



July 15, 2023

This newsletter may interest particular those related to persons related directly or indirectly to Grace and Clifford Retson. My genealogy website is located at <http://www.retson.ca/retsongenealogy.html>

Culture Wars, Conflict and Change

Deep cultural divides that exist in the country and even more so to the South of us in the United States. I live in Kenora, a small city in northwestern Ontario which is not immune from racism and resistant to forward movement strains. It has a somewhat notorious past. (See Pierre Burton's *The National Dream, The Great Railway 1871-1881*; Scott Rutherford's *Canada's Other Red Scare, Indigenous Protest and Colonial Encounters during the Global Sixties*). Progress is slow and comes only with increased education and awareness of our shortcomings. I must admit that during the last year, I had to ask my brother for clarification of the term "woke".

Woke is an adjective derived from African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) meaning "alert to racial prejudice and discrimination". The term was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2017. While the term woke initially pertained to issues of racial prejudice and discrimination impacting African Americans, it was appropriated by other activist groups with different causes. Among American conservatives, woke has come to be used primarily as an insult. Critics accuse those on their left of using cancel culture to damage the employment prospects of those who are not considered sufficiently woke. Among the uses by Republicans is the Stop WOKE Act, a law that limits discussion of racism in Florida schools. A program of eliminating books by LGBT and Black authors from schools was conducted by the Florida government. Attacking the idea of wokeness, along with other ideas such as cancel culture and critical race theory, became a large part of Republican Party electoral strategy.

My wife, daughter and I arrived early morning Saturday June 24 and decided to take in the Pride Parade which was passing by our Hotel on Young Street. We ended up watching the parade for over 6 hours. I was impressed with the size of the parade, the energy and joy expressed by participants and on lookers and would highly recommend the attendance of one by those who have not attended one before. I was a little surprised by the number religious groups in the parade as religious institutes have not been overly supportive of the LGBTQ2 community. There were Anglicans, Presbyterians, more than one United Churches various other diverse religious groups and even a Catholic group. I am a hopeless heterosexual but felt right at home as I suspect that more than half of participants and on lookers shared a similar orientation.

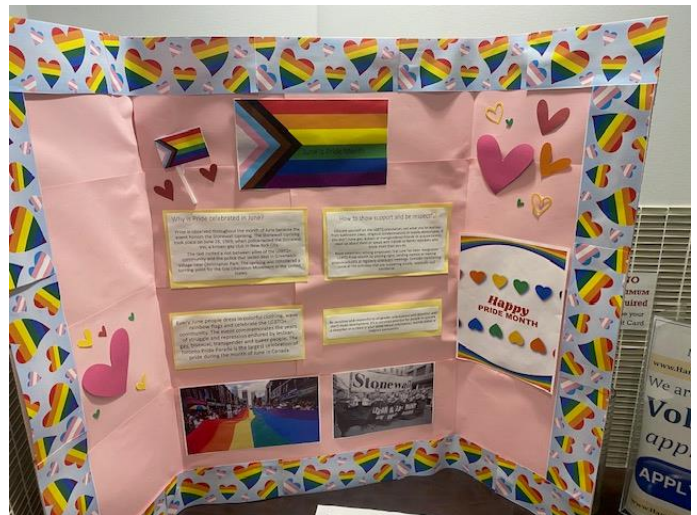
While visiting my mother-in-law at the nursing home in Hamilton, I found a supportive poster in the main foyer. One square entitled "How to show support and be respectful" encouraged residences to get educated to that community, the history of persecution it has experienced and get beyond caricature jokes and religious prejudices.



I must admit that I am somewhat ignorant of that discrimination and attacks on the LGBTQ2 and need to get myself better informed.

Cultural Conflict is particularly rife in the United States but is also ramping up in Canada. Cultural conflict is a type of conflict that occurs when different cultural values and beliefs clash. Cultural conflicts intensify when those differences become reflected in politics.

In, *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel P. Huntington proposes that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. While close to all our ancestors originated from the British Isles, there has been various cultural variants among our ancestors over the last roughly 500 years. The cultural uniformity of 1523 in England, Ireland, and Scotland contrasts with the cultural diversity that exists today.



Different cultural aspects run through our lives and relationships, giving us messages that shape our perceptions, judgments, and ideas of self and other. Understanding these cultural aspects are difficult for many reasons. Firstly, culture is elastic in that individuals of a particular cultural group may not participate in the aspect. Consider issues such as birth control or abortions. The official view of the Catholic Church may not be shared by all Catholics. The degree to which an individual actually believes or commits to the major tenets of his major cultural group may vary substantially. Further, culture is largely below the surface. One's attitude and beliefs with respect to racism isn't necessarily easy to understand without a deeper examination analysis. Finally, culture is constantly in changing adapting in dynamic and sometimes unpredictable ways.

Your religion, your neighbour's religion, and the religion's within your cultures all play an important role in how people view the world, their place in it and how they interact with other people in it. It is hard to define the nature of religion as there appears to be exceptions to every major tenet of the definition. Religion is a belief in divine (superhuman or spiritual beings and the practices (rituals), moral codes (ethics) that result from that belief. Some religions do not require a belief in a supernatural god: Buddhist, Universal Unitarians. Not all religions believe in only one god or belief in a chief god and other lesser gods (polytheistic religions). Religion is the belief in the truth but have different understanding of what is true.

Today you often hear people say, "I'm not religious but more spiritual". This kind of distinction is hard to understand but it is clear they are trying to say something even if it's not clear what that is. A spiritual life does not require membership within an organized religion, nor does it have the authority structure of religions. Spirituality tends to follow rituals, ethics and beliefs of different religions that are personally appealing. Spirituality is deeply personal and not systematic as religions.

I have always been fascinated with our ancestor's expression of belief's, values, concerns and emotions and hope to examine them in a way that honours them. That fascination does not mean that I necessarily share in all our ancestor's beliefs, values or concerns. I strive to support all aspects of spiritual expression and to respect the spiritual dimension of all ancestors and relatives regardless of race, culture, belief system, competencies, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. I consider this striving, a duty to spiritual care:

Spiritual care is care of individuals, focusing on personal beliefs, core values, significant relationships, meanings, and behaviours around which we understand our lived experience. Spirituality refers to that part in each of us which seeks to find meaning and purpose in our lives.¹

Our 1500s ancestors were catholic (there wasn't many alternatives). The greatest number submitted willingly or otherwise to the established authorities. (The alternative was death, subjugation to cruel punishment or imprisonment). The 1600s represented a substantial shift. The Church of England and its officials became the chief oppressors. A substantial shift began in the direction of Protestantism; first fundamentalism Protestantism and then a more secular cultural shifts.

The bulk of our ancestors who arrived in North America in the 1600s were pilgrims or puritans, then Congregationalist (Reformed) members. They believed in a god who imposed order, that subjected women to their husbands instruction and who had a duty to encourage conformity and corrections. Two books illustrate this culture. The first a historical novel, *The Captivity and Ransom of Mary Rowlandson* (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/851/851-h/851-h.htm>). This book mentions our ancestor John Hoar (see <http://www.retson.ca/hoar.pdf>) who was sent by the Massachusetts government to negotiate her freedom from local natives following her capture at Lancaster, Massachusetts. It has been believed that her account was heavily edited by Increased Mather, a Puritan minister.

John Hoar was taken to task by the church for “disparagement of the Lord’s holy ordinance” and for neglecting public worship of God on the Lord’s Day.” He was disbarred in 1665 for sinful practices. In 1668 he was charged before the county court at the public house of Ensign William Buss “that the Blessing Master Bulkeley pronounced in dismissing the publique Assembly in the meeting-house was no better than vane babbling”. He was fined 10 pounds for conviction of what the law of 1646 called “the disparagement of the Lord’s holy ordinance and making God’s ways contemptible and ridiculous”. Also reported by Nourse that he was called upon twice “for neglecting the public worship of God on the Lord’s day. John Hoar was definitely an outlier as a puritan. (for more information on John Hoar see <http://www.retson.ca/hoar.pdf>)

In 2014, Amy Belding Brown, published *Flight of the Sparrow* which another author Sally Cabot Gunning, praises in the following terms:

“The story of Mary Rowlandson is the story of one of the darkest episodes in our nation’s history, and yet Amy Belding Brown manages to turn it into a soaring tale of light and hope. In telling her story of a courageous woman’s search for freedom, independence, identity, and love, Amy Belding Brown never strikes a false note, never lets us down by snatching us out of time and place. While keeping faith with existing historical fact, she fills in the gaps with the delicate strokes of her art, transforming historical figures into living beings, vividly resurrecting long-lost ways of native and Colonial life.”

These two books give a fascinating description of the puritan culture but with a difference, which in the later case gives a more sympathetic view to the character of Mary Rowlandson (Not one of our ancestors).

Flight of the Sparrow, a historical fiction contains a wealth of accurate historical detail relating to characters, events and setting, including geography, customs, beliefs, culture, society and habits. To make the story of our ancestors more interesting genealogist often include historical details to elucidate. It is not always possible to indicate what is in the mind of our ancestors, but speculation is always possible. “Perhapsing” is a term that is used to indicate speculation in creative non-fiction. In addition to the word “perhaps” other words might include ‘maybe’, ‘might have’ and ‘possibly’.

¹ UHN, Patient Education, Toronto, Spiritual Care, Spiritual and religious care for patients, families and staff of UHN

Historical fiction serves to simplify and educate the reader in a much more entertaining fashion than an article from Wikipedia or history book. In this book you see the practical effects of the puritan religion and culture and I would highly recommend it for those interested in understanding our early American ancestors.

Why should we honour our ancestors. One reason was given by this poem of Elizabeth Barrett Browning some time ago:

We, who are the seed
Of buried creatures, if we turned and spat
Upon our antecedents, we were vile.
Bring violets rather. If these had not walked
Their furlong, could we hope to walk our mile?
Therefore bring violets. Yet if we self-baulked
Stand still, a-strewing violets all the while,
These moved in vain, of whom we have vainly talked.
So rise up henceforth with a cheerful smile,
And having strewn the violets reap the corn,
And having reaped and garnered bring the plow,
And draw new furrows 'neath the healthy morn,
And plant the great Hereafter in the Now."

The poem speaks to the past, present and future. I do not take Browning as indicating that we should accept the actions of our ancestors nor that we should necessarily favour the stories of some over others. Or that we shouldn't recognize the actions of some characters as more moral worthy than others. Rather, it suggests that we are here because our ancestors existed and survived and that we are responsible for planting the seeds for a better future. Down through the ages we have debated nurturance versus nature or the effects of our up bring and choices versus our basic genetic structure. I don't know exactly how much of what we do is determined by nature or nurturance or to what extent we are predetermined or the balance i. e, our degree of freedom. But to the degree to which we are free, we are responsible.

Additions to <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneology.html> since July 1, 2023

Archibald Ancestors <http://www.retson.ca/archibald.pdf>

Archibald Descendants <http://www.retson.ca/archibalddescendants.pdf>

Ball Ancestors <http://www.retson.ca/ball.pdf>

Belgrave Ancestors <http://www.retson.ca/belgrave.pdf>

Busecot Ancestors <https://www.retson.ca/busecot.pdf>

Odlin Ancestors <https://www.retson.ca/odlin.pdf>

May 2023 Newsletter <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneologynewslettermay2023.pdf>

June 2023 Newsletter <http://www.retson.ca/retsongeneologynewsletterjun2023.pdf>

This newsletter was sent to individuals who have expressed an interest in this genealogy at some time. If you do not wish to receive future updates, please email me at jretson@shaw.ca and indicate so.