on the matter is that there is no such person as Angus McAngus living at Gould Station. Indeed, the name is so obviously fake that I doubt there is an Angus McAngus anywhere.

But until such time as I unearth the rascal - and unearth him I will - I should like to apologize to all the horses of Bury. In the 20-odd years that I've been attending the Bury Celebration, I can state categorically that the horses have always been models of decorum. They never disgrace themselves in public.

Neither do the girls.

Bernard Epps

(*Townships Sun*, July 1977)

Reading the *Adventure*, I was not only reading Bernie, I was reading the words of Ethan Allen, Nicholas Austin, Josiah Sawyer, Gilbert Hyatt, Alexander Tilloch Galt, Bishop G.J. Mountain, Jefferson Davis, Sir Hugh Allan, and many others.

I felt the anger and frustration of families buffeted by the erratic decisions of the British American Land Corporation and the ruling class. I felt the relief of those who survived the violence of war and the vagaries of weather. I felt the disquiet of Townships English speakers who foresaw the end of their community.

I had the impression of looking over Bernie's shoulder, reading the stories as they happened on the page. I was listening to various voices of the past, replete with funny spellings and archaic expressions. Then I would hear

his incisive comments calibrating each story with the next.

In short, I felt I was looking over the shoulder of a lucid writer and a painstaking researcher. A passionate Townshipper.

That's why the *Townships Sun* needs to publish these two volumes.

We are proud to partner with the Eastern Townships Resource Centre and Shoreline Press, and we are grateful for the support of the Bélanger-Gardner Foundation. See you at the launch!



R.A. Garber has been editor of the *Townships Sun* since October 2021, and knows a good researcher when she sees one.

A Moment in September

by Frank Willdig

There's a rise above the river;
in a boulder-strewn pasture
on a hill of shallow soil,

I stand where the hawthorn and thistle thrive,
where the land takes on a golden tint,
and a red-tail perches on a dying elm.

The sky is radiant, a gleaming blue,
grasshoppers fill the air
with their ambient drone.

The tempering sun rides high,
and the cows at mid-day
do not seem to require shade.

Summer greens are slowly draining
to reds and yellows and browns,
the sumac flames against a cerulean sky.

It is noon and miles to the north,
the Angelus can be heard
over the fields and woods.

The river is slow and summer dry,
hidden behind the cedars,
the stillness suspends the day.

In this very moment,
a breeze moves over the hissing grasses,
the days grow shorter, the evenings chill.

I have not wasted my life.

Frank Willdig is a long-time resident of the Townships who enjoys writing poetry.



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ETRC History D 3.
 D 2.
Quiz Answers B 1.

John Alfred Poor & the Eastern Townships Railroads

by Bernard Epps

Despite the Assembly's rejection of a charter for the St. Francis Valley Railroad in 1836, Townshippers kept on trying. In 1841, they won a charter for the Eastern Townships Railroad which would connect Sherbrooke to Lake Champlain & the St. Lawrence River at St-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Alexander Tilloch Galt, seeing the potential for improving the value of [British American Land] Company lands and local industries, was prominent among the promoters, but capital could not be raised and the scheme collapsed.

"It gave me such a shock that my hair seemed to start from the roots rather than to stand on end."

In February 1843, Townshippers met in Sherbrooke to consider a railway linking Boston to Montreal through the Eastern Townships, which would give both Canadas [Upper (Ontario) and Lower (Quebec)] and all the Great Lakes access to an ice-free port all winter. Galt was on Company business in England at this time but returned in May 1844, to take a leading role in the scheme. He chaired a committee composed of Benjamin Pomroy, Edward Hale, Samuel Brooks, and others. They were tasked with exploring the possibilities, and Galt went to Boston to learn all he could about railways. On his return, he published *Statistical Information relative to the proposed Rail Road from Montreal to Boston via the Eastern Townships*.

Then John Alfred Poor Blew Into Town.

Poor was a whirlwind of a man — over six feet and 250 pounds — fast-talking, constantly in motion, and bursting with impatient energy. He was a Maine lawyer who'd watched New England's first locomotive arrive in 1834 and felt he'd seen the future.

"It gave me such a shock that my hair seemed to start from the roots rather than to stand on end," he wrote, "and... the locomotive engine grew into a greatness in my mind that left all other created things far behind it as marvels and wonders."

Poor dreamed of making his hometown, Portland, ME, the hub of a transportation network linking Europe to the Great Lakes and the American mid-west, Nova Scotia and the deep south. The Cunard Line had begun swift and regular steamship service between Liverpool and Boston in 1840, but Portland was half-a-day closer and a railway to Montreal would speed that communication to the heartland of the continent. It would bring European news to the prairies and prairie produce to Europe while making Portland (and incidentally John Alfred Poor) rich and powerful.

The Boston & Portland Railway was already under construction. The ambitiously named European & North American Railway was proposed to connect Portland to Halifax, Nova Scotia, scrapping plans for a line to Quebec while shortening the trans-Atlantic distance even further. The next step was a connection to Montreal and the Great Lakes.

"I honor the men who have acquired success in the useful arts as the great benefactors of their age," Poor confessed. "I have honored Watt, Arkwright, Stephenson, Fulton and Whitney more than any of the heroes of war."

A Race by Sleigh Clinched It.

Driven by his vision of a golden age of steam and bursting with vitality, Poor addressed the Eastern Townships businessmen and politicians on the advantages of a connection to Portland over Boston. He won their backing largely because Montreal and Boston promoters were considering a link to an extension of the Champlain & St. Lawrence through Rouses Point to Burlington. Such a route would bypass the Eastern Townships entirely.

The final decision lay with the Montreal Board of Trade. There is a story Poor provided the clinching argument with a race to Montreal. His sleigh covered the 280 miles from Portland in 20 hours, arriving 12 hours ahead of the Boston sleigh. The Board of Trade threw its weight behind Poor's Eastern Townships plan to connect Portland to Montreal and the St. Lawrence & Atlantic won a charter in 1845. The rail was complete in 1853 and immediately purchased by the Grand Trunk Railway.

This story is excerpted from the previously unpublished Volume 2 of The Eastern Townships Adventure by Bernard Epps, planned for publication later in 2024.

He Was A Friend of Mine

by Janice LaDuke

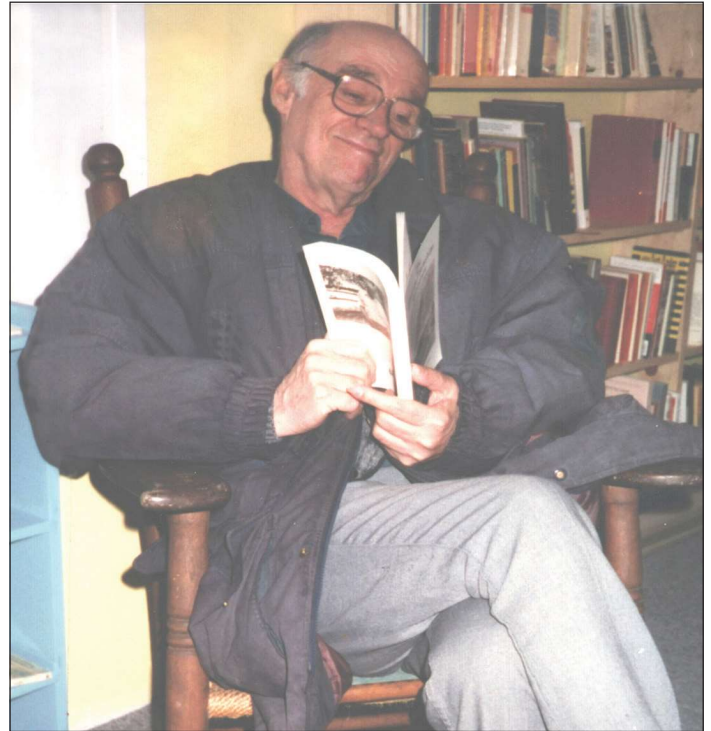
I met Bernie in 1985. I believe it was spring. Kathy Williams and I had just opened McRat's Bookstore in Lennoxville and shortly after we hosted a book launch and reading for Bernie's book, *More Tales of the Townships*. Many people came. Robert Allen, Kathy's husband, organized the event, and he's gone too now.

After that reading, I had only a peripheral awareness of Bernie. His novel, *Pilgarlic the Death*, went into its second edition with Quadrant Editions, which I was half-owner of, but I am ashamed to admit that I did not read the novel till years later!

No, it wasn't until I opened Black Cat Books on Friday, November 13, 1998, that I got to know Bernie. Shortly after opening, Bernie became a regular patron, with a regularity close to clockwork! He was my daily visitor, always giving the little bell on the door a tap with his finger as he entered, then that shy mischievous grin as he placed his good right hand across his lame stroke-inflicted left hand and held it to his body. (Do I have those hands right?) Sometimes we'd chat. Often I'd be wrapping books for mailing and Bernie would help, holding the tape just so here, or the paper just so there. Sometimes I'd tell him that his shirt was buttoned crooked and I'd help him fix it. Other times I just observed the crooked buttoning and told myself to leave the poor man alone. It was only me who was bothered by it! It didn't bother him.

I hated to call Bernie that early in the morning ... because I knew that was when he wrote.

Some days we didn't talk much beyond Hello. I'd be busy with some business matter and he would browse, then settle with a book in the rocking chair in the back corner. I'm sure that some days I clean forgot he was back there! His was always a quiet, companionable presence. I don't remember ever feeling the least bit bothered by his being there for hours on end. Of course, I carried his books, such



Bernie Epps in the Black Cat (Photo: Brenda Jandron).

as were still in print, so we occasionally had our business transactions.

During those first couple of years of Black Cat Books, I took on a number of other jobs and projects in order to support this bad habit of mine — trying to be a bookseller, an English bookseller of English books in Quebec, no less. I had a few friends and accomplices that I could call on to cover the store while I was elsewhere making money, but in September 2000 it became necessary for me to take every single substitute teaching position that was offered to me.

That year I had two principal co-horts: Libbey Griffith and Bernie. My phone would ring at 7:30, sometimes as early as 6:30 in the morning, with a plea for me to take somebody's class at one of the local schools. Yes, I would say immediately. I'll be there. Then, with fingers crossed, I'd call Libbey and/or Bernie. Can you open the store for me? I usually called Libbey first, but some days she had other commitments, so then I'd call Bernie. I hated to call Bernie that early in the morning, not because I thought I'd wake him up but because I knew that was when he wrote.

I don't think he ever turned me down. And whereas I would inevitably be in a bit of a frenzy by this

time, anxious about the store, anxious about whatever class I was taking on, getting my daughter up and ready for school and lunches made, Bernie would always be the voice of calm, quiet certainty. Certainly, he could open the store. Yes, he had

*Bernie, Bernie.
Always a gentleman.
Always just a little bit
quirky.*

his key, not a problem, don't worry. What a sigh of relief he was for me! No great problems ever arose while Bernie was in charge of the Black Cat, and though his tiny crabbed handwriting in the receipt book was sometimes difficult to decipher, the accounts were always in perfect order. I think he enjoyed the responsibility, and I certainly appreciated his easy willingness to help out.

It may have been in that year that Bernie had to move. The house in which he was living was to be torn down to make way for a big brick building that now houses the liquor store and, at that time, the video store! Bernie found a new apartment just up the road a block or two. His landlord was going to help him empty the old apartment, but he needed someone to move him up the street to the new place. I had Mr. Blue, at the time; an old blue mini van. Bernie and I arranged that he would have all of his worldly goods down in the driveway by six o'clock when I closed up the store, then I'd come over with the van and we'd load her up. So we did that, and it may have taken us two or three loads with Mr. Blue, but it wasn't far.

I remember wanting to help him get unpacked and set up in the new place, but there was a certain formality to our relationship that made too much help seem over-solicitous. I knew he had other friends who would be by to see how he was doing over the next couple of days, and besides, it was getting late. I helped him move a few things around, and somewhere in there a small blue delft cow came to light. It was one of those china cows that is actually a pitcher! I admired it, being a hopeless sucker for any sort of blue and white china, and for those china cow pitchers! Of course, Bernie gave me the little pitcher and I felt entirely foolish for having carried on so, but he did want to repay me in some way for helping him with his move,

so I swallowed my awkward embarrassment and graciously accepted the gift. I treasure it, still.

Bernie, Bernie. Always a gentleman. Always just a little bit quirky. He never took part in the writing group that met at the Black Cat one evening a week, though he would occasionally make a brief appearance, just to check on us, I suppose.

In 2000, when Bernie compiled his chapbook, *Please, Sir, I'd Rather Be Ravished*, we had a book launch and reading at the Black Cat. When a woman took offence to his use of the word "ravish," claiming that it was akin to rape, we looked up the word in every dictionary on the Black Cat's shelves, heartily assuring each other that to be ravished was something quite other than to be raped and, quite unlike rape, to be ravished was something desirable! Which, of course, Bernie knew all along.

I remember bringing Bernie out to our house in Bulwer for a party of music and food and friendship under the apple trees. I remember him at the storytellers' meetings, gaily regaling us with Stanley Holloway's monologues, particularly "Poor Albert who was et by a bear..." I remember Bernie getting a coffee and a donut at the Church Street Café, then settling in for the music.

I remember Bernie talking about Jennifer, about her upcoming graduation, how proud he was of her, how maybe, just maybe he could go to London, England, to see her graduate. ... I remember the dream slowly becoming a possibility, then a reality. He went! He sent me a postcard, then a little book by a writer we both admired. *The Queen's Knickers*, by Nicholas Allan. The book I have in hand, the postcard lost in a drawerful of correspondence, but it will surface. Bernie. I thought you'd come back to us. I really did.

*That rocking chair in
the back corner was
always "Bernie's chair."
Other people sat there
... but I forgave them.*

Bernie did not come back to Lennoxville. He suffered another stroke while in England, and when he finally returned to Canada, it was to Kingston where his sister was able to care for him. We corresponded a couple of times, but this stroke had

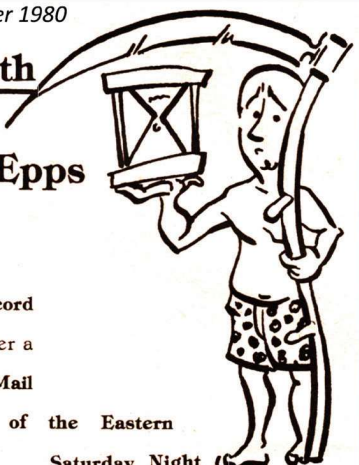
left him in worse shape, and writing anything was challenging. In July 2007, news came that he had passed away.

I missed him, in the bookstore especially. That rocking chair in the back corner was always "Bernie's chair." Of course, other people sat there but ... I forgave them, as they just didn't know! Yes, I miss Bernie. He truly was a friend of mine.

Ad in Townships Sun, November 1980

Pilgarlic the Death

by Bernard Epps



"Vigorous story of life"
Sherbrooke Record

"Existential meaning under a simple surface"
Toronto Globe & Mail

"The Raintree County of the Eastern Townships!"
Saturday Night

Years later, after attending some of the wonderful plays produced by the Eaton Corner Historical Society, written by and acted by people in the community, it occurred to me that Bernie's novel, *Pilgarlic the Death*, could appear in that venue. If someone would just write a script from the novel... I mentioned this idea to Scott Stevenson, Barbara

Verity, and Gilles Peloquin, all good friends of Bernie, and they agreed that this was a good idea. Who would write it? Finally, I took myself in hand and said, Just do it!

So, I did. I created a script based on the novel. It was difficult to have to leave so much out. Tough decisions! But I decided that if I could just give an introduction to the novel, a hint as to where it went, the flavour of it, and the characters in it, produce something to pique people's interest in the novel. ... I came up with something, and received the kind and generous permission of Bernie's daughter, Jennifer Epps, to go ahead with it.

I presented the play to the Eaton Corner theatre group, and though many chose not to be involved in something so different from the other plays they had done, a core group agreed to work with me on it. That core group astounded me with their enthusiasm and determination and support! They were truly amazing to work with, and the play was presented to a warm, receptive audience on a cold, icy day and evening in February 2019. I had my lucky stars to thank, and Bernie!

Yes, he truly was a friend of mine.

Janice LaDuke lives, works, and plays in Bulwer, Quebec. She has been in the Townships 46 years, give or take a few. She is a librarian/ bookseller/ gardener/ baker/ musician/ paddler/ Gramma and sometimes she writes.



Cast of the *Pilgarlic* play in Sawyerville, March 2019; Janice LaDuke on the left. (Photo: Linda Hoy)

Story Behind the Best Feature Story

by Marie Moliner

EDITOR'S NOTE:

On June 28, 2024, the *Townships Sun* took home two first-place awards from the 2023 Quebec Community Newspaper Awards — the Best Feature Story Award and the Best Community Newspaper Promotion Award.

When editor Rachel Garber encouraged me to write about the decade since the Megantic train disaster, I worried that I could not give this story the time required to honour the memories of a community that is still struggling.

On July 8, 2013, because railway barons cut corners and staff, a renegade train obliterated Megantic's downtown core, leaving the community to grieve 47 friends, neighbours, and family out enjoying a warm rainy summer's night at the pub. A decade later, federal, provincial, and municipal disputes persist over expropriations and rail bypasses, arousing emotions that continue to tear the community apart.

Writing the story "Megantic, Then and Now," the weight of the facts sat like an eagle on my shoulder. It was a privilege to be trusted by those who agreed to be interviewed. This includes the courageous young mayor trying to guide her town's recovery, the photographer who arrived on scene shortly after the first explosions in Megantic, and a local expert in railway engineering signals and communications, who made it clear that "This disaster was avoidable."

Congratulations to the second place award winner Cedric Gallant of the *Nunatsiq News*, weekly

newspaper for Nunavut and the Nunavik territory of Quebec, published since 1973. His story recounts the rediscovery of a wartime Nazi weather station abandoned near the Quebec Labrador border. Kudos also go to third place recipient was Trevor Greenway, editor of *Low Down to Hull & Back News*, for his story, "Wakefield mom has 'no options.'" (For details visit "News ~ Notes" at TownshipsSun.ca)

Together, our three publications share over 150 years in the English-speaking Quebec community news business. This is a remarkable accomplishment. The QCNA community media are to be commended for persevering in the face of government cutbacks and financial woes.

Community newspapers are relevant. Local readers can smell the truth.

Lastly, lest you be naive enough to think a train wreck will never happen in your backyard, beware. If you live by a railroad that transports active goods, it is just a question of time. Railway incidents and disasters are not decreasing in any significant way. *Global News* reported 913 rail accidents were signalled to Canada's Transportation Safety Board in 2023, with 67 fatalities and 45 serious injuries.



Marie Moliner, Rachel Garber, and John Mackley at the QCNA Awards Gala (Photo: Scott Stevenson)

Read the *Townships Sun's* award-winning article at townshipssun.ca/megantic-then-and-now/

Townships Young Voices Wins QCNA Award

by Marie Moliner

The inaugural edition of the Townships Young Voices project earned first place in the Best Community Newspaper Promotion Awards at the Quebec Community Newspaper Association meeting in Montreal on June 28.

The original purpose of TYVoices was to raise the profile of the *Townships Sun* magazine and to make it more relevant to English-speaking Townshippers of all ages, with a focus on involving youth. Getting the inaugural edition off the ground took a lot of heavy lifting by many volunteers. Winning the QCNA Best Community Promotion Award acknowledges the worth of these efforts.

Our gratitude goes out to all the volunteers who share this QCNA Award with us, especially the 2023 team. Marie Moliner, Assistant Editor, coordinated the project and captained the Instagram posts. Rachel Garber, Editor, conceived of the project and carried out communications for it. Local experts in poetry, photography, visual arts, fiction, and nonfiction led a series of workshops that were captured by videographers Abigail Whitcher of Townshippers' Association, John Mackley, and Léa Côté. These were posted on our YouTube channel, rounding out the offering to participants.

2024 Awards Just Wrapped Up

TYVoices lives on. More than 100 guests attended our second Awards Gala on April 28, 2024, at the Lac Brome Community Centre in Knowlton. The 2024 edition doubled the number of participants and awarded \$3,250 in cash prizes. Four jurors reviewed 80 anonymized entries from all across the Eastern Townships, and selected 21 finalists, aged 11-29. Their winning works were published in the special July/August Townships Young Voices edition, guest edited by Marie Moliner. We continue to receive overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, families and teachers, and the TYVoices initiative continues to benefit the *Townships Sun*. Young English and French speakers who write in English have now engaged creatively in their communities. A number of participants continue to submit articles and artwork to this magazine. We see a more dynamic online presence and engagement by youth, and a taste for intergenerational teamwork as evidenced by youth participation in board meetings. Donations increased from funding partners, and our media and community partnerships continue to grow.

TYVoices received excellent media coverage from CBC Radio, CJMQ-FM Radio, CIDI-FM Radio, the Sherbrooke Record, Le Reflet du Lac, and Le Progrès de Coaticook.

Townships Young Voices represents a pivotal initiative in the Township Sun's current cycle of renewal. Yes, TYVoices successfully raised awareness and expanded the readership of this small magazine, the only community magazine in English specifically serving the Eastern Townships English-speaking community. But beyond that, it helped transform the magazine's very personality and relevance to its readership.

2025 Awards to Launch!

With new partners, including Townshippers' Association, we are preparing to launch the third annual TYVoices Awards Competition. We look forward to announcing this new initiative and our partners at the *Townships Sun* AGM on Friday, September 27, at 5 p.m. See pages 27 and 28 for details.

Read details about the *Townships Sun*'s first place Community Newspaper Promotion award at townshipssun.ca/2785-2/. Congratulations to the second place award recipient, *Nunatsiak News* (a weekly newspaper serving Nunavut and the Nunavut territory in Quebec since 1973), for their 50th anniversary special edition, nunatsiaq.com/nunatsiaq50/. We also congratulate the third place winner of this award, *The Low Down to Hull and Back News*, for their special edition demonstrating the necessity of community journalism townshipssun.ca/2024-qcna-best-community-newspaper-promotion-awards/.



Assistant Editor **Marie Moliner** fearlessly promotes TYVoices, finding funding and supervising youth volunteers, in addition to writing scintillating articles for the *Townships Sun*. She also coordinates the magazine's 50th anniversary activities.

Join Us for Our

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

NEW DATE!

Friday, September 27, 2024, at 5 p.m.
3355 College St. (Lennoxville Borough),
Sherbrooke. Downstairs conference
room & back lawn (weather
permitting).

The Townships Sun warmly invites our subscribers to our
Annual General Meeting.

ON THE AGENDA

- Help launch the 2025 Townships Young Voices Awards
- Learn what the Townships Sun is up to in its 50th year of publication
- Approve bylaw amendment
- Elect a new Board of Directors
- Celebrate retiring Board members
- Enjoy good company!

BYLAW AMENDMENT

CURRENT BYLAW 5c: The Board of Directors shall choose from its membership a Chairperson, a Secretary, and a Financial Manager.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT, BYLAW 5c: The Board of Directors shall choose from its membership a Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer.

NOTE: Marion Greenlay (non-member of board) is our Financial Manager. The treasurer will work with her, and may head a Finance Committee.

For more information



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Winners will
be published
in the
Townships Sun

tyvoices

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JAN. 31
2025**

Please join us
September 27th
when TYVoices
2024/25
is launched
at our AGM,
5 p.m. at
3355 College St.,
Lennoxville

townshipssun.ca/townships-young-voices

