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Retson Genealogy Newsletter

This newsletter may interest in the genealogy and in particular those related to persons related directly or indirectly to Grace and Clifford Retson.

My genealogy website is located at <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html>
On the left side you will see a list of Family Roots.

Social History

Disease, natural disasters and so called “Acts of Gods” impacted all our ancestors. How they and the governments that they lived under responded to such events also impacted our ancestors. It has been over 100 years since the Spanish flu of 1918. Many in Canada do not know that the Spanish Flu killed more Canadians than were killed in World War 1. In 1918–19, it killed some 50,000 Canadians. The pandemic brought not only death but social and economic disruption as well. Children were left parentless and many families found themselves without their chief wage earner. Businesses lost profits because of lack of demand for their products or because they were unable - as a result of a reduced work force - to meet the demand. Municipal governments, in an attempt to halt the spread of the disease, closed all except necessary services. Provinces enacted laws regarding quarantine and enforced the wearing of masks in public. Although the Canadian population unhappily accepted these restrictions, it defied the federal government’s request that First World War victory celebrations be postponed until 1 December 1918. The establishment of the federal Department of Health in 1919 was a direct result of the Canadian epidemic.

Social History is concerned about the lives of ordinary people and their strategies for coping with life rather than political, military, diplomatic and constitutional events. How did your ancestors fit into their world? What were their cultural values? What were the social, moral and ethical controversies of the day? What social issues did they face and where did they stand on them? Were they conservative, liberal, or progressive. Were they narrow minded and discriminatory or did they strive for tolerance, fairness and justice? How did they make a living? What was their community like? How did they face the social issues of their day? How did our Canadian ancestors differ from our American, Scottish and English ancestors in this regards. I have begun to study a number of social issues and will attempt to determine where our ancestors stood on various social issues of their day. I will update the file at <https://www.retson.ca/socialhistory.pdf>

To begin with I will start with our current situation. There is a Chinese curse which says, “May he live in interesting times.” Like it or not, we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty. Ask anyone living in downtown Ottawa in the first week of February 2022. Our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tested positive for COVID-19 that week and that was not even close to being the biggest news story of the week. The breaking at the beginning of the week was that a third of Conservative Party of Canada caucus had triggered a leadership review on Monday night, and by midday Wednesday the party’s leader Erin O’Toole was gone. A “freedom convoy” came to town with hopes of seeing a political leader lose their job. That happened, but it wasn’t the one they were hoping for. Nor was it entirely their doing, but now the new Conservative leader, Candice Bergen doesn’t want them to leave. She is squarely on the side of the Conservative caucus that has embraced the “freedom convoy”. Some of her colleagues have called them "salt of the earth" people and have decried the suggestion that all participants should be dismissed because of the actions and words of some, even if that includes the convoy's organizers. Late Thursday, an internal email she sent was leaked in which she advised senior Conservative MPs not to tell members of the convoy to go home. "I understand the mood may shift soon. So we need to turn this into the PMs problem," she wrote.

After a full week of honking, harassment and general hooliganism displayed by the so-called "Freedom Convoy" and their supporters, apparently many Ottawa residents don't share her enthusiasm. Former Ottawa Police Chief Charles Bordeleau's didn't even think her or her colleagues support appropriate:

"When you have political leaders that continue to influence and support this type of criminal and illegal behaviour that is paralyzing the city, which is impacting businesses, which is impacting residents in our downtown core, I don't believe it's appropriate for people to continue to put fuel on the fire."

By the third week, if not before, Ottawa Police and the Country became the laughing stock of the world. After an economic loss, well in excess of a billion dollars caused by the occupation of the bridge at Windsor, the Province of Ontario and the Federal government began to take serious action. Later the Federal government declared the Emergencies Act to the relief of Ottawa residents and at this date of February 15 2022, it appears that more permanent relief may be in store. Further review may assist in determining weaknesses of political leadership, political ideology including examination of the strength or desirability of total separation between police and political responsibility for direction and what revisions must be made to protect the public from the tyranny of a dedicated minority.

The struggle between individual rights and the good of the community as a whole continues in the battle to maintain a liberal democracy, where mass human freedom is possible but the welfare of the community is protected. Going to either libertarian or collectivist extremes results in chaos or tyranny. But where does the "sweet spot" lie. Social issues are "issues" either because there is no solution to a perceived problem or no solution that the community with totally and unreservedly support.

I will attempt to identify some of the major "social issues" that have been identified in the past 50 years and then elaborate on them at <https://www.retson.ca/socialhistory.pdf> . Some that I have identified to date include the following.

Vaccination versus Antivaxxers

While health and medical scholars have described vaccination as one of the top ten achievements of public health in the 20th century, anti-vaxers have been around as long as vaccinations themselves, but they were generally relegated to fringe movements. Polio vaccine was developed in 1961 and within a decade children received vaccinations for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps, and rubella in addition to polio. The main problem with antivaxers is the misinformation they spread. This information leads to an increase in vaccination hesitancy, an increase in deaths on the part of many who could otherwise escape the serious effects of diseases and possibly a delay in ending pandemics faster. In addition noisy and disrespectful demonstrations outside hospitals and medical clinics increase stress on already over worked medical staff. Finally, failure to take vaccinations lead to hospitals reaching near capacity limits many and elective surgeries and other medical patients receiving less care.

Protestors retort that they should have freedom of choice as to whether they get vaccinated or not. Yet evidence suggest that mandates or even inconvenient such as not being able to enter restaurants, alcohol and Cannabis dispensary increase vaccinations. No governments have suggested that forceable vaccinations would ever be considered. In Canada there appears to be a willingness to accept mandates. This notwithstanding several points in history when the minority and sometimes the majority violently objected. See for example "When antivaccine sentiment turned violent: the Montréal Vaccine Riot of 1885" by Jonathan M. Berman CMAJ April 06, 2021 193 (14) E490-E492; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.202820> and "Stop the slaughter of the innocents': Meet the anti-vaxxers of 1919" By Jamie Bradburn - Published on Jan 15, 2020 <https://www.tv.org/article/stop-the-slaughter-of-the-innocents-meet-the-anti-vaxxers-of-1919>

Racism particularly against the Indigenous Populations

Racial discrimination against the first nations has been one of the ongoing social issues faced by generations in Canada. First Nations population of Canada suffers high rates of social problems. These include incarceration, poverty, unemployment, suicide, addiction, and health issues. The rights of indigenous people and the desires of the industries such as oil are often in stark conflict. Many of these problems are rooted in racism and discrimination. While the government may have accepted responsibility for injustices, the issue remains. While only the most smallest part of the population would question historical injustices, the issue of redress continues. Settlements in recent times include Residential Settlement Agreement, Sixty Scoop Settlement (<https://sixtiesscoopsettlement.info/>) and the Day School Settlement, acceptance by the population at large is only gradually increasing.

Abortion

In Canada, abortion continues to be a controversial social issues. Those making social policy decisions in government are quietly pro-abortion. And generally most Canadians believe the issue of abortion has been conclusively determined in Canada. The Morgentaler ruling of 1988 is not likely to be challenged soon. Most Canadians realize that abortion is a deeply personal and often passionate issue. Thus, to bring it up in conversation is to start an argument, and so it is rarely discussed in polite society.

Possession of weapons

In Canada, hunting is popular, but the possession of firearms is one of their most divisive social issues. Owning a gun is far less sport, and more so a necessity, with bear attacks still possible in rural areas. Conversely, as much as a weapon is a defence against wild animals, gun massacres are still prevalent in Canada. In 2018, ten people were killed in the Toronto van attack; a further two killings happened later in the year. Four shootings were recorded in 2019, which bolsters the argument of those against gun ownership. Typical city-dwelling Canadians disapprove of guns. They point to gang violence and massacres as the reasons for the outlawing of gun ownership in the nation. Canada does have rigorous checks in place for gun licenses and ownership. Automatic and semi-automatic guns are banned. So, when an unfortunate massacre occurs in Canada, the numbers murdered are usually in single digits.

Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol are a part of virtually every society. In twentieth-century Canada, prohibition was used to tackle this most contentious of social problems. Most drinkers not native to Canada would likely be baffled and annoyed by the restrictions on the sale of alcohol. Conversely, marijuana possession has been legal since 2018. Visiting smokers to Canada would be impressed and delighted by the pot shops, which can be found in urban areas. Yet it has been estimated that only about 30% of Canadians who use marijuana buy it from legal stores. The rest, however, prefer both legal and unlicensed establishments.

In 2020, more than 1,500 people died of opioid overdoses. However much of the public are hesitant about adopting harm reduction approaches such as safe injection sites, and safe needle distribution.

Smoking and Vaping

Smoking in Canada is banned in indoor public spaces, public transit facilities and workplaces (including restaurants, bars, and casinos), by all territories and provinces, and by the federal government. Some municipalities have bylaws restricting smoking further than the applicable national/provincial/territorial legislation. The federal government's smoking ban in workplaces and on common carriers applies only to the federal government and to federally regulated businesses, such as airports. While there was initial vigorous

debates on the issue of smoking bans such bans are generally accepted in Canada. As of 2015, 13.0% of Canadians aged 15 and older smoke.

Violence against women and children

Family violence is one of the most complex issues facing families and communities in Canada, and its consequences can be far-reaching. Statistics on this violence in Canada are on an upward trend, mainly due to increased crimes against women and children. Since 2016, these statistics have begun to rise again, until 2019. Prior to that, the rate declined by nearly 19% between 2009 and 2016. Similarly, a global pandemic has been cited as one of the problems.

Approximately 25% of violent crime reported to Canadian police is family abuse. The Canadian Women's Foundation estimates that over 6,000 women and children sleep in shelters every night, while a further 300 are turned away. First nation Canadians are around six times more likely to be killed by their partner than non-indigenous Canadian women. And one Canadian woman is killed every six days by an intimate partner.

Poverty, Welfare and Creeping problem of pension benefits

Poverty is a complex issue related to unemployment, return rates on investments, sub-standard housing, health policy, and education. Despite Canada's reputation as a prosperous nation, millions of Canadians are still struggling to meet their basic needs. In order for people to get out of poverty, they need help from others and government support. Poverty costs us all because it results in high-stress levels, poor health outcomes, social exclusion and lower educational achievement. Generally speaking, the Canadian social safety net enjoys widespread support. But while Canadians overwhelmingly support spending social services for the poor, but they also appear to favour reduced spending on welfare.

The ageing population means that pension benefits are another of the major social issues affecting those in Canada today. Many younger people are not contributing as they are part of the freelance "gig" economy. And those relying on the benefit are living for decades past the age of sixty-five. The math simply doesn't add up when the population relies on state income for a period almost as long, if not longer, than the time spent contributing. The pension system in Canada allows for nationals and non-nationals who have resided in the country for more than ten years to receive a pension.

Past and Present

The above listing is only a partial listing of current social issues. The social issues we are currently facing and those faced by our ancestors were many. Where do we come down on current issues. Where did our ancestors come down on the issues of their day. The world has changed over the past 70 years and the world experienced by our grand children is quite different then the one in which we grew up. 70 years ago the concept of television, computers, and internet could hardly be conceived yet alone be experienced on a day by day basis. The existence of the "pill" changed the sexual revolution. Religion still played a significant role in shaping community attitudes. The children growing up in the fifties and sixties had parents who either experienced the depression years or at least heard of it. The "American Dream" was universal. The population was moving away from the farms and into more urban settings. The world is changing and at the same time the more it changes the more it seems to remain the same. We had ancestors that we admired and those we would just as soon forget. Some stood on principle -some might be regarded as conservative, some progressive- but those that stood firm for their principles, whatever they were, are the ones we would like to remember. Hopefully further research will reveal the issues they faced, the context of the world in which they lived and their responses to it.