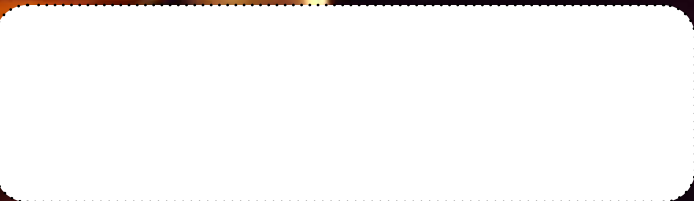
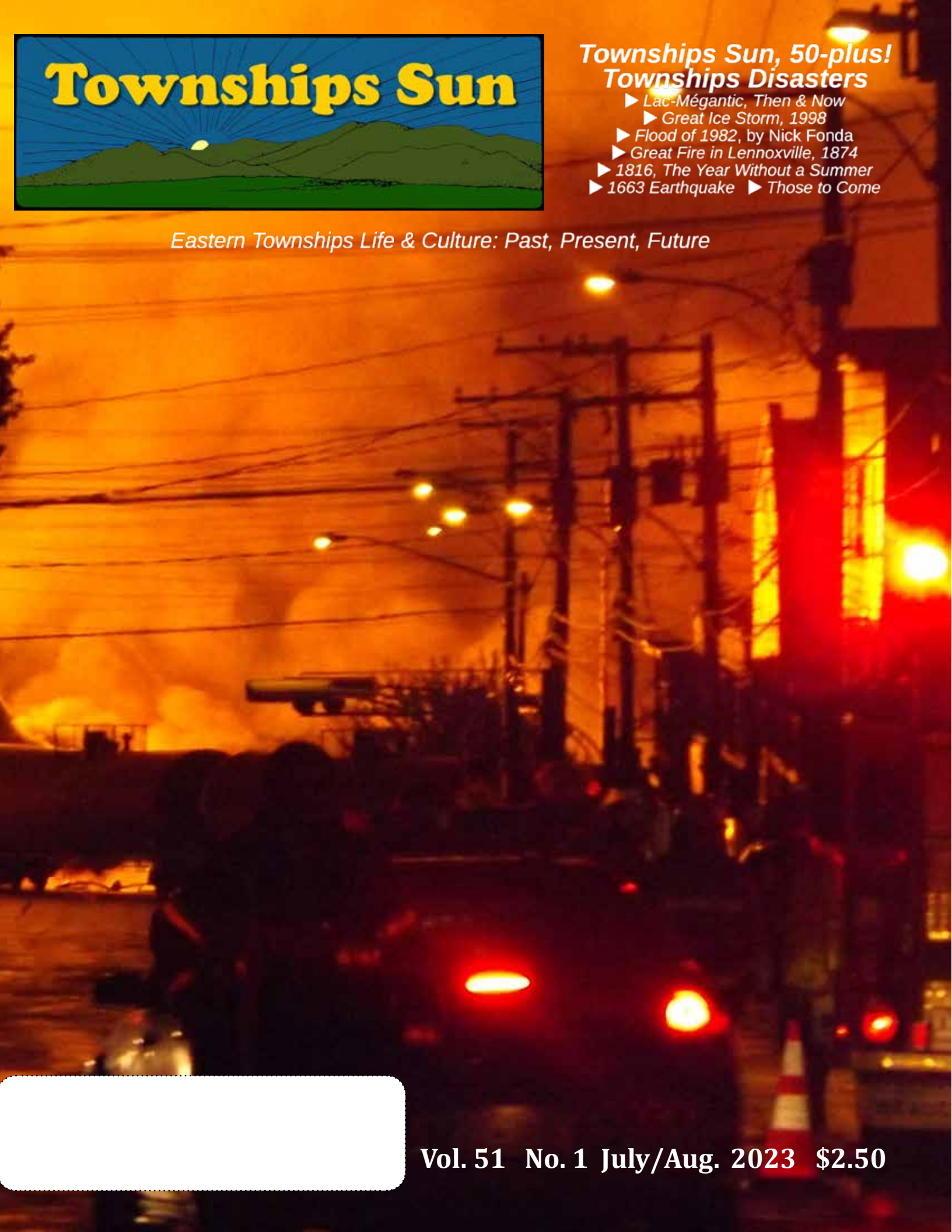




**Townships Sun, 50-plus!
Townships Disasters**

- ▶ Lac-Mégantic, Then & Now
- ▶ Great Ice Storm, 1998
- ▶ Flood of 1982, by Nick Fonda
- ▶ Great Fire in Lennoxville, 1874
- ▶ 1816, The Year Without a Summer
- ▶ 1663 Earthquake ▶ Those to Come

Eastern Townships Life & Culture: Past, Present, Future



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28 pages!

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Townships Young Voices Poetry Award Winner. (Photo: John Mackley)



COVER PHOTO (Front & Back)

Corey Bellam is a journalist and nature lover who lives in St-Isidore-de-Clifton, Quebec. "I love to take photos of all sorts of things," he says. He does that all around the Haut-Saint-François for the Colebrook Chronicle, a newspaper in northern New Hampshire. He was one of the first photojournalists to arrive after the train derailed and exploded in Megantic (Lac-Mégantic) exactly 10 years ago, on July 6, 2013.

The cover bears one of his photos of the resulting fire. Three other photos by Bellam are on page 14.



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Whirlwind

by R.A. Garber

It's been a whirlwind, this past year. Besides publishing nine issues, look at what we've done.



library at Bishop's College School (the TYVoices project placed a year's complimentary subscription there and in 30 other school libraries).

Townships Young Voices

More than 100 attended the Awards Luncheon on March 26, a gala intergenerational event. Yayy!

You've noticed the art, photos, stories, and poems from Townships youth in our pages? Expect more! All from the 2023 Young Voices Awards recipients.

On page 2, check out our Instagram and YouTube channels, created by Léa Côté, John Mackley and Marie Moliner.

Ana's Mission

Another outcome of this project is our superb summer volunteer editorial assistant, Ana Martinez, from Brazil. She first saw the *Townships Sun* in the

Ana has agreed to analyse the TYVoices feedback, put order in our subscription lists, send out renewal notices, write an article for the September issue, and create Instagram posts. If she calls you, please congratulate our new 18-year-old volunteer! And please renew your subscription this summer: the price is going up in October. (Sorry, but paper costs are soaring!)

Archives

One more project: the Bélanger-Gardner Foundation funded the Archives project, preserving five decades of *Townships Sun* issues in our office, at the Eastern Townships Resource Centre, and at the *Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ)*.

John Mackley is finishing scanning years of tabloid pages, and depositing them at the BANQ. At our AGM, we plan to make these archives publicly available. Please come!

You are Invited to the Townships Sun's AGM & Archives Launch

The *Townships Sun* warmly invites our members and subscribers to our Annual General Meeting on Friday, September 22, at 5:30 p.m. at the Uplands Cultural & Heritage Centre, 5 Speid St. (Lennoxville Borough), Sherbrooke.

View the launch of our new online archives, sharing 50 years of the *Townships Sun* with the public.

Enjoy hors d'oeuvres and good company!

Info: 819-566-7424, contact@townshipssun.ca

Community Forum

Have a comment? Email editor@townshipssun.ca, or post on [Facebook/ TownshipsSun](#). Comments may be published in print or on our Facebook page, and edited for length, clarity, and accuracy.

Correction

The "Church, Counterfeiting, and Printmaking" article (June 2023, page 16) said Bernice Sorge's printmaking group "Encreguenille-Inkrag" was formed with grants from the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs. In fact, this well-known co-op was called Estampille (1987-1997), and it preceded Encreguenille (2013).

Community Forum

I would like to thank you and other volunteers for having this large and enjoyable event [March 26th Townships Young Voices Awards Luncheon].

I was happy to see so many young folks and would like to mention that with their attendance and support we will be able to keep our English-speaking community more connected in this French-speaking environment.

Since I have moved to a seniors' residence, I have had no social contact with anyone. I used to enjoy attending all sorts of events based on and organized by English-speaking people. Right now it makes my life very lonely and last December I also lost my wife, Alice Boomhower. And of course I have no transportation to go anywhere. I was very grateful to find a ride to attend your invitation.

I hope you can or will organize another meeting. And instead of awards, perhaps have some music by some young and adult Townshippers?

*Sincerely, as always, keep your Townships Sun shining,
Casey Vriesendorp, Esq., Coaticook, Quebec
p.s. I will be 90 next January.*

ETRC Townships History Quiz

by Jazmine Aldrich

Question 1. The photograph below, from about 1920, pictures two simultaneous Townships disasters—a train wreck and a flood. Where was it taken?

- A-Richmond B- East Angus C- Danville D-Huntingville

Question 2. Which of the following Townships churches held a memorial service following the sinking of the Titanic on April 14, 1912?

- A- St. James' Episcopal Church, Bedford B- Compton Methodist Church
C- St. James' Anglican Church, Hatley D- All of the above

Question 3. Which Townships school suffered the loss of its main building after a chimney fire spread on May 28, 1938?

- A- Dunham Ladies' College
B- Stanstead College
C- Bishop's College School
D- King's Hall, Compton



Photo Credit: P020 Eastern Townships Heritage Foundation fonds

Answers: Page 21



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

Gripe! Gripe! Gripe!

Do you have a pet peeve or a serious complaint? It might merit a **Townships Moon!** Please email John Mackley at: editor@townshipssun.ca



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Lucky to be Alive!

by John Mackley

Accidents happen. Nature takes its course. Considering the extremely violent nature of the universe as a whole, it's amazing the Earth or any planet anywhere is habitable at all.

The 4.5-billion-year existence of the Earth has been a litany of catastrophic events: continent-altering seismic shifts, devastating earthquakes, volcanic upheavals, multiple ice ages, floods, and asteroid impacts, to name a few.

Evidence of life on Earth has been confirmed as far back as 3.7 billion of those years. Scientists have found evidence of [five major mass extinction events](#) in that time, resulting from nature's normal processes, and leading to nearly total annihilation of life, repeatedly.

We don't truly recognize how lucky we are to be alive.

I've often looked up into a clear sky and marveled that a mere 16 kilometres above the surface of the earth, the thin layers of the atmosphere can be as cold as a bone-chilling -60°C. Yet at the same distance beneath our feet, down in the earth, temperatures can rise to a [scorching 480°C!](#)

The [habitable zone](#) where life has any hope of surviving is extremely thin. Almost all life exists between about 500 meters (1,640 feet) below the ocean's surface to about six kilometers (3.75 miles) above sea level.

Only since the most recent ice age abated have our species and a wide variety of plants and wildlife adapted to survive in our current, although ever changing, environment.

Even if we aren't constantly aware of it, the hazards of nature abound, threatening us from every direction nearly all the time. We have learned to deal with them by building ever more fortified housing. Concrete and steel apartment blocks are a far cry from early lean-to shelters and grass huts. We have improved modes of transportation: We no longer pause our horse and buggy under over-hanging trees to wait out a passing rain storm, but simply turn on the windshield wipers and keep on driving.

And yet. Although we have countered many of the life-threatening extremes in temperature and weather, our technological advances have come to pose risks of their own. Nearly everyday we can hear about severe highway

accidents, airplane crashes, or faulty construction leading to collapsed buildings, bridges, and other infrastructure. Not to mention destructive home and business fires resulting from sub-standard wiring or lax construction practices.

Some catastrophes are beyond our control, but a good many local and regional disasters have been foreseeable and avoidable, were it not for the negligence or pernicious incompetence of those in a position to prevent them.

The [recent spate of wild fires in the Maritimes](#) have been deemed "man-caused" because there had been no thunderstorms in the region, ruling out lightening as a cause. The epidemic of train derailments in the past decades have nearly all been a result of human error and maintenance failures.



Road washout on Route 255 in 2019. (Photo: John Mackley)

On the plus side, the once common practice of building homes on flood plains has finally been recognized as unwise. Building codes are progressively being updated and stiffened. Automobile safety standards, as well, are constantly advancing as engineers learn from the mistakes of the past.

History is replete with avoidable accidents and disasters that "we saw coming" without taking

adequate precautions. In the public or private sector, conscientious engineers and insider whistle-blowers regularly find themselves labeled "Chicken-Little" for warning that current practices or sub-standard materials or workmanship may lead to cataclysmic failure.

This month's *Townships Sun* is on the theme of Disasters. Rather than awarding the Townships Moon to any particular agency or institution, a great big Moon goes to all government, business, and other responsible individuals who continue "business as usual" under the assumption that short-term "good enough" will still be good enough long-term.

We truly are lucky to be alive.



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

Flood of 1982: A Paradigm Shift

by Nick Fonda

The flood that Richmond experienced in 1982 was no less destructive than earlier floods. It also marked a paradigm shift in the St. Francis River's long history of flooding.

For almost all of the 10,000 years that the St. Francis has traced its V-shaped run to the St. Lawrence River, it has flooded annually, and on occasion more than once in the same year.

Only in the last two or three decades has the river not frozen solid every winter and experienced break-up in the spring with ensuing ice-jams that temporarily flooded riparian lowlands. Some years, a heavy snow melt a few weeks after break-up creates rivulets that swell the brooks, creeks, and tributaries of the St. Francis, causing it to again overflow its banks. Less frequently, a heavy

summer downpour might provoke a flash flood. The river has also been known to flood in the winter.

Early settlers and their descendants took note and made accommodations.

For much of the first half of the 20th century, the painter Frederick Simpson Coburn spent his winters working in his Montreal studios. Summers, he spent experimenting with photography while living in a small house in the flood plain at the foot of Cemetery Road in what was then Upper Melbourne. His neighbour was George Lovett, an English-born mechanical engineer who was in charge of the repair shops in Richmond where steam engines were maintained. Every fall, after Coburn returned to Montreal, Lovett would raise Coburn's house on stilts for the winter. Several feet off the ground, it escaped flood



Winder Street: The day was cold, dead cows were floating down the swollen river and people were yelling to get off the bridge,

For the Townships Sun of May 1982, Bernard Epps wrote about the 1982 flood and John Boudreau took this photo of the flooding in Lennoxville.

damage and avoided being swept downstream. In the spring, the relatively unscathed house would be lowered back to ground level.

Across the river, at Gunter's Hotel in Richmond, over an even longer span of time, a pool or lottery was held every spring to guess the exact hour that the river would spill over its banks. Like all other buildings along much of Main Street, Gunter's saw its basement flooded every year during spring thaw. When the river started rising quickly, a careful eye was kept on a mark etched on the stone foundations, a few feet up from the dirt floor. When the water in the basement touched the mark, the exact time was noted and a winner would be declared. Some years, it was more than just the basement that flooded. In the spring of 1942, while the wooden tables and chairs in the tavern floated in five feet of water, Jim Gunter and his sons, Cliff and Doug, sold beer from the hotel's second storey windows to customers who arrived by canoe or rowboat.

To some extent, the flooding in Richmond, or at least its severity, is a result of human activity.

Richmond's first train station was located at the south end of town, about a mile upstream from where the current station—now serving as a restaurant and motel—stands. The move to this second location, only a few years after the first station was erected, was to accommodate a new rail line linking Quebec City to Richmond (and therefore Montreal and Portland, Maine). The site chosen was a lowland that had to be extensively filled in to create solid ground for the station, the repair shops, and the rail yard that served the Grand Trunk Railway and later the Canadian National Railway. In an age before bulldozers and backhoes, the job must have been unimaginably laborious.

From our perspective today, it was also ill-conceived. Marsh land and floodplain that could absorb or contend with high water levels was replaced with a slightly elevated, solidly built embankment. The new rail yards constricted the river and deprived it of its natural release valve, the now filled-in lowlands. To the detriment of the lower end of Main Street, the river was made more susceptible to ice jams.

The flood of 1982 was all the worse for having come immediately on the heels of the flood of 1981 which had been only a little less devastating.

On Monday, April 19, 1982, *Sherbrooke Record* editor Charles Bury wrote, "there was 22 feet more water than usual and firemen patrolled in boats. About 165 families were evacuated."

Bury reported that the mayor, André Lupien, "sent telegrams to Quebec Premier René Lévesque, Environment Minister Marcel Leger and MNA Yvon Vallières, asking that Richmond be declared a disaster area. Citizens were angry [...] and bitter that promised help from the provincial government had not materialized. Last year during the general election campaign, Lévesque promised that 'never again' would Richmond have to live through another flood unprotected."

The protection, in the form of a kilometer-long dyke between the river and the lowest-lying section of Main Street, was built the following summer, but that was too late for Paul Desmarais. Paul was a grandson of Édouard-Stanislas Desmarais, a very successful businessman who, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, simultaneously served as mayor of Richmond and Member of the National Assembly for the Richmond riding. Following his grandfather's footsteps, Paul opened a hardware store and lumber yard on Main Street in the early 1970s.

He was on track to do well. But Fate can be fickle. In 1978, he was hit with a first setback. A fire broke out, destroying his store and lumberyard. Undaunted, he rebuilt. The new store—in contrast to the brick storefronts that had been built a century earlier—was bright, airy, and spacious. Business was good. Then came the flood of 1981. Lumber floated out of the yard, disappearing just like the lumber that had gone up in smoke three years earlier. Paul cleaned up, restocked, and reopened, only to be completely wiped out by the flood of 1982.

What wasn't lost was the man himself. Despite financial ruin, he kept his easy smile and calm demeanour.

In retrospect, the flood of 1982—Richmond's last flood—marked another turning point. By 1982, scientists like David Suzuki were starting to warn us that our climate was changing because of excessive amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. [Oil companies had been aware for some time](#) that the burning of fossil fuels was the root cause.

The relatively smooth transitions from one season to the next started giving way to unpredictable swings in temperature and increasingly violent weather events. Since 1982, Richmond's concern has shifted from anxiety about flooding to worry about our dearth of water. No one longs for the floods of yore, but it's hard not to notice that, over the last two decades, the St. Francis River has grown ever shallower and is increasingly dotted with sandbars that grow larger and more numerous every summer. The problem of too much water has become a problem of too little water.



Nick Fonda has been writing about the people who make the Eastern Townships special for close to 50 years. He lives and writes in Richmond.

Year Without a Summer

by Scott Verity Stevenson

This year, Sunday, May 28, the skies over our western horizon were thick and orange. Orford was almost invisible from Island Brook. It was partly humidity but also, likely, smoke from Alberta. Some in the Townships complained of headaches, perhaps related, perhaps not. Others may not have noticed.

berta and Halifax. Speaking to my sister-in-law, Corinna, I learned they were also burning close to her, in Sayward on Vancouver Island. She had received the alert only an hour or two earlier. The skies filled with smoke, blocking out the sun. The temperature dropped from 22 degrees to 16 or 17, she said.



Orford is small in this photo from New Mexico Road in Newport, but the haze also made it barely visible.

Townshippers in 1816 certainly noticed. Their skies—and their weather—had changed dramatically. Volcanic dust from a massive eruption on the other side of the world contributed to what became known as the “Year Without a Summer.” It was devastating here and around the world, but our ancestors couldn’t have known what happened.

“It was only decades after the event that two and two were put together,” said Environment Canada Warning Preparedness Meteorologist Geoff Coulson. “There was no real understanding of the jet stream. It was 70 years before the event was understood.”

Fast forward 200 years, again to late May. On the 29th, the news reported wildfires burning, most notably, in Al-

Particles in the air from either smoke or volcanic ash can cool air temperatures, experts from Environment Canada and the Geological Survey of Canada said recently.

The year after Mount Tambora erupted in April 1815 in today’s Indonesia, the average global temperature dropped by a degree, more or less, according to scientists, and local temperatures plunged more significantly. In the newly settled Eastern Townships of Lower Canada, it was disaster.

“The 6th of June, 1816, it commenced to snow, with the wind from the north-west, and it snowed for three

days, the weather as cold as winter,” Leonard Channell wrote in his 1896 *History of Compton County: 1692-1896*. He attributed the quote to Alden Learned of Learned Plain. “The leaves were all killed and nearly all the birds died.”

“It ruined agriculture,” Environment Canada’s Senior Climatologist David Phillips said. “The cruel thing for farmers is that there were warm bouts during that year. They would plant again.” But the cold would return. “It was really a bad situation, a lot of starvation.”

In Frederick Edmund Hurd’s 2021 book, *Footprints Into Newport Township: Revealing a Hidden History of Lives Lived*, he tells the story of one of the Township’s first settlers, David Metcalf. “David made his last entry in the *First*

Records of Newport in 1816 where he listed the death of his daughter Candace in October of that year, his last duty as Clerk of Newport Township.

“The Metcalf families had settled on a farm near Grove Hill; however, due to the ‘short crop’ of 1816, David abandoned his farm and moved back to Vermont in the spring of 1817.”

Channell’s account from Alden Learned tells a similar story. “On account of the cold summer and hard frosts for two or three years in succession, provisions of all kinds were very high, flour selling from \$15 to \$18 per barrel. Many of the farms were left vacant, and half of the settlers left the country.”

“Severe frosts occurred every month,” Massachusetts historian [William Atkins wrote in his 1887 *History of Hawley*](#).

Vermont’s population decreased by 10,000 or 15,000, geologist Robert Evans wrote in a July 2002 article entitled “Blast From the Past” in the *Smithsonian Magazine*. “Thousands left New England for what they hoped would be a more hospitable climate west of the Ohio River.”

Tambora was the “largest eruption in 1300 years,” said Geological Survey volcanologist Melanie Kelman. Its plume of ash went 45 kilometres high, sending out 41 cubic kilometres of particles, including sulphur dioxide and “very, very tiny” sand-like ash.

“It was like it was on steroids,” Phillips said, adding that 41 cubic kilometres is the size of Prince Edward Island 25 metres deep.

Most of the particles stayed in the atmosphere—“in the stratosphere,” he said, for two to three years. “They can affect temperatures for months, up to two years.”

Such ash, like smoke in the atmosphere, causes “very red sunrises and sunsets,” Coulson said.

“It appears to have been very trying times in those days, for even those who remained were on the point of leaving when things changed for the better,” Channell wrote.

“This explains why many of the land grants issued to some of the original Associates were abandoned, leaving those lands open to reassignment or sale to other settlers,” Hurd reported. “The weather suddenly began to change in the spring of 1820, finally giving relief.”

What of Today’s Smoke?

Although the immediate local effects of current wildfires are drastic and devastating in their own right, their larger widespread effect pales in comparison to Tambora, the scientists told us.

“Wood smoke is very different from volcanic ash,” Kelman said.

“You can smell the smoke and see a haze, but it’s not enough to lower the temperature,” Phillips said, when

asked if the Alberta wildfires could affect our weather in Quebec this year. “I don’t think so.”

Smoke, like volcanic ash, travels farther distances when it gets carried high up into the atmosphere. It moves along with air currents such as the jet stream, traveling from west to east across Canada. Then local weather can cause the upper air to come down, in high-pressure systems in particular.

When the particulate matter works its way down, we experience poor air quality, Coulson said. “The air quality can still be affected here.” He also said that if smoke stays, it inevitably leads to less sunshine and therefore cooler air. This is more obvious locally where the smoke is heavier.

Evans climbed Tambora before writing his 2002 article. “Looking into that crater [5 km across and 900 m deep], and having familiarized myself with others’ research on the consequences of the eruption, I saw as if for the first time how the planet and its life-forms are linked. The material that it ejected into the atmosphere perturbed the climate, destroyed crops, spurred disease, made some people go hungry and others migrate.”

Ultimately, Coulson said, “Everything is linked to everything else. A change that occurs in one part of a system can affect other things in the system”—including the global weather system.



Scott Verity Stevenson farms and writes in Newport, Quebec, near the village of Island Brook.

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Footprints author Fred Hurd and his family recently donated this invaluable document to the Eastern Townships Resource Centre at Bishop’s University.

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Friends of Friends

by Bernice Angeline Sorge

We moved to the Eastern Townships in 1976, and I started a barter system with a few people I got to know: art for a handwoven rag rug, seedlings for homemade cheese, paintings for restaurant meals. Most people I knew were doing a bit of bartering, an idealistic project that was more symbolic than practical. At that time, I was reading Marx and Kropotkin, involved in growing my own organic food, and part of a bio-food co-op.

We are all interconnected and co-dependent; we need each other.

I want to tell you about my experience in the ice storm of 1998. I was staying at a friend's house in Montreal one night a week, while doing my Master's in Art Therapy. On January 5, I was up half the night working on my assignments. I heard something going on outside. It was like "Raindrop," that famous Chopin prelude. I fell asleep with the pen in my hand, probably just in time not to hear the disaster unfold.

In the morning, I looked out the window. My car was across the street, but it didn't look like a car. Something was not right. I went to the bathroom and splashed my face with water to clear my eyes. I looked out again. My car was like a block of ice. Trees were all over the road,

shiny like Christmas decorations. Soldiers were everywhere, cutting them down.

In the ice storm, we immediately had to think of how to get the basics we needed to survive. Credit cards were useless; there was no electricity to run the machines. Even cash was becoming more and more scarce. The village handed out \$100 cash to each citizen, a meagre one-time gift to see us through.

If you are hungry, how useful is it if the stores are all closed or running out of food? Who wants money over needed supplies? When roads were closed, and bridges too, the thought of vital necessities running out crossed our mind.

We got a generator from Alberta because of a friend who had a contact there. But it ran on gas. Would gas be rationed or not available?

There it was, my car covered in ice about ten inches thick! I turned on my friend's radio. She was lucky to have electricity; power was down in the region where I lived, Dunham. My first thought was to go out, clear my car, and go home. I borrowed a hammer and went out. It was impossible to crack the ice. I chipped away for a while and gave up.

Ice Age: Storm-of-the-Century on a Dairy Farm

by Heather Darch

It was one of the largest natural disasters in Canadian history. [Statistics Canada neatly summarizes the 1998 Ice Storm](#) by the numbers: Over 18 per cent of Canada's population, including 56 per cent of Quebec, were impacted by the storm. Over 1,000 power transmission towers were toppled and more than 30,000 wooden utility poles were broken. At its height, close to 1.4 million people in Quebec were left without electricity.

The statistics for dairy farms hit as hard as the falling branches at the time. Nearly one-quarter of all Canadian dairy cows (274,000) were located within the storm zone, the majority in Quebec. In all, 1,300 farms were without power. Cows not milked regularly were vulnerable to mastitis and many became sick. Without veterinary services, some had to be euthanized. Milk processing plants were closed and milk trucks were off the roads. Farmers were forced to dump 10 million litres of milk worth over \$6 million.

Our Ice Storm experience in Pike River, Quebec, was not as dire as some farmers faced in what was known

as the "[Black Triangle](#)," in the [Montérégie](#). For us, the storm began on January 5 with the sound of crashing branches and the dreary, relentless drumming of freezing rain on the window. My husband, Mike Gasser, came in from milking that morning, concerned. We watched as trees in our garden split in two and branches littered our road. When the power went out later that day, our world closed in.

Besides having a baby and a two-year-old to care for, we had calves and heifers, 70 cows in our tie-barn that needed feeding and milking twice per day, a dry (pregnant) cow barn, and in a larger loose-housing barn, we had 200 more cows.

Mike and his dad Ernest fired up tractor-powered generators to get the milking machines running, keep water flowing, and ventilation fans and lights turned on. Adding to the burden was the daily maintenance of the generators and keeping the tractors filled with fuel.

Knowing we would be without water at home—no electricity to pump the well!—I decided to get a jug of water at a nearby store. There was none left.

Then I heard the bridges were closed, including the Champlain. People were advised not to walk downtown or near tall buildings as ice could fall into the street.

Realizing that I was stuck in Montreal, and I didn't know for how long, I thought about a friend of a friend, a retired dancer in her late eighties. She lived alone in a downtown apartment. Through a series of calls, I found someone who would help me pick her up. He was my friend's friend, a Turkish guy, a very nice taxi driver.

We climbed the stairs to the sixth floor, in the dark. Luckily, I had my little flashlight in my purse.

She was cold and hadn't eaten for two days. I held the light while he went down the stairs backwards, holding her from falling. We put her into my car and took her back to my friend's apartment. (You may be wondering how I got there by car. With the help of several neighbours we had chopped for a few hours and freed my car. I drove in the middle of the empty streets so as not to get hit by the falling ice.)

I was in Montreal for four days. Once the Champlain Bridge reopened, I headed home. All over the country roads, power lines were down. I was afraid to drive over them, forgetting they were probably not live. I waited for a car to come by, to see how they fared driving over the

wires. After about an hour, a car coming in the opposite direction drove over the wires. I did the same and got home safely.

There, I joined the party and organized some trading of goods, our home-grown chickens for firewood. We had a wood stove. A huge pot was on top of it all the time, and I kept replenishing it with vegetables from our root cellar and chickens from the freezer—where everything was thawing out.

We had several spontaneous overnight guests who didn't have heat in their homes, and we fed our sons' friends, whose parents were away in a warm country for the winter. It was cozy and fun. Also, since we were gardeners, we had plenty of stock for the feast: carrots stored in sand, potatoes in grape boxes, onions, garlic, turnips, and an assortment of experiments like dandelion wine, golden sun slightly warm, going down.

We are all interconnected and co-dependent. For an experience of this, the ice storm of 1998 was a petri dish grown from a chaotic coming together of environmental events.



Bernice Angeline Sorge is a visual artist, poet, and writer living in Dunham, Quebec, with her partner. www.bernicesorge.ca

Fortunately, the generator at our barn was powerful enough to keep the farm house belonging to Mike's uncle George fully functional. His home not only became our shelter, but also a refuge for a hired hand and other family members, including five little children and a menagerie of pets. We shared food, kept toddlers entertained and watched the CBC for updates from Hydro Quebec. We also shared our own anxieties as the situation dragged on into a second week. As everything around us became trapped in ice, we felt trapped too. On occasion, we went back into our dark house to check on the property. Christmas decorations were still hanging, dishearteningly.

Remarkably, our barns, two built in the 1930s, showed no signs of caving in under the weight of ice. Travel between the three sites meant taking a treacherous provincial road, but it was deserted and branch-free. In what seems like a daring idea now, we parked a shovel tractor in the middle of Route 133 and lifted Mike up to the hydro lines near the barns so he could knock the heavy and sagging ice-covered wires with a stick to prevent them from hitting the ground.

Our ice storm experience lasted 13 days. The sound of our appliances and heaters returning to power was a

welcome moment, but we were astounded by the incredible damage to our property. It was a wonder that any trees were able to remain upright under the crushing weight of the ice. Some of our trees to this day have a permanent stoop.

We consider ourselves fortunate compared to others. In total, we dumped over 12,000 litres of milk before the trucks could deliver to the dairy. Our farm's insurance covered the loss. We were not flooded, no one in our family was injured, our cattle remained healthy and our buildings secure. When the power goes out now, there is angst, but it's placated in the knowledge that the same tractors and generators used in 1998 are still at the ready.



Heather Darch is a project director for the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network. She is former curator of the Missisquoi Museum, a heritage consultant and a regular contributor to Quebec Heritage News and The Townships' news magazine *Le Tour*.

Megantic, Then and Now

by Marie Moliner

“You had flames, about two or three feet high on the lake. That was something to see.” - Corey Bellam, photographer, about the Lac-Mégantic train explosion July 6, 2013

How do you live through a disaster of epic proportions? What if the risk of recurrence unsettles your thoughts each time the train chugs through town?

This is life for residents in Megantic, Quebec, ten years after the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway freight train MMA-002 carried 7.7 million litres of crude oil into its downtown, derailed at 1:14 a.m., exploded, incinerated its core, and vaporized almost 50 people.

That night, photographer Corey Bellam was listening to the radio. He lives near Megantic and reports for The Colebrook Chronicle in northern New Hampshire. Around midnight he heard that a train engine, parked overnight, had caught fire near Nantes, a town uphill from Megantic.

“When I heard the news, I headed straight for Megantic,” said Bellam. Driving, he soon saw a glow in the sky. He was among the first journalists to arrive, witnessing another explosion.

“You could hear sirens. People were walking around with the blankest look on their faces. Others were standing in the middle of the street screaming at the top of their lungs.”

Clearly, the memory still haunts him. I ask if he has PTSD. He says he does not. Others do.

Imagine life in Megantic, once a thriving town. Despite its best rebuilding efforts, the town centre remains a moonscape ten years later. This is the above-ground evidence of disaster. Bellam digs deeper, “For years there was a smell of oil along the commemorative boardwalk. You wouldn’t want to grow cucumbers in that soil.”

As the trains roll through, longer and heavier, Mayor Julie Morin speaks of “the human impact” and “the collateral damage.” Elected in 2017 at age 34, Morin is tackling the complexity of a grieving community.

When the train rolls through, at least four times a day, she shudders, “Ever since the accident, we can’t concentrate. Not everyone heals the same way.” In her view, residents cannot mend as long as “the murderer is still in the house.”

She insists that Megantic must become known as “more than the town where the disaster happened. We will recover. We are better at supporting each other. We have specialized social workers on the ground. We have developed tools together and a strong social fabric that will allow us to heal.”

But she worries trauma will be rekindled as a recent documentary and a TV drama profile the community. She



Explosion aftermath, downtown Megantic (Photos: Corey Bellam.)

saw *Lac-Mégantic – This is Not an Accident*, the documentary by Oscar-nominated film-maker, Philippe Falardeau.

“Those films shocked me! I realized that the government and railroad companies have not learned anything from the disaster.” As Falardeau told the *Montreal Gazette*, “The ticking time bomb is still active. At some point it’s going to happen in downtown Calgary or in Magog.”

Indeed, it has. This year, on April 15, on the same line. A CN train carrying hazardous material derailed in Rockwood, Maine, 90 kilometres from Megantic. The cause was debris on washed-out tracks. It was “an absolute miracle,” the local fire chief told the media, describing how three crew members broke windows to escape the ensuing forest fire. Transportation consultant, Greg Gormick, blamed the Rockwood derailment on “the deferred maintenance every observant railroader knows has been built up over

not deploy an investigator to the site, [reported Transport Canada](#).

About 1,250 derailments have occurred each year over the past decade in the USA, per American Federal Railroad Administration data, [reported USA Today](#). Are derailments the cost of doing business by rail?

Robert Asselin echoes the conclusions of the [Transportation Safety Board report](#) into the Megantic event: Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway (MMA) was a company with a “weak safety culture.”

“I was born on the tracks,” he says. “The railway ran 100 feet from my childhood home in Valleyfield, Quebec. So maybe I am more comfortable than most with trains.”



On July 8, a “comfort concert” will be free of charge at Veterans Park in Megantic. (Photo: Claude Grenier, courtesy Municipalité de Lac-Mégantic.)

a period of more than 30 years through four changes of ownership” ([Montreal Gazette](#)).

In 2019, three railway workers were killed in Field, BC, when their train plummeted off a bridge, caused by air leaks in aging brake cylinders. The [Transportation Safety Board’s](#) report noted that earlier warnings of brake system irregularities were not seen as problematic.

On January 26, 2021, in the same location, 32 cars carrying grain derailed. The Transportation Safety Board did

He retired after 50 years working for CN, like his father and grandfather. His career was managing signals and communications—key elements of rail safety. Asselin is now Mayor of Newport, Quebec.

He links the Megantic disaster to the 1995 privatization of CN. Bruce Campbell’s book, *The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster: Public Betrayal, Justice Denied*, spells out the consequences of this deregulation. Asselin winces as he recalls the corners being cut while he was working for the

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railroad. "It is a shame that it took Megantic to turn things around."

Asselin joined the new company's rebuilding efforts after MMA went bankrupt. He says it can be safe for trains to carry dangerous goods. He is succinct. "The rules were not followed. That is why Megantic happened. This disaster was avoidable."

"Let the outside world know Megantic is alive and welcoming!"

Indeed, it was avoidable...

...If only the rail line into Megantic had been built with fewer inclines, described by Asselin as the most difficult in Canada.

...If only the train had not been carrying Bakken crude oil, so flammable that North Dakotans have bragged about using it unrefined ([Globe and Mail](#)).

...If only privatization and cost cutting over decades had not led to a one-man crew on a train carrying millions of litres of flammable liquid.

...If only management had heeded multiple alerts about rail, container, and engine deficiencies. (The Megantic train engineer reported that the engine was hot and spitting black smoke. He was told not to worry and that it would be looked at the next morning).

...If only the train had not been parked on the main track in Nantes.

...If only the engine had not caught fire shortly after the train engineer left.

...If only firefighters had known that the train's manual brakes would fail when they turned off the engine to extinguish that fire.

...If only the train engineer, asleep in a nearby hotel, had been called directly by the firefighters and asked what to do next. (Instead, firefighters called a railway manager who was not a train engineer.)

...If only those in charge at the top had not repeatedly turned a blind eye.

Yes, if only any of these things has happened differently, this disaster might have been avoided. But because the air brakes decompressed, because there was no derailer to stop the train rolling away, because gravity pulled Train 5071 downhill, it became a "Dementor," a black spectre speeding up to 100 km/hour. It derailed in the heart of Megantic, releasing six million litres of crude oil, forming a four-foot wave of oil which ignited almost immediately. It burned for almost three days, thoroughly contaminating the downtown soil.

Forty-seven friends and family members, most of them inside the Musi-Café, died almost instantly that warm summer night. Two thousand people were evacuated.

Lessons learned are listed in a Transportation Safety Board report, but residents want a public inquiry. Mayor Morin

was shocked to learn (from the Falardeau film) that the decision to not proceed with a public inquiry was made by the federal (Harper) government less than a week after the disaster. Both Morin and Asselin say an inquiry remains important. It would bring attention to ongoing risks while clarifying accountability for future disasters.

The community is both united in their grief and conflicted about their future. A recently promised rail bypass remains in limbo despite expropriation decisions. Neighbouring towns and local residents are pitted against each other. Some debate whether the bypass is necessary. Others encourage it to be built anywhere but their backyard.

Asselin notes that risks will always exist. He asks the critical question: "Do you want dangerous goods transported by rail, or by road?"

"Rail transport is safe if the rules are followed," he repeats. "It is as safe to live in Megantic as it is to live anywhere a train runs through your village."

Meanwhile, Mayor Morin hopes the bypass will be built beginning next spring.

Today, Megantic struggles to rebuild its once bustling town centre. Dollarama occupies a prominent position on the main street, emblematic of our society's preference for cheap goods transported at a human cost. How long does it take to recover from such visceral and architectural trauma?

Ten years is not a long time. A hundred years may not be long enough. Yet, Mayor Morin is unequivocal about the town's future. "We are more than the disaster. We're a tight community and our strength will endure and evolve with the rhythm of our residents. My wish is for a town that is proud of its resilience and is able to move forward."

On the disaster's 10th anniversary, the mayor acknowledges the delicate balance required to honour the town's grief with a need to let the outside world know Megantic is alive and welcoming. This year, beginning July 5, memories of all that was lost will be commemorated during a mass, a baroque recital, a silent vigil and a "comfort concert."

If you ask me, "Would you move to Megantic?" I would pause before saying yes. Yes, because it has probably never been safer to live there, given renewed scrutiny on rail safety. Yes, because the countryside is spectacularly beautiful.

Yes, because we recently visited the Musi-Café, rebuilt 400 metres from its original location. Exceptionally friendly staff went out of their way to make us feel welcome. We felt the town's heart beat. I also ate the best lobster roll, ever.

And yet, as we sit on the Musi-Café's sun-soaked patio, a train trundles by. Everyone stops talking...and watches... and wonders.



Marie Moliner is Assistant Editor of the *Townships Sun* and enjoys the magic of her surroundings every day.

I Once Had Five

by Ruohan Wallis

Luna places a paw on the soot-stained ground before recoiling with disgust. She glances up, slowly taking in the desolate scene. Miles of destruction, buildings razed to the ground, turned into rubble. The stench of the noxious oil and smoke fills her nostrils, burning her sinuses. In the middle of it all, dozens of charred tank cars lie collapsed on one another and the twisted metal remains of the train that carried them.

With a moan of anguish, Luna crumples to the ground. Lifting her paws over her muzzle, she covers her eyes, blocking out the cruel light of the world. Her mind flashes back to the evening before, a night that will be forever incised in her memory.

The Night Before...

"And stay away, you MUTT!" a two-legged shouts after her. Luna tears out of an alleyway, mouth clamped firmly over a half-rotten drumstick. Arriving where the railroad cuts through town, she stops, shaking her matted gray fur, chest heaving, but pleased at her score. Suddenly she freezes, hair standing on end. Something's off. Her acute hearing picks up a sound, her ears swivel towards the source, the railroad.

Seconds later a train comes barreling down. She watches, stunned. The train is going way too fast. It rocks, teeters and loses its hold, slamming into the ground. Metal against concrete, it crashes across the ground with ear-splitting shrieks. Then it comes to a full stop. Silence.

Suddenly chaos breaks loose. The tank cars explode. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Luna is blasted back. Heat rolls over her, wave after wave. Fires roar. The very earth shakes as if the world were ending.

Disoriented, she heaves herself up. Then she spots an alleyway directly in the line of fire. Realization hits. "No!"

Drumstick forgotten, Luna races right for the inferno.

Amidst the chaos, she hears wails. The sound intensifies as she travels further down the dark lane. She is acutely aware of the flames that follow in her wake, leaping from place to place, consuming anything and everything. But that comes second to her goal. She arrives at a dead-end, the dirty brick wall climbing towards the sky. She has reached her tar-

get, and the source of the noise: A beaten milk crate. In it are five squirming, crying puppies.

Luna lowers her nose, and her puppies cluster around it fighting for a nuzzle. Yet too soon she has to pull away. The fire has gotten alarmingly close. Biting down on the crate she begins to drag it along. Out of the question to go back the way she came, but an opening leads to a side alley. Progress is steady but slow, way too slow. The heat is becoming unbearable, the smoke suffocating.

Luna bites harder, fearing for her puppies. They have stopped wailing. She pulls with renewed effort. Then she catches a whiff of fresher air. She stops and turns. An opening is just meters away! Yet as she turns back, she hears a blast and the sound of a deteriorating building. With horror, Luna sees part of a wall peel off and slam down right in front of her. Bits of brick spray everywhere, stinging her eyes and lungs. She coughs as the dust settles. The wall has missed her by inches, but it has not been as merciful to her puppies. The crate lies buried under a mound of bricks; only a section sticks out. The world has turned dark. Luna stands, blood pounding in her ears. She is unaware of the flames pressing in on her from every side, unaware of the collapsing buildings and debris falling around her. The flames can swallow her up for all she cares. Nothing matters anymore.

A small whimper cuts through her grief. In her murky thoughts, she is slow to comprehend. No, it can't be possible. But wait, there it is again! The sound seems to be coming from the bit of crate protruding from the mountain of bricks. Luna advances, hardly breathing, and peers in. There, she discovers a puppy, pressed tightly against a corner of the crate. Luna bends down gently and picks up the puppy by the scruff of the neck. She can save this miracle, at least. Heart wrenching, she turns away, and with her daughter securely in her mouth, races for their chance of freedom. She does not dare to look back, even once.

Mother and daughter stumble into a park, battered and weary. It seems like a safe place to be. The moon shines brightly overhead, a soft breeze blows, a welcome relief to their singed skin. Finding shelter under a rocky outcrop, they settle down. Her daughter yawns and curls up against the warmth of Luna's stomach. Luna is unable to shut her eyes, spending

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the night, in her mind, watching the wall of bricks slam into her puppies over and over again.

Back to the Present...

A warm lick makes Luna start. Untangling her paws, she sees a small furry face, head crooked and eyes looking down at her, full of concern. Luna pulls herself up, nuzzling her daughter and gazes at her with affection. Her throat tightens. This puppy is all she has left. Luna lets out a howl, and her daughter follows soon after. Together they honor the fallen, their cries echoing in the air over the wreckage of the past, present and future.



Ruohan Wallis, age 17 has helped start up a school magazine, and has won at least two writing prizes, including first place for nonfiction in the Townships Young Voices Awards. She likes nothing more than being in a quiet corner with a book and maybe a sketchbook.



Write Here, Write Now! of the Bishop's University Lifelong Learning Academy

Thanks to our wonderful facilitators, Etienne Domingue, Rachel Garber, and Rebecca Welton, and our great writers for a year of creativity and exploration. Our editors are working on a **Flash Anthology**. See you in the autumn!

Jan Draper, Coordinator, WHWN

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The Bizarre Rocks of Lake Memphremagog

by R.A. Garber

What was the largest and most violent earthquake ever documented in Quebec? Various [seismological reports](#) will tell you it was the 1663 earthquake. It happened at 5:30 p.m. on February 5 in New France, and was also felt sharply on January 26 in New England, where settlers were still using the Julian calendar. Landslides and damage observed suggests its [magnitude was higher than 7](#).

The epicentre of the earthquake was northeast of Quebec City along the Saint Lawrence River, in the [Charlevoix Seismic Zone](#), where faults of the Saint Lawrence rift system run parallel to the river. In fact, since recording began, this rift system has sired five earthquakes of a magnitude of 6 or higher.

The 1663 earthquake “was felt over the entire eastern part of North America—750,000 square miles, accompanied by vast landslides along the St. Maurice, Batiscan and St. Lawrence Rivers” ([seismescanada.rncan.gc.ca](#)). Aftershocks trembled the earth until the following July.

What of the Eastern Townships, lying between Charlevoix and New England?

Here we turn to the *Townships Sun* of April 1988, and an article by Jacques Boisvert, then president of La Société d'histoire du Lac Memphremagog. He wrote:

“Not far from Lord’s Island [in Lake Memphremagog] I found some rocks with strange, bizarre shapes and wondered what type of upheaval or natural catastrophe occurred to produce such a phenomenon. ... The stones that I saw are huge and are located from 30 to 165 feet below the water. Some are really frightening to look at because they are in a slanted position and the simple act of diving under them leaves you breathless that they might fall. I have taken a few divers to the area and they were stunned by what they saw. I felt compelled to find out what may have happened and I came up with a theory that they may be the result of an earthquake.”

Boisvert settled on the 1663 earthquake as the most likely cause of the bizarre rock formations. At that time, what is now the Eastern Townships was wilderness whose inhabitants did not record the event in writing. Leave that to scribes among the Jesuits and other religious groups in both New England and New France. Boisvert’s article offers graphic descriptions coming from their pens:

“The Heavens began with phenomena of great beauty, and the Earth followed with violent upheavals which made it very evident to us that these mute and brilliant aerial voices were not, after all, mere empty words, since they presaged convulsions that were to make us shudder while making the earth tremble.”

He described “fiery serpents intertwined in the form of a Caduceus and flying through mid-air borne on wings of flame.” A meteor over Montreal “seemed to issue from the moon’s bosom with a noise like that of cannon or thunder, and after travelling three leagues [about 9 miles] in the air, finally vanished behind the great mountain whose name that island bears.”

And then, “most extraordinary, the appearance of three suns.” (Sun dogs?)

Witnesses said the earthquake did not kill any people, but it was nonetheless fearsome. It seemed the forests were “drunk”; trunks were uprooted and thrown against each other. Some mountains “were borne from their beds and thrown upon others, leaving immense chasms in the places from whence they had issued.” Riverbeds were drastically revised. Finally, a solar eclipse on September 1st of that year lasted almost three hours.

Fearful people asked the age-old questions, “Why?” and “Why did this happen to us?”

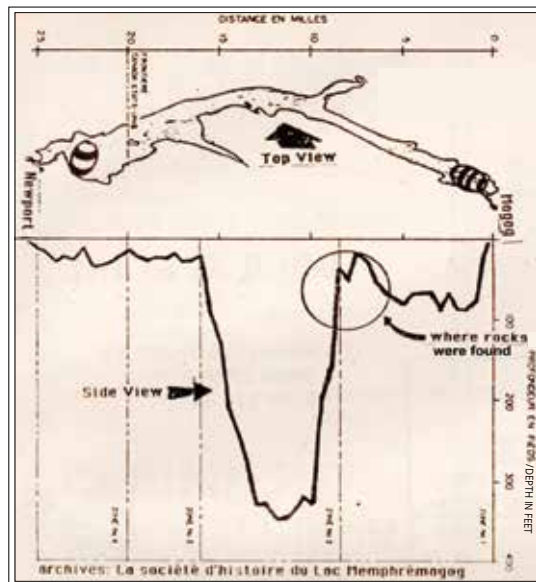
The missionaries had ready answers: God’s judgment for sins. God’s warning to repent.

Apparently many did just that. The missionaries, [reported a Wikipedia article](#), “were pleased to see all the colonists attending church regularly in the following days and ... even the traffickers in wine and brandy appeared to repent.”

But “these effects were short-lived and [the] missionaries were soon left wishing for another great earthquake to help them in their cause.”

Meanwhile, Boisvert theorized, the 1663 earthquake shifted huge rocks under Lake Memphremagog, and these strange formations have been preserved to this day in the underwater environment, silent witnesses to great forces that helped shape our region.

For the complete story, see the April 1988 issue of the *Townships Sun*.



Map of Lake Memphremagog showing location of the underwater upended rocks described by Jacques Boisvert of the Société d'histoire de Lac Memphremagog. It was previously published in the *Townships Sun* of April 1988.

The Great Fire in Lennoxville

by Gérard Coté & Jean-Marie Dubois

It was almost 150 years ago. The summer of 1874 had been hot and dry. By September, water levels were very low in rivers, brooks and wells.

Around 10 a.m. on Monday, September 28, fire broke out in the barn beside the house and general store of Charles Brooks at the corner of Main Street (Queen, since 1953) and Belvidere (College, since 2006). This is the present location of a Subway restaurant, in a building constructed after the fire.

In no time, the whole barn and stable full of hay were in flames. They spread to the adjoining Brooks' house and store and also to the nearby Methodist Church. Soon the whole corner was in flames, and the fire had crossed over Belvidere Street. It started up in the three-story hotel of F. P. Buck, where the Lennoxville Library now stands.

Because Lennoxville had no fire engine, town officials telegraphed Sherbrooke to send over their Merriweather pump engine, pulled by horses. However, very little water was available to pump.

A strong warm wind from the south fanned the flames. Fresh fires broke out everywhere, spreading from house to house. Fire engulfed all the houses right up the east side of Main Street all the way to Speid Street; those of the confectioner, the tailor, the cobbler and the baker. The next home beyond Speid Street also burned down.

After jumping over to the west side of Main Street, the fire burnt down the Town Hall and the neighbouring house of the dressmaker. Also consumed was Asselin's Store, south of Depot Street. (Depot is now named Samuel-Gratham Street; in 1936, Gratham would become the first Lennoxville volunteer Fire Chief.)

Just north of Depot Street, the tinsmith's shop and his house beside it went up in flames, as well as the old Grand Trunk Railway Station nearby. But by then, the Merriweather pump engine arrived and 700 feet of hose were stretched down to the St. Francis River. Men pumped fiercely, and often had to be replaced.

Some progress was made to limit the spread of the blaze. But many more houses were lost on the eastern side of Main Street, as far up as where Academy Street would later be built. And so it was that 43 homes and shops were all burned to the ground. As a measure of the significance of the fire, at the time Lennoxville had a population of only 800 persons.

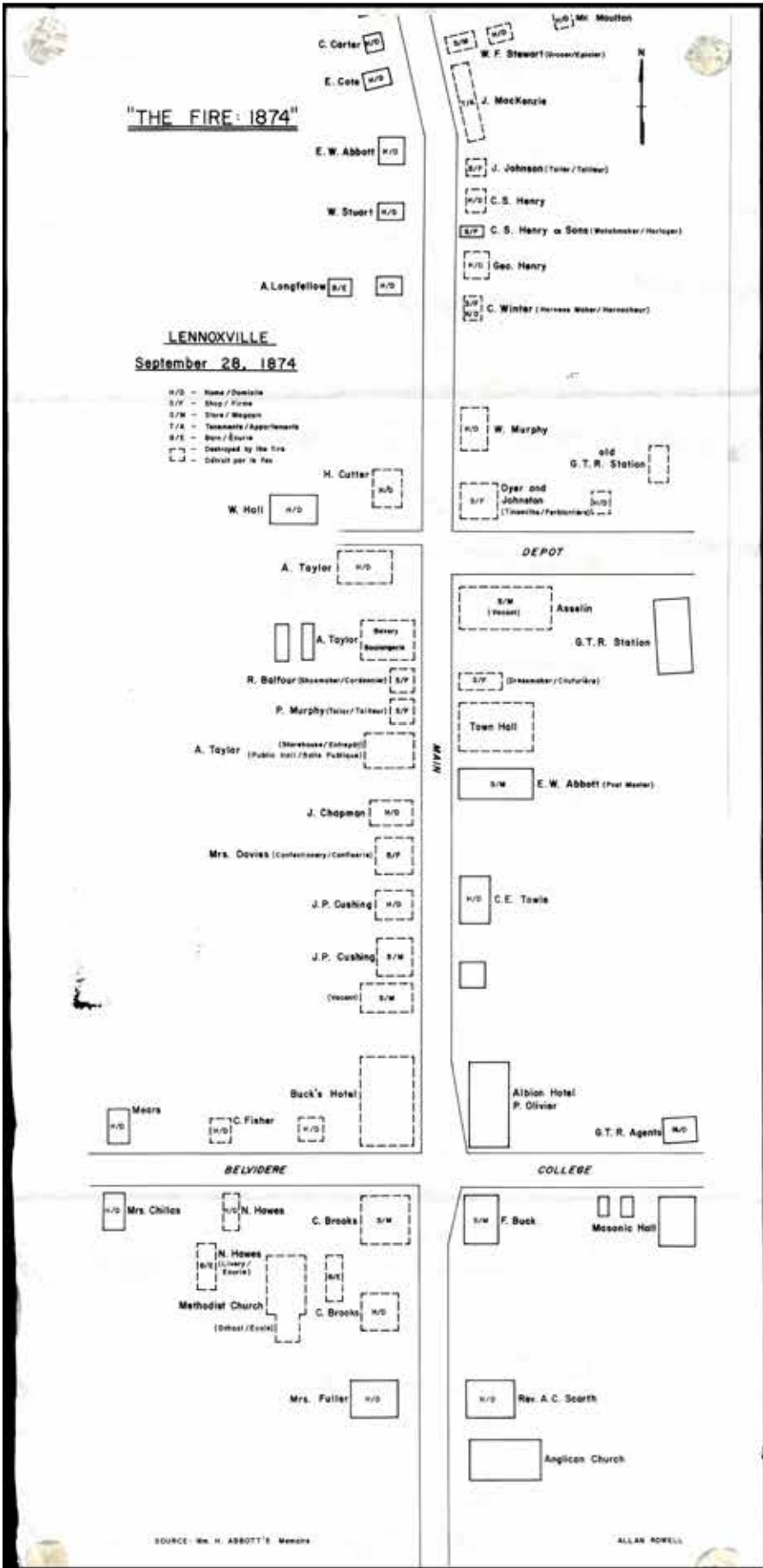
In his memoir, William H. Abbott described, as a boy, helping to put out flames on the roof of their home. In the immediate aftermath, neighbours sheltered the newly homeless. "A scene of desolation showed the next day—fires burning in cellars and wood-piles; scorched maples and elms along the streets; standing chimneys in many places but most of these fell or were pulled down in a short time. ... I remember going up the street in the morning and seeing by the ruins of the Cushing store a hogshead of brown sugar, partly burned and broken open. A young fellow had brought a saucepan and was making taffy on a bed of coals. A number of us gathered there and had a continuous sugaring off" (*Lennoxville Volume 1* by Kathleen H. Atto and Committee, LAHMS, Lennoxville, 1975).

Shortly after the conflagration, the Lennoxville Town Council purchased a hand fire engine and hose from Sherbrooke. They stored it in the basement of the new Town Hall that opened in 1875 and is now the Lennoxville Borough Office. The first fire station was not built until 1917, a small extension behind the Town Hall. The wooden structure was complete with a 55-foot-high tower for drying hoses. In those days, the fire engine was moved by a team of men who also operated the equipment by hand.

One likely further consequence of this fire was that, in 1914, Chas. E. Goad Co. Ltd drew up an Insurance Plan of downtown Lennoxville, mapping and describing its buildings.



Where the Great Fire started in Lennoxville in 1874: C.S. White's store, at the location of today's Subway Restaurant at Queen & College streets. (*Lennoxville Ascot Historical and Museum Society P 240 BUS_C2*)



In a [May 1983 Townships Sun article](#), Bernard Epps described another outcome of the fire: The Town Council passed a bylaw “prohibiting the erection of any wooden buildings, connected or detached, within the limits of Lennoxville—buildings to be exclusively stone, brick, brickcased or rough cast and the roofs of these covered with slate, metal, gravel or asbestos.”



Gérard Côté (Lennoxville and Ascot Historical and Museum Society) and **Jean-Marie Dubois** (Université de Sherbrooke)

Map of Lennoxville in 1874 (LAHMS M033; by Allan Rowell around 1995, after “Excerpts from Wm. H. Abbott’s Memoirs” published in Lennoxville Volume 1 (1975) by Kathleen H. Atto and Committee, LAHMS, Lennoxville. The buildings drawn in dotted lines were destroyed in the fire.

Answers to ETRC History Quiz on Page 6:
 Question 3: B
 Question 2: D
 Question 1: C

Sherbrooke's Tramway

by Bryan Laprise

Part of the city's less known history is that Sherbrooke once had a tramway! A group of local businessmen had a vision of Sherbrooke having a tram, like other cities in Quebec at the time. They started the *Sherbrooke Street Railway* in 1895, which was sold to Americans the following year. However, the population had to wait until 1897 before the tramway opened up. At the time of its opening, Sherbrooke was the smallest city in Canada to have such a system in place. This helped it achieve the image it wanted: Sherbrooke was a modern city.

The transit line connected Le Vieux-Nord, downtown and Lennoxville. The trams ran between 6:30 in the morning and 11 at night, and the fare was five cents per passenger during the day; ten cents at night. The tramway allowed workers to work in areas further from home, and travel at a quicker speed—24 kilometers per hour! Sherbrooke East profited from the tramway and its Park line, all the way to Victoria Park. The heart of the tramways was near the train station on Rue Dépôt, downtown.

An interesting story involving the tramway took place in 1902. A few years earlier, in 1890, a bridge had been built to replace the artisanal one that connected the Island and Montreal streets to the other side of the Magog River, and consequently, the new Canadian Pacific railway station. When the tram was inaugurated in 1897, rails were built on the bridge to connect the two sides of the river. Over time, the weight and vibration caused by the vehicles weakened the bridge, which led to one of the tramways derailing into the Magog River in 1902. Only the conductor was on board, and he made it out alive. The following year, a new steel bridge was built in its place.

The company became *Sherbrooke Railway & Power* in 1910, and that same year, they built their own hydroelec-



Antonio Bernier and his tram car (n°9), April 2, 1919. (Musée d'Histoire de Sherbrooke)



The Centrale des Abenakis was built on the Magog River in 1911. (Musée d'Histoire de Sherbrooke)

tric power dam, currently named the **Centrale Abenakis**. This allowed them to produce their own electricity for light and heating.

At its peak in the “Roaring Twenties,” the company transported between 1.3 and 1.8 million passengers a year with their 18.5 kilometers of rail, 17 tramways and 35 compartments. Almost everyone in Sherbrooke was within a six-minute-walk away from a tramway station.

The economic depression started in 1929 and racked up debts for the *Sherbrooke Railway & Power*. In December 1931, the company asked the city of Sherbrooke to supply the power it used for free, totaling \$50,000 a year. The council refused, and the tramways were closed down on December 31st, 1931. Additionally, people began to see a new mode of transportation, the bus, as an easier, cheaper alternative, and to think the streets would be “more enjoyable” without the tramway rails.

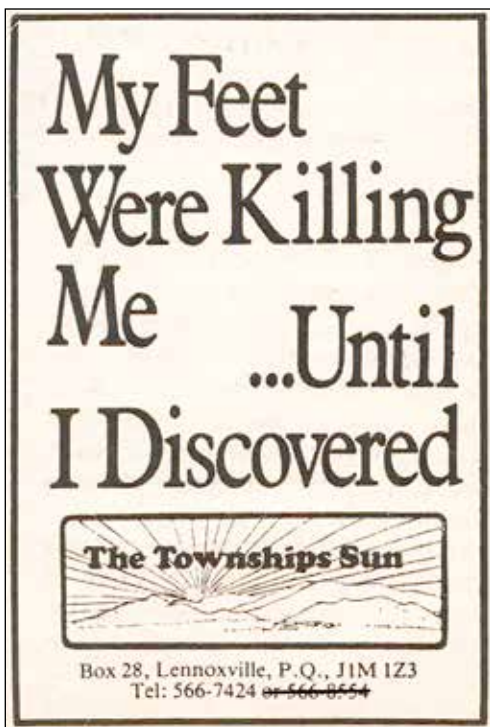
More recently, in the 2022 provincial election, the *Québec Solidaire* party promised to build a tramway in Sherbrooke in order to create a faster, more reliable mode of transportation which more people would be inclined to use, bringing about a “Transportation Revolution” (*Québec Solidaire amène la révolution transport à Sherbrooke* by R. Messier, Sept. 17, 2022). They claimed the only “serious” way to get around the city is by car, since the bus lines don't serve all sectors of Sherbrooke very well.



Bryan Laprise is a 16-year-old English enthusiast, passionate about literature and history, and an avid reader. He is a journalist for *The Point* and the Alexander Galt Regional High School's student newspaper, *The Piper Post*, of which he is the founding member.

Not Quite 50, Not Yet

by R.A. Garber



A subscription ad in the *Townships Sun* of August 1984. Note: The address and phone number are still good—except, oops! Lennoxville is now a borough of Sherbrooke, and only the first phone number will get you to our office. You can also visit our website townshipssun.ca or email contact@townshipssun.ca.

from our 50th volume to our 51st. But that doesn't mean we're 50 quite yet.

July 2023 marks 50 years since the Eastern Townships Social Action Group founded the *Townships Sun*; February 8, 2024, will mark 50 years since the first issue was published.

As befits birthdays, we take stock of where we are, with glances both backward and forward.

Scanning back issues of the *Townships Sun* yields treasures. More than 14,000 pages, starting in 1974, reveal many pointed views on the language laws of the 1970s. Fears, reassurances, uncertainties. Loss of family and friends to points west in the Great Exodus. Lots of humour. Irony. Outrage. Strength. Joy. Love of community, nature, Quebec.

The *Townships Sun* has just rolled over

Where are we? Along with the English-speaking community we serve, we live in trying times. The climate is a worldwide calamity, fomenting fires and floods. Species are going extinct. Wars rage. Dictators abound. Language laws threaten our community, and our edges are merging into the French-speaking majority surrounding us.

Yet we are grateful. As a minority, we are fortunate to experience good will from most folks around us. We are lucky to live in a region of natural beauty and to have jobs, education and health services among the best in the world. We enjoy multicultural friends and family.

The *Townships Sun* magazine's pages highlight our community's history, address current issues, and dream its future. We have an army of *Townships* contributors—over the past year, more than 100 writers, artists, and photographers of all ages.

And we have a few surprises coming up to celebrate our 50th. Stay tuned, please!



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Uncomfortable Truths

by Angela Leuck

Cowansville-based author Meghan Redmile spent her childhood on the family farm in Abercorn, Quebec. Fascinated at an early age with history, she pored over albums containing photos of past relatives and begged to be told their stories. One photo in particular caught her attention. It was of her grandfather's sister, Katherine, who disappeared in 1947.

Thus began a years-long quest to uncover the truth behind her great-aunt's disappearance. While Redmile was never able to fully solve the family mystery, she uncovered enough to inspire her to write two historical novels: *Hold On* (2016) and *Let Go* (2019). Nevertheless, despite her own considerable research, and drawing on stories her father and grandfather told her over the years—"tucking them into each chapter"—Redmile says that her books should be looked at as works of fiction.

Hold On takes up the story in 1931. At 11 years old, the protagonist, Katherine, is timid and secretive. Her father has lost his job as a policeman in Sandwich, near Windsor, and moved the family to the northern Ontario town of New Liskeard. Following an angry confrontation with their father, Katherine's beloved brother Harry (the author's real-life grandfather) departs for good back to the ancestral farm in Quebec, leaving Katherine alone to deal with her hard-drinking, angry father, submissive mother, and older sister intent only on escape through a successful marriage.

Katherine, age 15, meets Jacob, a 19-year-old boy from a disreputable local family. She makes her first disastrous decision, falling in love and marrying him when she turns 16. Jacob's drinking and violence become more pronounced, and even though her best friend and brother warn her against him, Katherine, like her mother before her, stubbornly turns a blind eye.

As her marriage spirals into abuse, Katherine's second disastrous choice is to fall in love with a Black labourer who arrives in town. While they try to conceal their feelings, they are discovered and forced to flee. The novel ends with the last (real-life) sighting of Katherine by her seven-year-old daughter.

Redmile's follow-up novel, *Let Go*, opens on the day after the previous novel ends. Finally free, Katherine and her lover, Ralph, try to build a life together. If this were the American South, there would be no doubt this would lead to bloodshed. But what about here in Canada? How

much more tolerant were our fellow citizens in remote areas in the 1940s? Redmile does a good job of capturing Canadian attitudes of the time.



The last trace of the real-life Katherine is a North Bay general delivery address. After that, the trail peters out. This second novel, as the author states in her "Author Notes," was written to give her great-aunt Katherine's daughter and grandchildren the ending she wishes they could have had—to be reunited and safe.

I don't want to give away any more of the story, so you will have to read Redmile's books to discover how the fictional plot unfolds. Certainly, they offer enough mounting drama to keep you turning pages to the tumultuous and unanticipated ending.

What is most compelling about this author's work is not so much the real family story, but the way she uses it to shed light on the situation of women. Redmile feels strongly about the importance of honouring feminine narratives. She believes too much attention has been paid to men who fought during World War II and not enough to the women at home, especially those who were poor and had few alternatives to seek a better life. To do so often meant losing their children.

Redmile forces us to face some uncomfortable truths: not just of a patriarchal court system, but of internalized prejudice against a woman leaving her husband or choosing to be with a man of a different race.

Interestingly, in what is quite a shift in perspective, Redmile has just completed her third novel, which features a male protagonist based on her grandfather. She is currently seeking a commercial publisher—her two earlier books were self-published with Amazon. We can only hope this talented Townships author will gain a foothold in the Canadian historical fiction market.

Redmile's books are available on Amazon or from Brome Lake Books. You can visit her website at meghanredmile.com.



Angela Leuck is a poet and publisher. She is the editor of *Emergence: Contemporary Women Poets of the Eastern Townships of Quebec* (Studio Georgeville, 2021).

Are you Emergency Prepared?

by Anita Duwel

Emergency preparedness is important at any age, but even more so as you enter your golden years.

Having a well-thought-out emergency plan in place will help boost your safety and well-being during an unexpected event. Here's what you can do to ensure you are able to efficiently handle any emergencies that may come.

Your Environment

- Evaluate your home safety. Go through your living space and identify any potential hazards. Remove any obstacles that can get in your way, and if needed, install handrails or ramps where necessary.
- Make sure that electrical systems, smoke detectors, and fire extinguishers are in good working condition.
- Know where all the emergency exits are.
- Put together an emergency kit that includes essential items such as a first aid kit, medications, flashlight with extra batteries, blankets, non-perishable foods and copies of important documents. Make sure to store the kit in an easy-to-reach location.
- Make copies of important documents such as passports, wills, property deeds, licenses, insurance, birth certificates, marriage certificates, and so on. Put them in a safe place inside your home, and also with family or friends, or in a safety deposit box.

• If you have not already done so, install sturdy locks, motion-sensor lighting, and an alarm system to ward off potential intruders.

• Joining a neighbourhood watch program (if you have one in your area) can provide a sense of community security.

Personal Safety and Health

• Keep an up-to-date record of your medical conditions, allergies, and medications. Keep an extra supply of necessary medications and periodically check their expiration dates.

• Create a list of emergency contacts, including family members, friends, neighbours, and healthcare providers. Keep a printed copy of this list in your emergency kit, by your phone, and in your wallet.

• Program important numbers into your phone for easy access. If you use mobility aids, have spare batteries,

chargers, or backup equipment available.

• Plan out where you can take your pets in case of an evacuation. Do you know a pet-friendly hotel or motel, an animal shelter, or a family member who can help out?

Communication and Support Systems

Your family may not be together when an emergency occurs, so it is important to have a communication plan that will let you stay connected during emergencies. Come up with a designated meeting point and identify an out-of-town contact person who can relay information. Stay informed through local news sources and emergency alert systems.

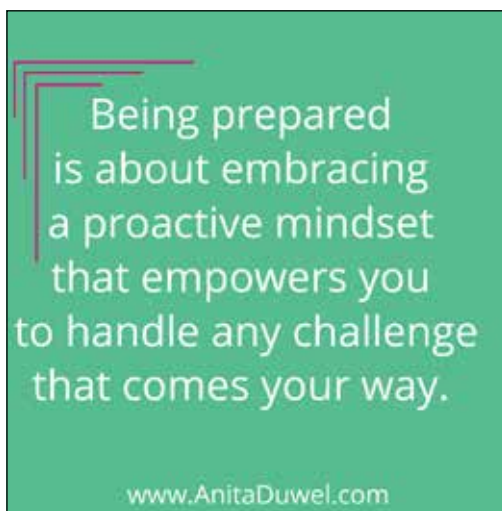
• Build a support network of friends, neighbours, and community organizations. Let them know about your emergency plan and discuss ways they may be able to help you during a crisis. It would be a good idea to team up with someone; maybe have a "block buddy."

• Prioritize self-care and emotional well-being. Take part in activities that make you feel good and that can help reduce stress. Practice relaxation techniques and, if you are an anxious person, identify coping strategies that would help you manage any anxiety that may come up during an emergency.

In summary, a personal emergency preparedness plan is crucial. It will

help you manage unexpected situations with confidence and it will safeguard your well-being. Evaluating and securing your environment, prioritizing personal safety and health, and building communication and support systems can enable you to better handle emergencies. Your plan will prepare and equip you for whatever may come your way.

The Government of Canada's Get Prepared website offers more on preparing an emergency plan: getprepared.gc.ca/cnt/plns/mk-pln-en.aspx



Anita Duwel is owner of *Love the Life You Live/Aging with Vitality*. She is a Certified Holistic Nutrition and Health coach, Workplace Wellness Consultant and helps people who struggle with weight and low energy to feel healthy and vibrant so that they can live a life of quality and vitality. Learn more at

www.AnitaDuwel.com or email Anita at AnitaDuwel@live.com.

Midsummer

by Leo Webster

The field rises against the rigid forest
Stalks bent by swells of wind
Leap up again
And are felled by the scythe

The burnished hay
Is sweetest as it dries
The scent of nectar in the dizzy heat
Gathering a meadow-hum of bees

Beneath my feet, crickets scatter,
legs flashing under the sun,
Who pauses at his height
To gaze down at the meadow

The cicadas murmur
It's brief, It's brief!



Leo Webster is a Bishop's University student who enjoys writing about nature. His work has previously been published in **The Mitre**. For his poem, "Midsummer," he received a Townships Young Voices Award (second place, Poetry category) from the **Townships Sun**.

*Train Explosion in Lac-Mégantic,
July 6, 2013*

