



**AN OUTSTATE MISSOURI FAMILY
CONNECTS WITH CANADA'S CAPITAL**

A MEMOIR OF 1953

Michael D. Sublett

**AN OUTSTATE MISSOURI FAMILY
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ALSO BY MICHAEL D. SUBLETT

Commentary on a Corn Belt Countryside (Co-Author)

Farmers on the Road

Paper Counties

Township

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PRELUDE

WHAT I OFFER HERE ARE MAINLY MY MEMORIES as a Missouri lad who had just turned 10 when our nuclear family embarked in the spring of 1953 on a half year encounter with Ottawa, Ontario, the national capital of Canada. Supplementing these memories are many items from newspapers, a selection of current online resources, the memories of sister Marcia Diane (we call her Diane), and some miscellaneous materials. I also asked sister Patricia Jean (we call her Jeanne), but she was too young to remember anything about Canada. My memories are precise on certain topics and a bit vague on others. When that difference matters, I will acknowledge it. Otherwise, I will meld them as smoothly as possible. By the way, the Sublett family had not made such a temporary relocation in the past and never did so again.

Inspiration to compose this memoir came from several sources. First, the experience made a strong impression on me and often triggered later connections to something else that life threw my way. Second, the 2023 coronation of King Charles III brought back the recollection of being in Ottawa for the coronation of Canada's previous sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II. Third, also an influence on my decision to write up some of my memories was the fact that, during the 2023 coronation period, I was reading a book that daughter Jennifer had gifted me, George Stewart's classic *U.S. 40: Cross Section of the United*

States of America, which he happened to publish in 1953. Stewart's book covers the highway we initially drove on the trip and later that year we used to return to Columbia, Missouri. Finally, Jennifer encouraged me to put down some of these memories for her to read, after a few of my tales sparked an interest in what her dad had been doing seven long decades ago.

Several photographs illustrate the memoir. All photos devolved to me directly from my parents or through Diane. I name the photographer if I am certain beyond a reasonable doubt.

BACKGROUND

Columbia, Missouri

OUR HOMETOWN AND POINT OF DEPARTURE, a college-focused county seat settlement of 33,000 in 1953 (“Columbia, Missouri”),¹ Columbia stands halfway between St. Louis to the east and Kansas City to the west, part of Outstate Missouri (Sublett 222–24) and at the heart of Missouri’s once southern-leaning Little Dixie, a multiple-county area along and mainly north of the Missouri River. Its three colleges, Stephens College, Christian College (now Columbia College),² and the University of Missouri, provided much of Columbia’s basic employment; and college students added to the population counts. When the students left for their parental homes in the summers, Columbia was a quiet place in the 1950s. For comparison, Ottawa, Ontario, at the same time had roughly 250,000 residents (“Ottawa”).

The Sublett Family as of 1953

Our traveling team included parents James Abraham Sublett (born 1915) and Eva Deane (Varvel) Sublett (born 1920), who

¹This parenthetical segment is the first of many in-text citations. Readers should be able to follow citations to the consulted items in the reference list.

²Not every parenthetical segment is a citation. This one and others offer additional information.

had married in the spring of 1940, following their graduations from Columbia's David Henry Hickman High School (he in 1933 and she in 1938). Dad grew up on a large family farm a few miles east of Columbia, just north of U.S. 40. But his dad, our Grandad Samuel T. Sublett, had died in the early 1930s; and the remaining family members struggled to keep the farm going and intact. Grandmother Lillie Sublett and her children still at home eventually moved to Columbia that same decade. Our mother, Eva Deane (never just Eva), had a vagabond childhood, moving from small town to small town across Missouri while her father, our Grandad Arch Varvel, worked as a carpenter and site boss on road culverts and other short-term construction projects. Auxvasse and Rocheport were among the tiny towns where she and her sister, Ola Marie (Aunt Marie [often Aunt E] to us), attended elementary schools. Eventually, Arch found carpenter work in Columbia, which is why they moved into the larger community.

James and Eva Deane had four children: Michael Dean (born in 1943), Marcia Diane (born in 1946), Patricia Jean (born in 1949), and James Franklin (born in 1954). So, the Ottawa adventure included only the oldest three children. Also traveling with us was David, Mom's first of several Pomeranians. He was a feisty little dog and could take good care of himself around cavorting kids.

Carpenter, Seabee, Superintendent

Dad was a skilled carpenter but also one to see the bigger picture, and he transitioned to carpenter foreman and then superintendent for larger and larger jobs. After high school, he tried to obtain financial assistance to attend the University of



Eva Deane Varvel and James A. Sublett at the time of their March 1940 marriage in Jefferson City, Missouri. [Unknown photographer]

Missouri; but the Mizzou official to whom he spoke told him that the farm they still owned made him ineligible for such aid. Putting aside his dream of a college education, he embarked on a carpenter's life, finding work locally but later in places like the army's Camp Crowder, then expanding in extreme southwestern Missouri, and in or near Kansas City. When World War II beckoned, he took his carpentry skills to the United States Navy and served as a Seabee in a naval construction battalion. He spent much of his service time working as an enlisted man at a seaplane base on the island of New Guinea in the southwest Pacific. After the war years, he returned to Columbia to work as a carpenter but fell in December 1947 from a construction scaffold at the University of Missouri veterinary science building, a fall that resulted in many broken bones and lifelong residual aches and pains ("Worker Hurt . . ."). Upon recovery sufficient to work again, he moved into supervisory roles, eventually to the status of project superintendent for B. D. Simon Construction Company, out of Columbia.

Tilt-Up Wall Building Method

In the late 1940s, Columbia's Nowell-Wetterau Grocer Company needed more warehouse space to supply better the existing and planned grocery establishments of the Independent Grocers Alliance, the IGA. Nowell-Wetterau officials could not find a Columbia-area property sufficient in size for the warehouse. So, they bought 27 acres in Mexico, Missouri, also in Little Dixie and several miles to the northeast of Columbia. On the outskirts of Mexico, in 1950–1951, they had B. D. Simon Construction erect and, in the process, become proficient at the trending technique of pouring concrete wall panels

horizontally and then lifting them with a crane to their final, vertical configuration (“Nowell to Build ..”; “B. D. Simon to Build . . .”).³ I am not sure what role Dad played at the Mexico job, but he must have been an integral factor in the successful erection of this large building (“From Here . . .”; “Giant New Warehouse . . .”).

Tilt-up concrete construction had been around since the early 1900s, really caught on immediately after World War II, and is still in use widely today (Tilt-Up Concrete Association). A wholesale grocery supply firm out of Ottawa, M. Loeb, Limited, became aware of the Mexico warehouse; wanted to build a tilt-up warehouse of its own; and contracted with Simon to construct it in Ottawa, using Canadian labor and as much local construction materiel as possible. Simon employees would supervise the construction, and that is why we entered the picture. Loeb was a significant supplier to the IGA stores in the Ottawa area (“National Chairman . . .”).

³Here I shorten the in-text citations by reducing them to a few initial words. I will do the same on many subsequent citations, those for which I must use source titles because I find no named author.



James A. Sublett is working as a carpenter on window trim in 1939, wearing traditional carpenter overalls and a matching soft cap. Today's carpenter in such a situation might sport a hard hat, wear a tool belt over shorts and shirts, and use a nail gun instead of a claw hammer. [Unknown photographer]

APRIL 1953

Departure

HOW WE FOUND OUT WE WERE LEAVING HOME for Canada is not in my memory bank. I can guess there were complaints about missing our friends, not being able to play in my summer softball league, having to leave behind my bicycle, among other things. Mom would have notified the school that Diane and I attended, the recently completed West Boulevard Elementary, where Diane was a six-year-old first grader and I a fourth grader.⁴ As time passed, and we were still in Columbia weeks after the original time Mom had given Principal J. Wesley Mayhew for departure, he became fixated on knowing a definite date. I remember him calling me to the office so he could question me about our family's intentions. One time he pressed Diane for information. Weather in Canada and perhaps supply issues for the build prevented the Simon company from providing that date as March passed and April began. But sometime toward the middle of April, we did pack up and depart Columbia for Canada.

⁴B. D. Simon Construction offered a bid on the general construction contract for West Boulevard School but was not the low bidder ("Contract for School...").

1949 Mercury

Besides the Simon pickup truck that Dad daily drove to and from work sites, we had only one other vehicle, a maroon 1949 Mercury Eight four-door sedan. The truck stayed with Simon; and we loaded the big Merc with three kids, two adults, a dog, and who knows what other stuff to keep us entertained for the long journey, around 1,200 miles, with one or two overnights in roadside lodging each way. The car, like all 1949 Mercury Eights, had a three-speed manual transmission, three on the tree, as I learned later to describe (and drive) vehicles with their clutch-controlled shifting device on the steering column. Mercury did not offer an automatic transmission in 1949. Power came from Ford's highly successful flathead V-8, producing around 255 horsepower ("Mercury"). Whitewall tires added to the Merc's cool look.

Dad did the driving, with Mom and David up front. Diane, Jeanne, and I occupied and made good use of the ample seating area in the back. Sometimes Mom would turn the dog loose to play with us, but usually David rode quietly either in the seat between our parents or on floor beneath her legs. Both front and back areas had bench seats with a nice, comfortable velour-like fabric. Across the back of the front seat was a grab rope for back-seat passengers. Nobody had a seatbelt. Airbags were in the distant future. Access to the rear seating area was via doors that hinged at the rear, sometimes referred to as "suicide" doors because they could pop open and stay open while the vehicle was in motion. So, the handles for front doors (hinged at the front like most vehicles today) and handles for the rear doors were next to one another in the middle of the Merc's side panels ("Suicide Door").



In Columbia prior to the Ottawa trip, the author, in Cub Scout uniform, beside the family's 1949 Mercury Eight. Note the car's suicide door, its whitewall tire, and the Simon Construction pickup truck. [Eva Deane Sublett]

East by North by East

As I recall, we left on a weekday morning, date unknown; picked up U. S. 40, which cut east-west through the north side of Columbia a few blocks from our house; and headed east to St. Louis, on through Illinois, and into Indiana. Somewhere in the Indianapolis area, we turned northward off U. S. 40 in order ultimately to catch U. S. 12 in southern Michigan. On the way to Michigan, we may have spent a night near Peru, Indiana, as that place seems to ring a memory bell. U. S. 12 took us to Detroit where we used the Ambassador Bridge to cross the Detroit River into Windsor, Ontario. From there we most likely drove what is now Highway 2 through Toronto and northeastward along the north shore of Lake Ontario. I know for sure that on our April drive we spent a night in a mom-and-pop motel in Port Hope, Ontario.

It was cold and nasty alongside the big lake that evening, as we pulled in tired and hungry at a lonely motel. We may have been the only overnight guests. The motel operators ran a small café as part of the complex, and we ate a nice dinner there. Mom wanted us to have a hot breakfast the next day; she and the managers agreed as to how they could make that happen. Apparently, the owners did not plan to open the café until later than we wanted to leave. The next morning, we got up expecting to dine again in the motel's café; but it was not in service. Somehow, in the shift from Central to Eastern time, we had made a mistake and were an hour early. Dad, never one to linger, was anxious to get on the road and finish the journey. Mom did not want the motel owners to think we had skipped out on breakfast, after we had asked them to open the café just for us.

She left them a note of apology and perhaps a small tip for their trouble. We ate farther east along the lake before we turned northward through mainly rural Ontario toward Ottawa.

21 Belmont Avenue

The Merc brought us safely to Belmont Avenue. Diane remembers snow was falling as we approached; I remember dark gray skies and a sense of foreboding. In what was then and is now the Ottawa South neighborhood, residential Belmont runs northeast to southwest, with its eastern terminus at the Rideau River. Just two houses and a narrow road separated us from the Rideau. The house at 21 Belmont was much larger than what was then our two-bedroom, one-story/no basement house at 517 North Hardin Street in Columbia.⁵ Our Belmont house had three floors plus a basement, all accessible by convenient stairways. Simon Construction had made the housing arrangements and would pay the rent for us to live there. The owners of the Belmont house, an elderly married couple, the Whiteacres, were going to be abroad that summer and early fall. They stored much of their personal gear on the third floor, an area to which we kids did not have access. Our bedrooms, including one strictly for me, were on floor two, along with what I recall having been the only bathroom in our part of the house. On floor one we had a living room, dining room, kitchen, fully screened front porch, and side door to the driveway.

⁵Dad, with the help of Grandad Arch Varvel and other construction colleagues had built the starter house on North Hardin Street right after World War II. We outgrew it eventually and moved in the late 1950s to another house that Dad, with help, built a few blocks from Hardin. I was among the helpers on the second build.

In the basement was a carpeted recreation area that we could access for playing. Had there been a television, the rec room would have doubled nicely as a TV room. The exterior house surfaces were brick on the first level and stucco (perhaps covering brick) above the first level. Like other lots up and down Belmont, the Whiteacre lot was narrow, with barely room to park the car off the street in a short concrete driveway. Unlike our place in Columbia, there was no garage. The front yard was almost nonexistent, while out back was a bigger area of grass and a mint-smelling weed. Houses on the street were typically two or three stories.

Rideau River, Lakes, Falls, and Canal

About a hundred yards across as we viewed it from Belmont, the Rideau River flows northward past Belmont toward its merging with the Ottawa River as a right-bank tributary. In turn, the Ottawa's waters slide into the St. Lawrence River at Montreal. The east-west trending Ottawa River corridor provided a handy access route for the fur traders of Canada's interior throughout French and English exploitation of the beaver and other native animals. Rising in the glacially derived Rideau Lakes amidst the high ground between Ottawa and Kingston (on Lake Ontario), the Rideau River flows mainly northward, and ends in the curtain-like Rideau Falls, just east of what is now Parliament Hill on Ottawa's north side. The French word for a curtain is *rideau*. Roughly parallel to the Rideau River and near Belmont to the west, the Rideau Canal (opened in 1832) connects the Ottawa River near Parliament Hill with Kingston and now mainly serves a recreational function ("Rideau Canal"). The canal passes through Ottawa South near Hopewell

Avenue School; and, like the river, it was a novel landscape feature for visitors from a town with neither a canal nor a river. The river turned out to be an important contributor to our overall experience in Ottawa, as we swam, fished, frogged, and generally appreciated it.

Hopewell Avenue Public School

Diane and I returned to first and fourth grades the next week. Hopewell Avenue, coming in from the southwest, terminates at Bank Street, a block north of where Belmont also terminates at Bank from the northeast. Hopewell Avenue School stood on the northwest side of Hopewell and immediately west of the local retail strip on Bank Street. Bank was and is a major north-south thoroughfare leading out to the countryside south of the city and northward all the way to Parliament Hill. Compared to our brand-new West Boulevard School, Hopewell was much older, with wood flooring (versus asphalt tiles over concrete at West Boulevard) and multiple stories above ground level.⁶ Hopewell, by the way, is still standing as a public school, with what I can see via Google Earth to be several significant enhancements, so that it now extends to the west sidewalk of Bank Street. Hopewell housed grades K-8, while West Boulevard had K-6.

Instead of the Pledge of Allegiance that we recited at the start of the school day in Columbia, classes at Hopewell began with two patriotic songs, sung standing. “God Save the Queen” was, I believe, up first. Next came what was then the unofficial

⁶The Hopewell structure that we occupied dated from 1910–1911, but there had been a school there previously (“Prizes for Essays”; “Surprise for School Board”).



Granddad Arch Varvel standing in the front yard of the rental house at 21 Belmont Avenue. Note how the house has a screened front porch with a ventilation trellis underneath the porch. [Eva Deane Sublett]

Canadian national anthem, “The Maple Leaf Forever.” I had probably heard of the former but never of the latter. To fit in, however, I tried to learn the words and sing along with my patriotic classmates. “The Maple Leaf Forever” was unofficial because of its strong British perspective, which French-speaking Canadians did not appreciate all that much (“The Maple . . .”). I am not sure what French Canadians thought about singing the praises of the British sovereign.

Classwork in the final weeks of the fourth grade went smoothly with social studies, science, spelling, reading, health, etc. Arithmetic was a different matter. I had never had difficulty with that subject; but the Hopewell curriculum had taken the students already into long division, something that I had yet to encounter by the time we left for Ottawa. I struggled with division computations (done with a pencil, of course) in class and even spent time after school with the teacher, trying to catch up with the others. Somehow, I acquired sufficient competency and could then do the daily numbers work that passing the fourth grade required. Diane breezed through the rest of first grade.

Lunch at West Boulevard had been hot and prepared in the school’s walkout lower level. Hopewell apparently did not have a school cafeteria; so, Diane and I had to walk home, eat a quick meal, and walk back to school for the afternoon. The distance (checked recently) was a half mile each way. Mom would have had lunch ready, and we had no problem making it back in time for the first bell. Walking two miles per day for an education did not seem in any way onerous, and I do not recall any issues with the weather on those walks. Walking a lot was just part of the Ottawa package.



View of Belmont Avenue and the northward-flowing (right to left) Rideau River from the front yard of the Whiteacre rental house on a rainy summer day. The driveway for 21 Belmont is in the foreground. Berms are absent between sidewalks and street. [Unknown photographer]

Hopewell life involved regular emergency drills. At West Boulevard, the drills were about fires; and we cleared out the building repeatedly, making our way to the school's playgrounds or sidewalks. Hopewell drills were about nuclear attacks from the air. When the special bell sounded, all the students and teachers rushed to the hallway adjacent to the classrooms. There, we huddled against the walls and covered our heads with our arms. I always thought to myself, "this is futile." If the Russians want to nuke the national capital and hit the school in the process, huddling in the hallway would not be much of a defense.

I have told more than one person since our time in Ottawa that I was way behind Canada in long division, but I was ahead of new Canadian classmates in softball and baseball. We would play softball on the asphalt playground next to Hopewell at recess, with bases and foul lines painted on the surface. It soon became obvious that I was better at most aspects of the sport than other guys in the fourth grade. After-school games involved competition between grades and perhaps between schools. I wanted to play in those after-school games; but fourth graders, seemingly, did not qualify. Nevertheless, I persisted. One day, a man (probably a teacher/coach) whom I did not know appeared in the doorway of our classroom and asked for me. My teacher instructed me to stand; being the tallest boy in the class seemed to make a difference. The guy said, "He will do." So, I became a regular member of the after-school competition, often playing first base because I had a glove and knew how to use it. Nobody but the first baseman and catcher wore baseball gloves in the 12-inch softball competition we enjoyed.

William H. and Mary Alice Simon

We were not the only Columbians to live in Ottawa that year. Simon Construction also sent Bill Simon, a younger brother of B. D. Simon, Jr., to assist on the warehouse job. William H. (Bill) Simon, wife Mary Alice Simon, and son William Craig Simon (born 1951 and called Craig) were there for the duration of our stay. Bill had served briefly in the navy during World War II, following his graduation from Hickman in 1944 (“William H. Simon . . .”). After service, he enrolled at Mizzou; dropped out; married Mary Alice Robertson (also from Columbia, a Hickman graduate, and a Christian College alumna); worked for other construction companies in places like Kansas City and Marietta (Ohio); and earned a civil engineering degree at Mizzou in the early 1950s (“Miss Robertson . . .”; “Simons in Ohio . . .”). I am not sure where they lived in Ottawa; but we interacted with them occasionally on weekends, usually to look at flower gardens.



Tulips form much of the backdrop as Mary Alice and William Craig Simon, left, join the Sublett family for a Sunday outing. Marcia Diane, Patricia Jean, and the author are sitting in front of parents James A. and Eva Deane Sublett. [William H. Simon]

MAY 1953

Loeb Warehouse Underway

CONSTRUCTION BEGAN IMMEDIATELY on the Loeb warehouse, which was to be about 50 percent larger than the one in Missouri. Simon Construction had won the Loeb job with a bid of \$600,000; that figure would be roughly \$6.8 million today. The warehouse site was downstream from Belmont and on the other (right bank, eastern) side of the Rideau River, on Industrial Avenue, in an area soon to have other commercial structures. Both B. D. Simon, Sr. and B. D. Simon, Jr. made monthly trips to Ottawa as part of the management team, but I never saw either of them. They flew from Columbia to St. Louis to Chicago to Cleveland or Detroit and then on to Ottawa. The elder Simon told the *Columbia Missourian* in May 1953 that “building materials pass through much of the same customs routine as persons . . . All the heavy steel sections come from the U. S. They don’t roll much steel in Canada.” He did acknowledge that “many other items are contracted through Canadian companies.” Dad got a bit of press in the same article. Commenting about the convoluted flight routine of the traveling Simons, the writer said, “If the flight pattern...discourages you, then maybe you would like the job two other Columbians, William H. Simon and James Sublett, have. They are on the job daily, making it necessary for them to live in Ottawa for the length of the project” (“Construction Business . . .”).

The actual building permit for the warehouse that the City of Ottawa issued was for only \$451,250 (“Get Permit . . .”) compared to the \$600,000 figure I above cited. That meant there was a difference of \$150,000 between the bid that Simon won and the permit amount. Those extra dollars may have helped make up for the exchange rate differential between Canada and the United States but mostly went to cover such extras as the rented space for the two company families as well as travel expenses for us and the Simon leadership team. Simon Construction also may have paid Dad and Bill Simon more in salary than would have been the case in Missouri.

Tulips Galore

Our mother loved growing her own flowers and seeing the flowering results of gardening by others. In Ottawa, she organized Sunday or holiday trips to see what the Canadians were doing with flowers on Parliament Hill, along the Rideau Canal, and at the agricultural experiment station not far from 21 Belmont. She must have found herself (and us) extremely lucky to have arrived in Ottawa only a month before the first annual Canadian Tulip Festival, which is still running. Tulips had been a spring attraction in the capital since the Dutch donated something like 750,000 bulbs in appreciation of the World War II kindnesses that Ottawa and the Dominion’s government extended to the exiled royal family of the Netherlands. The Dutch have donated many more bulbs since then. Festival dates in 1953 were 16 to 24 May (“City News . . .”; “Canadian Tulip Festival”). Even I, not much of a flower connoisseur in those days, found the tulip swaths spectacular.

Street Games

Both our Columbia and Ottawa neighborhoods had a lot of boys my age. Pickup games of softball/baseball and football were common diversions, depending on the season, almost daily in both neighborhoods. In Columbia, we also played basketball, while in Canada we added street hockey. In the coldest Canadian months, the boys would have migrated to frozen surfaces to engage in ice hockey; but the Sublett troupe missed the icy cold weather. What was different about how we played such similar games was where we played. Along and near Hardin Street in Columbia there were always vacant lots, yet unbuilt upon, that we appropriated for field games. We could and did also bike over to West Boulevard School to use the large expanse of dirt and grass playground space for games during weekends and summer days. In Ottawa, however, the preferred venue for our softball/baseball, football, and hockey games was Belmont Avenue's driving surface, its sidewalks (both sides), and the front yards of adjacent houses. We never played games on Hardin Street or any other Columbia thoroughfare. Streets were for motorized vehicles and bicycles. It never occurred to me or came up in our youthful planning of our playing turf to lay out a field on a street in Columbia.

Playing ball in the middle of a neighborhood street had its moments. With softball/baseball, one tried to hit up the middle of the playing area. Pulling the ball down the foul line or shooting it to the opposite field's foul line was out of bounds. In those houses were also windows that might break. Vehicles could park along either of Belmont's curbs but seemed not to be present most of the time. On the first or maybe second day



Temporary Ottawa residents, from Missouri, take in tulip blooms on a family outing, probably at the agricultural experiment station. From the left, in front, are William Craig Simon, the author, Marcia Diane Sublett, and Patricia Jean Sublett. Kneeling behind the children are William H. Simon (left) and James A. Sublett. [Mary Alice Simon]

of our stay there, however, I got into a street baseball game where a parked car ended up in centerfield with its windshield pointed toward home plate. Either thrown or batted by a comrade, our baseball impacted the windshield with bad results. We all contributed a bit for the “broken china,” as we called such collateral damage. When playing street hockey, we used a tennis ball, which is what we should have used also for softball/baseball season. Moving vehicles posed another impediment to our street games. Most of the motorized traffic would have been local; and those drivers knew the score, so to speak, as to what the kids were doing. We yielded the right-of-way always.

The Belmont boys also had to deal with horse-drawn carts, something totally new to my life story. Typically in the morning, as I recall, down the street, heading toward the Rideau River before turning northward to pick up the next residential street, moseyed at least two kinds of one-horse, rubber-tired carts: milk and bread/pastries. The drivers of the carts and their horses knew which houses typically bought their products, and the horses would walk ahead of the driver (always a man) who had to cover both sides of the street. Horses would stop where they knew to wait for the driver to catch up and resupply his hand-carried container. Not infrequently the horses would leave us a stinking reminder of their passage. Those piles would gradually dry and disperse over the succeeding days, and eventually we could kick them to the curb.

Ottawa Athletics Baseball

Professional baseball had far more Minor League teams in 1953 than it does today. Ottawa, then among several hundred Minor League cities in the United States and Canada, fielded

a AAA team in the International League. The Ottawa Athletics were a property of the American League's Philadelphia Athletics, which would in 1955 become the Kansas City Athletics and in 1968 move on out to Oakland, California.⁷ Ottawa's team played at Lansdowne Park, on the east side of Bank Street, just north of the Rideau Canal, within an easy bike ride for the Belmont boys. I recall attending several games there, paying 50 cents for an unreserved seat, age 12 and under, in the right field end of the grandstand. The grandstand had a wire screen to isolate those of us in the 50-cent section from the better seats closer to home plate. We could have paid just 25 cents, 12 and under, to sit in the uncovered outfield bleachers but chose to splurge (Ottawa Athletics).

⁷The peripatetic big league Athletics are now planning to move to Las Vegas, Nevada.



The Belmont boys take a break for this group shot along the avenue. Beside the curb, left to right, are J. D., Monty, and Yves. Behind them, from the left, are Richard, the author, Gordon, and Larry. [Unknown photographer]

JUNE 1953

Coronation of QE II

ELIZABETH II WAS THE QUEEN OF CANADA. Her coronation on 2 June 1953 was a major event in the country, especially in the English dominated provinces, like Ontario. Although communication channels did not then allow for simultaneous broadcasting of the coronation in Canada or the United States, authorities made every effort to get the recorded video and audio package to North America quickly. Following the coronation, three separate flights of film flew via “Canberra jet planes—the Royal Air Force’s new high-altitude bombers” (Breed) across the Atlantic that same day into Goose Bay, Labrador, and on to Montreal, with assistance from the Royal Canadian Air Force (“Jets Speed . . .”). From there the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation sent the filmed events out via its network to the nation’s television receivers starting at 4:18 p.m., even as the later films in the sequence were still in the air (Finn).

Not having a television at home, we could not view the program there. Instead, Diane and I got to see “an edited [for time] version of the Coronation films” at Hopewell Avenue School on 3 June in an area that accommodated all the classes at one time (“Coronation Broadcasts”). As a first grader, she remembers being down front, below a raised TV screen. I remember being farther back but also that each of us received a bronze commemorative coronation token. It is approximately



The royal cypher of Queen Elizabeth and her image appear on a large banner hanging from the south façade of the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Most likely the banner was there throughout the official period of coronation celebration. The Peace Tower, or Tour de la Paix, stands just over 300 feet and dates from the 1920s. It has long been a landmark and point of Canadian pride. [Eva Deane Sublett]

1.25 inches in diameter, from the Royal Canadian Mint, and shows a right-facing profile of the young queen on the obverse. On the reverse it reads around the margin: “Elizabeth II Regina Coronata MCMLIII.” In the center is the royal cypher for Queen Elizabeth, with “CANADA” below it. I still have my token, but others are for sale on eBay at \$20–25 US.

Drowning of a New Friend

Elizabeth’s coronation took place on Tuesday, and we viewed it at school on Wednesday. That Sunday, 7 June, tragedy visited our neighborhood as a young friend drowned in the Rideau River, a few hundred yards upstream (southward) from Belmont. Guy (rhymed with he) Flint lived at 42 Belmont Avenue with his parents. He was only six but tried to fit in with the older guys in street games and as a fisherman. I remember him wearing shorts and black knee-high rubber boots, carrying his fishing pole.

Guy had in mind catching some fish on Sunday and, in that quest, ventured alone onto a “rickety raft” somebody had left moored in the river, and ultimately fell into “about six feet of water.” A boy that I did not know called for help and was able to attract the attention of Maurice, the father of two Belmont boys I did know. Maurice told the boy to go for more help and dived into the Rideau water, but he could not find Guy. Soon the Ottawa Fire Department was on the scene and ultimately retrieved the body. They worked on him for “40 minutes with an inhalator before the coroner pronounced him dead” (“Two Men . . .”). Somehow, we on the street got the word; and Diane and I walked over to Windsor Park where the recovery was proceeding. We waited on the gravel parking lot

with a growing crowd for them to pull him out of the water. I think that may have been the first deceased human that I had seen. What had been a historic week on Belmont ended with the death of a new friend. I cannot recall whether he was wearing his rubber boots.

Fishing the Rideau River

I had arrived in Canada ready to do some fishing, even though fishing in central Missouri was not my favorite pastime. With my Grandad Varvel I had fished with a cane pole, hook, line, and bobber along the muddy creeks around Columbia, like Perche Creek to the west of town; but I had never done any casting or used other advanced fishing tactics. Our Uncle Bill (William Bittner, married to Dad's sister Lucille) took a different approach. He got me outfitted in Columbia with a casting rod; reel; line; tackle box; a couple of lures for lunkers like muskie, pike, and bass; and a practice lure. My practice lure was rubber and about the size of real lures, except it had no hooks. In our backyard on Hardin, Uncle Bill tried to teach me how to cast with the practice lure. The trick was to stop the spinning reel once the practice lure, or any lure, landed. Otherwise, backlash ensued, followed by a lot of unwinding by hand and reeling in the line before the next cast.⁸

By the time we unpacked in Ottawa, I felt pretty good about my chances; but the nearby river looked much different from Perche Creek (wider, deeper, cleaner, dangerous). I

⁸Bill Bittner was a construction inspector for the University of Missouri, and I sometimes saw him at job sites when I worked on university buildings as a carpenter for Simon during my high school and Mizzou summers.

quickly found somebody's narrow fixed dock on our side of the Rideau, just a few yards downstream from where Belmont ended. I never saw anybody else use the dock, for fishing or boating. I did a lot of lure casting from the dock and got pretty good at it; but the fish were not biting, no matter where I sent my line and lures. Nevertheless, I liked being on the dock by myself, giving it a good try. A couple months later, while our Varvel grandparents were visiting us, I saw a relatively large fish next to the dock, and just dropped the lure in the water in front of the fish. It bit, and I caught my only Rideau River fish, not a prize muskie but a catfish. Grandad Varvel, fortunately, was there to help me clean it for dinner.

Yoyos and Bolos

We were familiar with the yoyo in Columbia. Every West Boulevard guy (and maybe girl, too) had one in 1953. I had a couple of them and could do a trick or two. Nobody could match, however, the visiting yoyo salesmen who demonstrated their tricks on our playgrounds at recess and the noontime break in Columbia. I do not know how these young men managed to get access to us on school property, but we enjoyed their brief schoolyard shows before we left town. Diane also remembers similar performances at Hopewell, but she claims no fame as a yoyo operator in either locale.

For us, bolo bats were strictly an Ottawa thing. The bolo or bolo bat involved a wooden paddle, about the size of a ping-pong paddle. Attached by a thin but very elastic rubber band, several feet long, to the center of one side of the paddle by a staple was a hard rubber ball, about an inch in diameter. When one hit the ball with the paddle, the ball flew in the air only to

have the band restrain it and bring it back to the vicinity of the paddle. The player's role was to keep the ball in motion, by hitting it back into the air again and again. Counting the consecutive number of successful returns was a key aspect of playing this game. Better players could also hit it downward and deal with the unexpected results when the ball encountered the ground and then rebounded. Bolo bats were great for improving hand-eye coordination

I owned a couple of bolo bats during our stay in Ottawa. The first and cheaper one had an unpainted plywood paddle that was a bit flimsy, which meant that the returning ball had to hit the center of the paddle squarely to keep the sequence of strikes going well. My second bat had a red painted surface, and the wood was thicker than that of the first paddle. It may have been plywood but could also have been solid wood. In any case, because the painted paddle was sturdier, I did not have to hit so squarely to keep the ball in motion. Eventually, the rubber band would break, however, necessitating a retie fix. The shorter and shorter resulting band made returns tougher and tougher, until finally all the player had was a paddle and a rubber ball. At that juncture, lost balls were commonplace. The sound of the ball against the paddle must have been a noisy nuisance for everyone else.

Bolo bats were such a big deal that summer that kids could compete for prizes in batting contests. One contest, sponsored by the Ottawa Department of Recreation, occurred the night of 16 June at Brewer Park, which is a mile or so southwest of 21 Belmont alongside the Rideau River ("Ottawa South Children . . . "). That same week Ottawa's Linden Theatre was

advertising its “City Bolo Championship Contest” for Saturday, 20 June. “Bring Your Bolo Bat” read the newspaper advertising and maybe win “Valuable Prizes!” (Linden Theatre). I did not compete in either contest.

Bicycles

Our rental house came with a single-speed, coaster-braked men’s bicycle that I could ride as much as I wanted. The tires were thinner in width than the tires on my Columbia bike. It did not have a chain guard, so long pants on the right leg could pose a problem, a problem that one eliminated by rolling up that pant leg. Every boy had his own bike. A few guys had moved up to three-speed, dropped handlebar, hand-braked bicycles, something that I had not previously encountered. A few times I was able to borrow such a bike briefly and thereafter set my sights on having my own multiple-speed road bike in the future. Raleigh was the brand of choice for a three speed.

I pedaled that old single speed a lot. We rode up and down Belmont, of course, but also along the river road (now a dedicated bike path) to nearby streets and Windsor Park. I do not recall biking to Hopewell Avenue School; but we did bike to the Mayfair Theatre, next to the school, for movies and farther north on Bank Street to Lansdowne for Athletics games. On one occasion, however, I used that bike when I should have walked. The story goes something like this. At Brewer Park, the Recreation Department was holding tryouts for summer softball (maybe baseball) leagues one June evening. Somehow, I learned of the tryouts and decided to give it a go. Grabbing my glove, I pedaled off toward the southwest in my jeans and tee shirt to the tryouts, leaving myself what I thought was plenty

of time. After crossing Bank Street, I had to negotiate several blocks of residential streets prior to the park. In that stretch, disaster struck. My pant leg (which I had failed to roll) became entangled between the chain and the chainring. Trying to break the pant leg free did not go well. Fused to the bike, I ended up using my left leg to propel myself toward the park, coasting when I managed to achieve some momentum. I remember coasting and one legging it across the grass outfield, by then overdue for the tryouts. Somebody eventually helped me disentangle myself, but it was too late for me to show what I could do on the field. I had my torn and oily pant leg properly rolled up for the long ride back home.

JULY 1953

Dominion Day

ON THE FIRST DAY OF JULY, Canadians celebrate what amounts to their day of independence, their version of our Fourth of July, with parades, military displays, picnics, and fireworks. The British North America Act of 1867 came into effect on 1 July of 1867 and created the Dominion of Canada (Ware 3).⁹ Through 1982 they called it Dominion Day (using 2 July if 1 July fell on a Sunday). Since 1983 they have called it Canada Day, as at that time Canada became fully independent of the United Kingdom (“Canada Day”).

The guys and I supplemented the Dominion Day public fireworks of 1953 with many minor explosions of our own on Belmont. I cannot recall where we got the fireworks to detonate, but I do recall how we lit them. Instead of a fireworks punk stick, which I had used in Columbia for setting off firecrackers and the like, the Belmont boys used a string. You lit your string with a match, lighter, or (maybe) another lit string. Then you carried the burning string, hands-free, looped around your pants belt. Apparently, having such a small amount of actual fire bouncing off the cloth of our pants kept it from igniting said pants. String would burn longer than a punk stick and was much cheaper.

⁹Ware’s chapter is in the John Warkentin book, *Canada: A Geographical Interpretation*. That book was the first text that I used in my Geography of Canada course at Illinois State University.

Swimming Lessons

Mom signed me up for swimming lessons that began 29 June. She probably saw the notice in the *Citizen* that the Ottawa YMCA would “again sponsor a beginners ‘learn to swim’ program for boys 8 to 12 years of age.” It was free and open to any guy in that age group. Lessons were an hour each morning, Monday through Friday, for two successive weeks (“YMCA to Sponsor . . .”). I doubt that I asked to take the lessons, as I never enjoyed swimming or even wading in water. Most likely she (1) recalled the drowning of Guy in early June on the Rideau and (2) knew that I was going on a vacation that might mean some water time.

The YMCA was downtown somewhere, and too far for me to bike. Mom had two younger kids at home and a dog, maybe with no car at her disposal. That meant I had to use public transit courtesy of the Ottawa Transportation Commission each morning for my commute to and from the lessons. I caught the OTC bus on a street northwest of 21 Belmont, maybe two or three blocks from home. The cost would have been minimal, and the buses by that time had delivered their morning rush patrons to their places of work. I am guessing that the Y stop was either at the door or nearby. My commute was easy to the building that housed the indoor pool.

Not so easy was the first rule of these swimming lessons: no bathing suits for the students. What? I am not sure Mom knew this rule, but I found out that first day and had to make a tough decision. Do I reveal it all along with the other boys or quit and go home? I knew that heading home early would not resonate

well on Belmont Avenue, no matter what the reason. I opted for the lessons; dignity be darned.¹⁰

I did learn to swim, though not well enough to achieve a Beginners Swimming Certificate, which 16 of the 42 earned. My name appeared in the *Citizen* among those of the 20 students capable of swimming the width of the pool (“Beginners, Gliders . . .”).

Brighton Beach

One of the places where I practiced my new swimming skills was Brighton Beach, a privately owned and maintained Rideau River facility, just around the corner and a block downstream from Belmont. The Brighton Beach Aquatic Club owned the property (“F. R. Jessop . . .”), which included a clubhouse with lockers and such and provided several lifeguards to watch over the hundreds, even thousands, who paid a small daily fee to swim in the river or suntan on the grassy slope above the river. They had a big raft anchored in the river out beyond the safety boom. I went to Brighton Beach more than once that summer but never felt comfortable in the weedy water. Perhaps the

¹⁰YMCA pool administrators across Canada and the United States had been facing challenges to the Y’s nude swimming rule for boys and men before I began my lessons at the Ottawa facility. In Calgary, Alberta, for instance, letters to the editor of the *Herald* in 1949 had questioned Y policies regarding swimsuits (“Swimming in Nude . . .”). Gradually, one Y pool after another made swim clothing a requirement (“YMCA Restricts . . .”). One reason was that the “new type of swimsuit eliminate[d] the hazard” of clogging pool drains that those old woolen suits supposedly presented, but also YMCA pools were no longer just for males (“YMCA Ends . . .”).



A birthday brought the Belmont boys and one Belmont girl together around a candle-lit table. From the left are Richard, J. D. (the honoree), Kenneth (eyes closed), Gordon, Sandra (sister of J. D.) Monty, Yves, Larry, the author, and Clarke. [Unknown photographer]

drowning on 20 June of a rising fifth grader, Brian Kennedy, whom I did not know, had something to do with my discomfort. He was among approximately 1,200 who visited Brighton that Saturday (“Boy, Nine, Loses . . .”). Divers found him entangled in the weeds, in 15 feet of water, beyond the safety boom and near the raft. Brian had enrolled for and was ready to start the same YMCA swimming class that I completed (“Boy Tangled . . .”). Today Brighton is a public park served by the riverside biking-hiking trail. It no longer has a swimming beach.

Paper Route

For a couple of weeks, midsummer, I ended up carrying part of an afternoon *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper route as a favor for 12-year-old friend Richard. It was my first official job, the only paper route I ever carried. Richard’s route covered much of Belmont. For some reason, Richard, whose father had dived into the Rideau in search of Guy Flint, had to be out of town for a couple of weeks. Richard enlisted his younger brother, Monty, to carry part of the route and me for the other half. Monty and I followed him on the route once or twice to get our bearings. We went with Richard to the Ottawa South storefront *Citizen* office on the east side of Bank Street, a block or so south of Hopewell School. There we learned how to fold papers for delivery. Monty and I split the route evenly in some logical fashion. We each had a well-used, ink-stained *Citizen* shoulder sack for our papers. Everything went fine during the work week with my route. I had the portion that included 21 Belmont so I could end up there making my delivery in time for dinner.

Saturday, on the other hand, was not to be just another day at the office for me. I arrived there at the time I had been

arriving for Friday, Thursday, etc. Oddly, no paperboys were hanging around to pick up their papers or in the process of folding them. The circulation person was sitting in the office, not too pleased with me. It seems that on Saturdays our papers came to the office a couple of hours earlier than during the week. “Where have you been?” Nobody had told me that I needed to be there sooner. He was anxious to close for the day, and I got to do my folding on the sidewalk. None of the patrons complained, and I am sure the site manager had run into this Saturday problem in times past. There was no Sunday paper.

Richard, who became a neurologist, tried his hand that summer as a newspaper publisher. He and a couple of friends, brothers Clarke and Kenneth from Belmont also, established *The Belmont News*, a typed, carbon paper duplicated effort. They solicited news from the street and borrowed stories from the mainstream press. The *Citizen* carried a three-column piece with a pair of photographs about the homegrown newspaper effort and noted that Richard and Clarke were also “Citizen carrier boys” (“Future Newspapermen . . .”).

The Korean War

Belmont friend Yves and I talked about the French conflict then heating up in Indochina, as he had a cousin or uncle fighting for the French there. This conversation was probably my first inkling about what would evolve into our Vietnam War. So, while I was following Allied fortunes in the waning days of the Korean War, Yves had another war in mind. My special interest in the Korean conflict revolved around the dogfights involving American F-86 Sabre jet fighters and the MiG-15

jets of the enemy. The war ended in a armistice late in July 1953. That stalemate persists (Tong-Hyung).

Family Visitors

Also in late July, and probably stretching into August, we had family visitors. Our maternal grandparents, Arch and Jeanette Varvel, drove in from Columbia, where they lived and had been watching our Hardin Street house. Grandad Varvel, then 60, would have had to take off valuable summer days from carpenter work that he had been performing. At the same time, Aunt Marie (Varvel) Carroll flew in from New York City, where she had lived for many years and worked in the Manhattan office of Shell Oil Company. Her husband, Uncle John Carroll, was at sea serving as a mate and a navigator aboard the latest of several cruise ships on which he worked. Where our guests stayed is unclear to me now. One thing Diane and I both remember well, however, is the frog caper.

Those frogs were making a lot of noise with their mating calls along the Rideau, even keeping us awake when we had the windows open for a breath of night air. With my fishing rod, hooked lure attached, I set out one dusky evening to catch and dispatch a few of the big ones. By dangling the lure in front of shoreline frogs, I made a minor dent in the noise; but I needed a better method. When Grandad Varvel arrived, he assessed the situation and suggested skipping the rod and lure for just a sturdy stick. Walking quietly along the natural levee next to the Rideau, south toward Windsor Park, one could get close before they noticed anything amiss. Then it was a matter of who was quicker: jumping bullfrog or Missouri kid with stick to pummel them. As I became better at winning that

frog-kid confrontation, Grandad and I started harvesting the frogs, probably in a bucket. We cleaned them; and Mom, Aunt Marie, and Granny Varvel prepared the frog legs for dinner. Diane said to me recently that fried frog legs, “tasted like chicken.” They were pretty good, but I do not remember ever eating frog legs again.



The Subletts and their guests had a habit of dressing up to visit formal flower gardens. Here, somewhere in Ottawa, in front, left to right, are the author; Marcia Diane, and Patricia Jean. Behind them, from left, are Grandad Arch Varvel, Aunt Marie Carroll, and Granny Jeanette Varvel. [Eva Deane Sublett]

AUGUST 1953

Unexpected Vacation

ALSO COOKED UP THAT SUMMER, but without my knowledge, was a flight to New York City and a bus trip down the coast from New York to Cape May. Our visitors were departing, and I had the chance to accompany Aunt Marie on Colonial Airlines as she returned home. It would be my first commercial flight, and I was up for it.

Colonial, headquartered in Montreal, had enjoyed “23 consecutive years without an accident,” according to an April 1953 advertisement in the *Citizen*, and was in its “1st year of DC4 service from Ottawa.” Operating out of Ottawa’s Up-lands Airport, Colonial offered direct or one-stop flights to Montreal, New York, Washington, Syracuse, Binghamton [New York], and Bermuda (Colonial Airlines [April]). Three years later, in 1956, Colonial, which had begun in 1928 as Canadian Colonial Airlines, merged with Eastern Airlines and ceased to exist separately (“Colonial Airlines”). That merger was in the works when we flew Colonial to New York (“Lines Merge . . .”).

The Douglas DC-4 entered service in 1942; became a workhorse of the Allies during World War II; and garnered designation as the first presidential aircraft, under Franklin D. Roosevelt. It featured four propellers on piston-driven engines and a tricycle landing configuration, compared to the

two engines and tail-dragging layout of its DC-3 predecessor. Numerous airlines besides Colonial flew the DC-4, including Delta, United, and Pan American (Singh).

The only flight to New York departed Uplands at 7:55 p.m., according to a July 1953 Colonial advertisement that ran in the *Citizen*. They described the trip as “Direct one-stop 4-engine service” and charged \$47.00 for the round trip. If they had a child’s fare, they did not promote it in that ad. The \$47 would translate to about \$530 today. Who paid for my trip? My guess is that Aunt Marie did, but we will never know for sure (Colonial Airlines [July]).

Ottawa’s Uplands Airport (now Ottawa Macdonald–Cartier International Airport) was on relatively high ground south of the city and not too far from Belmont. The whole family, including grandparents but probably not David, came to the airport to see us depart. One could purchase, we learned, life insurance for such flights from a vending machine near the departure gate, not a confidence building option in my opinion. We decided against the insurance, but apparently enough 1950s passengers did purchase life policies to make the vending machines a profit source (“Two on Airliner . . .”).

It was still light when we left on our DC-4, and I got a window seat. That flight and the return, with views of the landscape in darkness and daylight, surely contributed to my decision in the 1960s to become a geographer. I loved looking down at the patterns unfolding on the ground. We made the short hop to our one scheduled stop in Montreal without incident. Then it was back in the air, across the St. Lawrence, and down the Lake Champlain corridor toward New York

City. A few minutes later, however, we were descending for an unscheduled stop in Burlington, Vermont. Some sort of mechanical issue led the flight crew to divert the DC-4 to the eastern shore of Lake Champlain for repairs. Subsequently, in full darkness now, we were back in the air, winging our way southward. Another surprise awaited. My aunt had talked the crew into inviting me to the flightdeck; and I got up there just as we passed over Albany, New York. If I thought the view out a tiny side window of the aircraft was a winner, one can imagine how it looked to me from the copilot's vantage point. I did not get to stay long, but the lights of Albany still shine in my mind. We landed safely and a little late at New York's LaGuardia Airport, on Long Island. Aunt Marie and Uncle John lived in Greenwich Village on Perry Street toward the Hudson River side of Manhattan. She and I took a taxi from the airport and toted our bags up the stairs to their fifth-floor, top-floor apartment. There was no elevator in the building.

Over the next few days, my aunt and I did typical tourist things. We went up the Empire State Building to the observation level, took a ferry to Staten Island, saw a double feature at a big movie house in midtown, and went over to Long Island on the subway. On the night of the Long Island subway ride, we visited friends of theirs in Brooklyn. The man of the house, an older gentleman, and I got to talking baseball. He was a Dodgers fan, and I rooted for the Cardinals. I asked him if the Cardinals were going to be at Ebbets Field while I was to be in New York. He told me to forget the Cardinals, that the visiting team I should really see was the one that played out of Cincinnati, the Reds. I lost interest at that point and missed my

chance to see a game at Ebbets. Another night, Aunt Marie took me to a Manhattan apartment where her social club was having a card night, playing Canasta. I did not have a great time in the smoke-filled apartment.

On the other hand, I did have a mostly fine time in New Jersey. The idea was to take an intercity bus down the coast of New Jersey to the extreme southern tip, to the resort city of Cape May, where the maternal grandparents of Uncle John's son, Johnny Carroll, either owned or rented a large ocean-front house. Even though Uncle John was divorced from Johnny's mother, he and Aunt Marie had a great relationship with the grandparents of his only child. I do not remember much about the bus ride. We must have gotten to Cape May in time for some splashing in the surf. The next day, Johnny (who was my age) and I spent much surf time sitting astride floating air mattress devices so that the tops of our thighs were always in the sun. That was a mistake; I ended up with a terrible sunburn on my legs. As it happened, Johnny and I were walking to the movies that night on our own, though not far from our temporary residence. At the theatre, my burned legs would not allow me to enjoy the film. I told Johnny to stick around as I walked alone back to the house. The pain was so bad as I walked that I found an area of tall dune grass near the street and lay down on my back on the ground for a few minutes. Reviving a bit, I then continued the painful walk, vowing to stay out of the surf—which I did. We finished our Cape May weekend with a car ride to the grandparents' main residence in the Jersey suburbs of Philadelphia, spent a night there, and took a bus back to New York the next morning. That was the worst sunburn I can remember.

My days in New York City were soon to end, and I have never been back there. John's cruise ship docked a day or so after my aunt and I returned to Greenwich Village. Once he found his way to the Perry Street apartment, I felt a bit like a fifth wheel. I always liked Uncle John, a smart and educated man. Later in my life, in the 1970s, while I was teaching a course in climate science, I recorded an audio interview with him in their then Florida residence (for my students) about the roles of climate and weather in his shipboard experiences.¹¹ When my time to leave New York arrived, we three made our way to LaGuardia. At the airport, they bought me a scale model kit of the DC-4, which I later assembled and proudly displayed. My aunt had arranged with Colonial for me to fly as an unaccompanied minor, which meant the cabin staff took pains to see that I was where I should be on the airplane and comfortable. The plane flew the same route, in reverse, as we had used on our approach to New York. This time there was

¹¹Our 1977 taped interview in Venice, Florida, was for an instructional series that I called *The Climate Corner*. The series had begun by chance when a student from England enrolled in one of my Geography classes at Illinois State. My formal interview with her went well; and I later added interviews about the human aspects of the climates of equatorial Africa, southern Africa, Australia, northern Canada, Arizona, and Louisiana—among others. We supplemented the audio-only interviews with slides that I took or copied and with artistic illustrations that I solicited from the audio-visual support unit of the university. The unit's director synchronized the visuals with the audio tapes. Students had to go to the unit's lab, check out the tape/slide set, and use a special machine to learn what each informant had said in her or his interview with me and at the same time see the slides we chose to project on the machine's monitor.



Uncle John Carroll and Aunt Marie Carroll, probably in New York City and perhaps on the day of their marriage. She left Columbia soon after high school for the big city. He was from the New York area. [Unknown photographer]

no visit to the cockpit, no emergency stop in Burlington. My parents, two siblings, and a maroon Mercury were at Uplands to meet me.

Cuke Combat

Back on Belmont the boys were stocking up with cukes for the annual skirmishes in the bush behind the houses across the street from 21. Cukes were something new to me. Apparently, they grow widely across North America, even in Missouri. This wild cucumber, *Echinocystis lobata*, I now learn, is in the gourd family. The vines from which we gathered the ripe fruit of late summer on the Rideau River floodplain near Windsor Park can grow to 25 feet, supported by shrubs and even trees (“Echinocystis”). The cuke itself is a spike covered green fruit, about the size of an oval golf ball, perfectly weighted for throwing at one’s rival of the moment. On Hardin in Columbia, we armed ourselves with dirt clods, which the clay in the soil helped hold together in flight. Cukes were better because they were easier to harvest, were lighter to carry, and did less lasting damage to the opponent. Unlike clods, which often disintegrated upon impact, fresh cukes typically retained enough integrity after a toss that one could throw them back at the enemy. Having a decent right arm gave me an advantage in those Belmont rumbles.

Warehouse Work Continues

While my sisters and I were enjoying the waning days of summer, Dad was hard at work on the Loeb warehouse project. The tilt-up walls were newsworthy, and the *Citizen* carried a long story about them and the warehouse in late August. Walls were to stand 18 feet tall, said the writer; and the Simon

crew poured them as “18 by 18-foot concrete squares” on the ground “on top of reinforcing steel and a two-inch blanket of spun-glass insulation.” A couple of days later, it took less than a half hour for the crew to hook up a cured concrete panel to a mobile crane, for the crane to tilt it up to position, and for workmen to secure it vertically. A space, one foot in width, separated each standing panel. In these voids, ironworkers tied off reinforcing steel (rebars) and carpenters formed up a structure to link the slabs. Concrete went into the void, filtered around and down through the rebars, and a pilaster resulted as a linkage between panels. Girders supported the flat roof and tied the walls all around the warehouse together. The finished warehouse was to be 500 feet by 200 feet. Its 100,000 square feet would “house groceries, tobacco and confectionary to meet the demands of hundreds of outlets in Ottawa and district.” Loading docks would accommodate up to 14 tractor trailer rigs, and it had a refrigerated section for cold storage of merchandise (“Unique Methods . . .”). Loeb included a copy of the architectural rendering of the main façade in an advertisement that ran in the *Citizen* on 28 April 1953. Visible there are seven of the 14 truck bays, 13 of the tilt-up panels, a (probably) brick office segment, and flagpole flying (probably) the national flag of Canada (M. Loeb Limited).

The new warehouse was to be part of the Hurdman’s Bridge industrial area that the city was developing under the National Capital Plan. “One of its purposes,” said an unnamed *Citizen* journalist, “was the provision of land to accommodate firms with warehouses on the cross town [railroad] tracks which must be removed to the new sites as the tracks

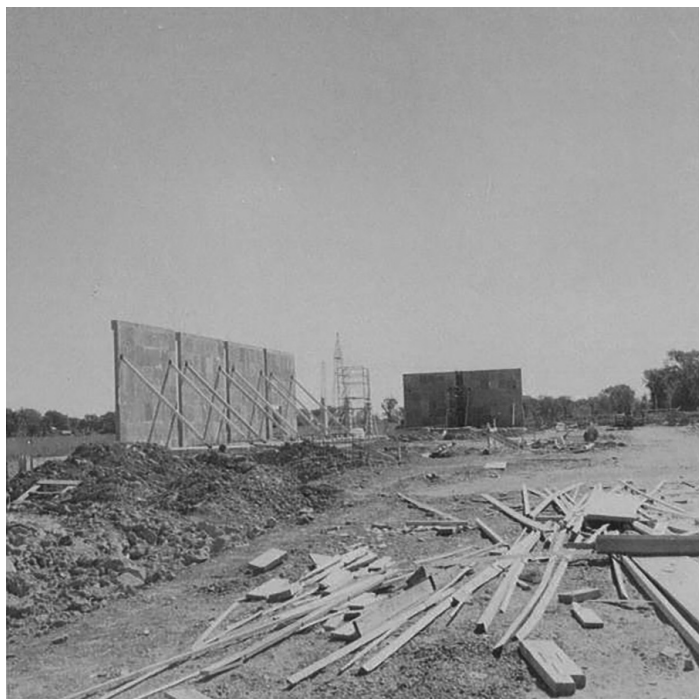
are eliminated.” In other words, the city was trying to eliminate the congestion of numerous freight railroad tracks near the downtown part of Ottawa by concentrating rail-dependent businesses in a more secluded spot, like across the Rideau River, in an area that could “be served by CNR [Canadian National Railway] spur lines.” Besides Loeb, other firms then building or planning warehouses in Hurdman’s Bridge focused on goods like soft drinks, farm tractors, meat packing, and flour (“Millions Pour . . .”).

One of the challenges to the warehouse project was language. Many of the local workers spoke mainly or only French. I remember Dad commenting about the language issues they faced, as well as the fact that a lot of his workmen came from Hull, Quebec, which lies across the Ottawa River from Ottawa. They managed.¹²

¹²Even though we did not know it then, the Sublett clan has a strong connection to the French language and France. With a surname originally spelled Soblet, the family was among the religiously persecuted French Huguenots who fled their native land to England in the late seventeenth century and then moved on to Virginia in and around 1700 to settle on the James River just upstream from Richmond (Allen, Cameron H.).



At the Loeb Warehouse in Ottawa a mobile crane lifts a tilt-up wall panel to its final position. The rising panel has an opening in it for access to an outside loading dock. Bracing in the foreground holds a previously lifted panel at the vertical. Note the insulation squares on the inside surface of each panel. [William H. Simon]



This view of the Loeb warehouse shows six standing panels. At the lower right is a curing panel, with nearby evidence of the lumber that carpenters used to form it and other panels. [William H. Simon]

SEPTEMBER 1953

School Again

DIANE AND I WERE AMONG a record-setting 16,771 students starting school in the public schools the first full week of September, in second and fifth grades, respectively. That number was about a thousand more than in June 1953, with the greatest “increase in registration...shown in the west, east and south borders and outskirts of the city” (“PS Enrolment . . .”). Ottawa was expanding its territorial reach.

As far as I can recall, the Hopewell regimen was like the previous year’s routine. Walk to school, study hard, walk home for and back from lunch, study some more, and walk home. We probably kicked a football around at recess, but that is a bit vague. Not so vague is my memory of a visiting nurse or health-oriented lady who came and talked to my class early in the school year. Did not every kid know how to brush her or his teeth? I thought we should, but the lady told us how to go about this common task. She also advocated washing our hands and keeping a window open in the bedroom at night. It seemed odd that big bad fifth graders would need such advice. The air raid drills continued as the Cold War deepened.

Belmont Girls

Had a Belmont woman written this memoir, the stories would have been oh so different. I guess there were probably as many

girls living on Belmont as boys. Two lived at my house; and there was Jacqueline, about age four, across the street, whose father was a physician, and her older sister, Sandra. It was at that Belmont house, number 24, that Diane first remembers seeing rhubarb growing in a garden, and where I remember homegrown potatoes roasting out back in a fall campfire. The family was good enough to share some warm spuds with us. Nearby lived a little girl, Diane tells me, about the age of Jeanne, who spoke only French. The French girl and my sisters played together despite the language difference. No girls joined the Belmont boys in games, on bike rides, swimming, or in any of our outdoor pursuits. I wish I had more to say on the topic, but my mind is blank.

More Street Games

Though I never tired of softball/baseball, some on the street were ready for fall sports. So, we transitioned to football and street hockey. Belmont Avenue, its driving surface roughly wide enough for three cars to park or squeeze through side by side, made for a narrow football field or hockey rink, even though we included the adjacent sidewalks. There was no narrow grassy berm between the curbs and sidewalks. Out of respect for the players' well-being, we played touch football rather than tackle—naturally with no protective gear. Scoring and playing rules probably mimicked those of Canadian professional football, which were slightly different from the rules I had known in Missouri. Driveways or other obvious features would have indicated the goal lines. Our street hockey equipment included an old tennis ball and ice hockey sticks, but no roller blades. Every native Belmont boy must have owned at least one ice hockey

stick that he could drag out for such street games. Somebody came up with a loaner stick for me, the only hockey stick I had ever used or would ever touch again. Mine was missing much of its blade, the top half, as I recall; but I whacked away at the tennis ball, nevertheless, with much less chance of connecting than if I had had a full stick. We would have found two boxes, rocks, or some other semifixed objects to mark the limits of the opposing goals at either end of the concrete rink. Of course, we had no crossbar like a regular hockey goal would have had. Street hockey, by the way, lately has become quite the thing in areas where access to ice rinks is too expensive or otherwise unavailable (Whyno). Horse droppings continued to plague us.

The Whiteacres

Our rental house on Belmont belonged to the Whiteacres, Allen Samuel and Ellen Jane. They were about the ages of our Varvel grandparents, all born in the 1890s. The Whiteacres were traveling when we arrived and absent during much of the time we lived there. I do not know for certain what they did that summer, but four years later the *Citizen* carried a short piece about their 1957 winter travel plans. It said, “Maj. A. S. Whiteacre and Mrs. Whiteacre will sail Friday aboard the Empress of Britain from Saint John, N. B., for Spain and Portugal, where they will spend the winter months. Their trip will include visits to the British Isles, Norway, Sweden and Denmark” (“Social and Personal News”). Whether we overstayed our projected 1953 departure date due to the late start of the warehouse or whether the Whiteacres always had planned to join us at 21 in the fall, I cannot say. In any case, after school started and some weeks of fall had elapsed, they reappeared and moved into the third

floor. We downstairs renters did not see much of them, which leads me to believe they had kitchen and bathroom facilities up in their space, like a small apartment.

Born in Toronto on 10 March 1893 (Hemmou), Allen Whiteacre was a soldier most of his adult life, a veteran of both world wars. He “enlisted at the outbreak of the Great War and went overseas with the first Canadian contingent.” Wounded in combat during November 1915, he spent 15 months in hospital care before receiving his discharge. Upon the 1920 reorganization of the Ottawa reserve forces regiment “now the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.) [machine gun],” he joined as a private and soon rose in enlisted rank to “regimental sergeant major in 1923.”¹³ Sergeant Major Whiteacre received his commission as a second lieutenant in 1931.¹⁴ In May of 1938, the army promoted him to captain (“Two of Highlanders’ . . .”). There appears a formal *Citizen* photo of him with other officers of the Cameron Highlanders, in their dress kilts and knee socks, in October 1939, as they camped at Lansdowne Park in advance of mobilization for World War II (“Officers of Ottawa’s . . .”). Later that October, Canadian Defence Headquarters announced that Captain Whiteacre had just received notice of his appointment to the Canadian Active Service Force. The announcement said that he was “an efficient officer” and

¹³Such a rapid rise in enlisted status, from the lowest rank to the highest, would not happen in the United States Army nor probably today in Canada. His prior service and combat experience no doubt helped him advance.

¹⁴For a midcareer enlisted soldier to earn an officer’s commission is not all that uncommon. Officers moving upward this way often possess a valuable perspective on what enlisted soldiers are experiencing.

“highly popular among the officers and other ranks of the kilted battalion” (“Capt. A. S. Whiteacre . . .”). After three years of active service, some of which was in Iceland (Christopher), Captain Whiteacre returned to Ottawa in 1943. He earned one more promotion, to major, and ended his career with the Highlanders (“Semi-final Night . . .”). Daughter Patricia and sons William and Robert also served in the Canadian military during World War II (“Ice Cream . . .”).

Ellen Jean (they called her Nellie) Blakely of Ottawa married Allen Whiteacre in Ottawa in 1919 (“Whiteacre-Blakely”). They settled in Ottawa where Allen secured a civil service position on the War Veterans’ Allowance Board (“Ice Cream . . .”), and by at least 1931 they were living at 21 Belmont (“‘Bobbie’ Whiteacre Better”). Nellie was a loyal companion of the rising soldier. One can find her name among the Ottawa newspaper archives at fashionable military functions where Allen presided or otherwise had a leadership role to fulfill. She also was active in their longtime church, Trinity Anglican, on Bank Street just north of the Rideau River bridge (“Trinity W. G. . . .”). Nellie was a devoted member and served as president of the Ottawa South Reading Club, which met at Trinity Church (“Reading Club”). She and Allen remained married until her death in 1966, age 71 (“Whiteacre, Ellen Jane”). Allen died in 1971 at the age of 77 (“Whiteacre, Major . . .”).

OCTOBER 1953

Mayfair Theatre

THROUGH THE SUMMER OF 1953 and into the fall, the guys and I would sometimes take in a double feature at the Mayfair, which stood in 1953 and still stands on the west side of Bank Street a block north of Hopewell Avenue School, at the corner of Bank and Euclid. I remember seeing my first 3-D movies at the Mayfair. The big theatre had a single screen in a large brick building, probably the equivalent of three stories in height.

Mayfair began operations on Monday, 5 December 1932, with *The Blue Danube* as its first film and would have attracted its clientele from Ottawa South as well as customers driving from a greater distance or taking public transportation to its front door. The *Citizen* devoted a whole page to the grand opening, including a lengthy article about the theatre as well as 21 display advertisements from companies that helped build, equip, and furnish the new movie house or businesses that occupied retail space nearby. Among the highlighted features in the article were “a towering lighted sign of the theatre name,” stained glass windows, terrazzo floors in the lobby, “retiring rooms, gentlemen’s on left, ladies on the right,” and stadium seating for 700 guests. The retiring room (restroom) for the women featured a “powdering glass and table” (mirror and vanity). Tan, rose, and green with gold trim were the dominating colors inside when the “first nighters” arrived that

Monday evening in 1932 for the 7 p.m. showing (“Mayfair Theatre Opens . . .”).

The reason for postponing my discussion of the Mayfair until October is that I can date for certain that on a Saturday, 10 October 1953, I saw there a film that made a big impression on me (Mayfair Theatre. Advertisement.). One of the two films was *Destination Gobi* with Richard Widmark and dealt with an Allied weather forecasting operation during World War II in the Gobi Desert of Mongolia. The movie guide in the *Citizen* for kids 8–12 gave the movie an “Excellent” recommendation. Paired with the Gobi film, and probably running first of the two that day, was *Titanic*, starring Clifton Webb and Barbara Stanwyck, dealing with a famous shipwreck. The movie guide for kids said *Titanic* was “[t]oo mature for many” in this age group (“Children’s Movie Guide”). I agreed and did not like *Titanic* at all. To this day I avoid boats if I can and ships for sure. No cruises for me, thank you. Thoughts of that old movie still give me shivers.

Epilepsy on Belmont

Not all the Belmont boys were hale and hearty, ready for a bike ride or a cuke fight. Harold (not his real name) was one of our mates; but he struggled with epilepsy, a new malady for me to ponder. Though not athletic, he would join our street games in front of his house. All might go well. Sometimes it did not. On several occasions we would turn around and find Harold on the ground having a seizure. The boys knew what to do. Somebody ran to his house to alert a parent, usually his mother. She would rush to his side on the pavement or in a yard, loosen his belt, and make sure he did not swallow his tongue. Then

we waited until the seizure ceased. Nobody ever called first responders. He would gradually recover, sit up, and then be able to stand. She would take him home to rest; we would go back to playing but with less enthusiasm. I hope our Belmont buddy lived long enough to benefit from all the subsequent advances in the treatment of this strange disorder.

A Night with the Cameron Highlanders

The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (Duke of Edinburgh's Own) drilled in 1953 at a large armory, the Cartier Square Drill Hall, near the central business district of the city, far from Belmont.¹⁵ Major Whiteacre had remained close to his regimental comrades after he retired from military service, and even later when he moved to Toronto in 1967 because of his declining health ("Allen Samuel Whiteacre"). Worth noting here is that first in the list of his many life affiliations that appear in his *Ottawa Journal* obituary is the notification that he was to his last day still a "member of Cameron Highlanders" ("Whiteacre, Major . . .").

One chilly October weeknight, he took me with him to observe a regular drill of the Highlanders. We watched as the troops practiced drill and ceremony formations, and we listened to the pipes and drums of the regimental band. At the close of the evening drill, he asked one bagpiper to play just for us, to march and pipe some of those mournful Highland tunes. I liked what I saw and heard that night. In fact, that

¹⁵Cartier Square Drill Hall, dating from 1879, still stands and serves as a "dedicated military training facility" for the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, on the west bank of the Rideau Canal. It is next door to Ottawa City Hall and the courthouse ("Cartier Square Drill Hall").

experience was one reason that I became a soldier myself and subsequently served 25 years in the Army National Guard and Army Reserve. I found that I relished the camaraderie that was so obvious on the drill floor, I liked the troops moving as one as they drilled and interacted, and I enjoyed the military music. Perhaps the retired major had seen a soldier spark in a kid of 10. I wish I knew now why he offered to take me with him. Why did I agree to accompany him on a school night?



The author in army khaki dress uniform during the fall of 1961, eight years after the Whiteacre night with the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, at home in Columbia on weekend pass from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. [Eva Deane Sublett]

NOVEMBER 1953

Warehouse Wrap

DESPITE AN INSULATION FIRE that broke out the afternoon of 9 October, which Ottawa's fire department quickly extinguished, the Loeb warehouse project came in close to the 1 November end date that the building permit specified ("Fire Threatens Warehouse"; "Get Permit . . ."). We took a family trip to see the completed or nearly complete structure prior to departure, as we often did with Dad's projects. Loeb later, over the years, added to the original footprint more than once; and today an even larger warehouse resides at 490 Industrial Avenue, according to MapQuest. Simon's tilt-up walls are standing tall; and the satellite view shows clearly the original 100,000 square feet of warehouse space that Dad, Bill Simon, and the crew erected.¹⁶

¹⁶B. D. Simon Construction Company, which had begun in 1912, continued in the business until 1989. That year, following the retirement of B. D. Simon, Jr. and the passing of Bill Simon, Craig Simon (Bill's son who was in Ottawa with his parents) and several others formed Professional Contractors & Engineers, Incorporated as a successor firm, also in Columbia. Craig served as president of the new company and has since retired (Simon; Professional Contractors & Engineers, Incorporated; "Halting Jail . . .").

Different Route

Soon it was time to pack up and leave what had become very familiar in just seven months. We said farewell to the Whiteacres. Richard and I agreed to keep our friendship going by mail. Mom likely added some names to her Christmas card list. Our return route did not retrace our April pathway. Instead, I am almost certain that we drove straight south to the St. Lawrence River, the international border, and crossed into the United States at Ogdensburg, New York. We had been down that way during our stay for Dad to purchase American cigarettes. Leaving Ogdensburg we would have skirted the Thousand Islands section of the St. Lawrence and then dropped southward and continued westward along the south shore of Lake Ontario. One reason for this different route was to see Niagara Falls, at the western end of the lake. There we stopped for a few hours at the famous waterfalls, a first for all of us. It was a cold November day so the mist from the falling water seemed even wetter than it might have in the summer. Few tourists were out midday as we watched this great North American natural wonder. From Niagara, we drove westward alongside Lake Erie, through Cleveland. Perhaps Cleveland is where we spent our first and maybe only night on the road. Where we turned south to intersect U. S. 40, I cannot say. The maroon Merc gobbled up the miles quickly as we motored in the westbound lane on U. S. 40, as Columbia approached. Our Varvel grandparents were at our North Hardin residence to welcome home the returning quintet, plus Pomeranian.

West Boulevard Again

Of course, Diane and I went back to school at West Boulevard. Principal Mayhew put me in a mixed fifth and sixth grade

classroom, something new to me. I recall several guys from other classrooms popping their heads in our door to make sure the rumor about the Sublett kid being back was true. It was. Later, but not much later, the mixed fifth-sixth students and I were doing an in-class recitation, trying to answer aloud as quickly as we could some arithmetic questions that the teacher was posing. I was able to do several tricky calculations in my head, which prompted a sixth grade guy (son of the Mizzou baseball coach) to exclaim, “How does he know this stuff?” I smiled and silently thought: Hopewell Avenue Public School.

REFLECTIONS

Never Today

AS I WROTE THIS MEMOIR, more than once it occurred to me that so much has changed in the way we handle everyday life since 1953. We would think twice today about allowing a 10-year-old to ride on a bus alone, about sending him or her downtown in a big city, 10 times over two weeks. Swimming lessons would require bathing suits for all participants, not just the instructors—period. Bicycles would have locks, and riders would use the locks and wear helmets. Nobody would have to ride in a car unrestrained; family vehicles would have seatbelts, airbags, and car seats. Walking two miles a day to and from school, including home for lunch, would be a nonstarter for many parents. Delivery of their students to the school door in the morning, lunch on the premises, and vehicular pickup at the end of a school day would be the norm. Traveling salesmen would no longer walk onto elementary school property to demonstrate wares for the students at recess and noon hour. Fireworks would not be in the hands of kids, much less lighted strings bouncing on pant legs. Sunscreen for bare backs and legs of surf-riding kids would be part of the beach package. In-flight visits to the cockpit of an airliner could never take place. Unaccompanied minor flights would occur, but they would cost much more than just the price of a ticket. Playing ball games in the street now seems quaint to me, but I loved to participate.

Foreign Country

Even though the United States and Canada have much in common, we are two distinct countries. At least one and probably more than one of the guys told me that I sounded strange, that I had a southern accent. Really? Newspaper coverage of events in our two countries was very different. While the *Citizen* that we subscribed to and that I carried had lots of American news every day, the Missouri papers we got out of Columbia and Kansas City almost never talked about Canada. Though I tried to fit in during our Ottawa stay, I remained always faithful to the red, white, and blue.

Regrets

What would I have done differently? What questions would I ask if I got another chance to do so? I should have taken more interest in the warehouse project, even requested to visit the jobsite, ideally when they were pouring and raising the walls. Though Dad might not have been able to take me to work and get me home before quitting time, Grandad Varvel could have escorted me and helped me understand what was happening. I should have quizzed Major Whiteacre more about his wartime experiences and his affection for the army and the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. Writing this would have been so much easier had I kept a log of daily events, noted key dates therein, and commented about how I felt regarding what was transpiring. I wish I had mapped our routes to and from Ottawa, perhaps saved the roadmaps that guided us. Taking pictures myself would have been a good idea, or I could have asked Mom to take pictures of things that I found important. In addition to the coronation coin that I did keep, I could have

squirreled away ticket stubs, receipts for other purchases, and any artifacts to help tell the story. I wish that I still had my DC-4 model airplane.

Final Thoughts

In the early 1970s, I got a chance to visit 21 Belmont Avenue again. Beginning in my first year as a professor at Illinois State University, 1970–1971, and through the 1970s, I taught a mid-level undergraduate course called the Geography of Canada. The course was in the curriculum when I arrived, and no professor was then claiming it. Teaching the course seemed fitting since I had lived there for seven months, though not then a geographer. I knew that I needed more on-the-ground Canadian experience; and that realization led to the vacation/study trip my wife, Patricia, and I took in 1971, 18 years after the year this 1953 memoir highlights. We looked at Ontario settlements, transportation routes, and glacial features, as we meandered toward Ottawa. Picking up Bank Street extended, we drove into Ottawa South and down toward the Rideau on Belmont. We found that 21 pretty much looked like I remembered it, though (I know now) the Whiteacres no longer lived there. From our old place, we drove to Parliament Hill; took in the sights; and spent the night at the Chateau Laurier, a famous Ottawa hotel. Then it was east to Montreal, the St. Lawrence River, rural Quebec south of the river, and down into New England. I helped myself on that trip as a geographer, but somehow the magic of what I had experienced as a 10-year-old was missing on our street. The Belmont boys were gone.

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The background of the entire page is a faded, sepia-toned map of a city street grid, likely Chicago, showing a dense network of streets and some larger landmarks.

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