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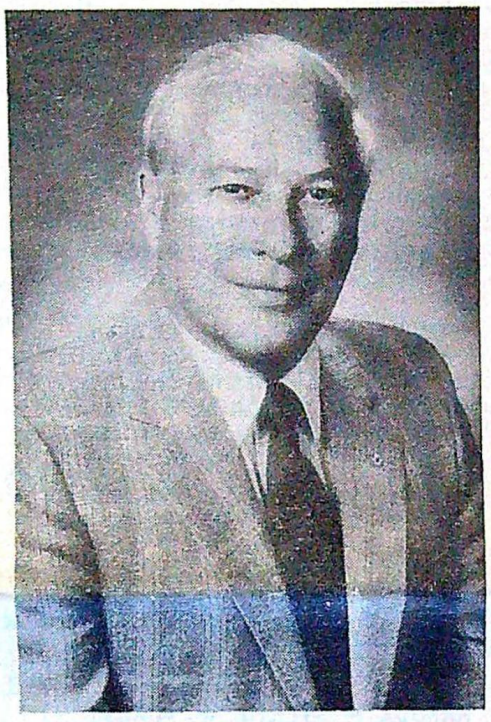
Partici~Paper

Covering culture, heritage, recreation, physical fitness, tourism, and community activities in Inverness County since 1979.

From Sled to SATELLITE



"It is in the nature of doctors to relish the challenge, complexity, and human drama of disease . . . I felt very much at home."

"From Sled to Satelite is a story of growth and change"

By Ann Sherrington

In 1979, a retired surgeon from Newfoundland built a home in Glendyre, intending to do a little parti-time medicine and to write his memoirs. Within a year, Gordon Thomas had a full time practice, out of his home, the Port Hood Medical Clinic, and the Inverness Hospital. His work in Inverness County has been punctuated by trips to his old job in Newfoundland, to Montreal and Toronto, that often puzzled patients waiting to see him.

In January, Dr. Thomas published a book that describes why he has made those trips. In **Sled to Satellite: My Years with the Grenfell Mission**, Gordon Thomas describes the 33 years, from 1946 to 1979, during which he rose to supervise one of Newfoundland's largest medical care systems and came to be a recognized and sought-after expert in tuberculosis surgery.

The conditions the young doctor and his family found when they reached Newfoundland in 1946 were shockingly primitive. "Residents of scores of isolated fishing village were still the distant half-forgotten poor cousins of a poor society," he writes. "They were hostages to a mercantile system that sold them supplies and bought their fish and set the price of both. They could work like coolies all summer and end the fishing season deeper in debt than they were in the spring. After more than half a century of missionary effort their poverty was somewhat less brutal: scurvy, rickets, and beriberi were in retreat, but diphtheria, typhoid, and tuberculosis were not."

Gordon W. Thomas, M.D. *My Years With the Grenfell Mission*

Nurses assigned to outport villages often served more than 60 miles of coastline each. Doctors found themselves serving as justices of the peace or as undertakers, as occasion warranted.

Travel was by mission ship in summer and by dogsled in winter, and "travel by dogteam was not exciting or glamorous but slow and painful." It took a doctor and his sled driver three days to make a trip that today, a Piper Cherokee can make in 20 minutes.

Grenfell Mission was a voluntary, charity-backed tribute to its founder, Sir Wilfred Grenfell, who went to Newfoundland in 1901, saw the need, and built an international foundation to answer it; creating a hospital, system of outport nursing stations, orphanage, craft business, dry dock, and experimental farm to both care for Newfoundlanders' ills and improve their standard of living.

When Gordon Thomas joined the Grenfell Mission in 1946, he gave up work in Montreal for a $2,500-a-year job because it satisfied his need to serve, rather than to just work, in a place that needed him. "It is in the nature of doctors to relish the challenge, complexity, and human drama of disease," he writes of his first years. "I felt very much at home."

Sled to Satellite is a story of growth and change. As Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949, baby bonuses, welfare, and UIC introduced cash to what had largely been a cashless society. Poverty eased, and parents, able to keep their children, gradually let the mission orphanage empty. Nutritional diseases such as scurvy and rickets vanished. Regular radio-telephone link-ups made outport nursing stations more effective.

Piper Cub air planes came into use as air ambulances, but slowly: in one emergency, a woman needing a caesarean section, the plane couldn't up enough speed on the ice available. The pilot got her neighbors to tramp back and forth, packing the snow, to lengthen the runway.

With nutritional diseases gone, the mission staff could concentrate on the highest rate of tuberculosis in North America. They experimented to find more effective cures than bed rest or collapsing the diseased lung, developing a system of spreading the ribs (with an

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adapted can opener) and cutting out diseased portions of the lung. It worked. So well, that Gordon Thomas travelled widely to explain how it was done. That operation, plus new drugs, brought TB to heel. By 1972, deaths from TB at Grenfell Mission had stopped.

In the early 50s, the Cold War wrought profound changes in the traditional societies of northern Newfoundland. The American government built the DEW Line, a string of military bases across the North, "the first major intrusion of the industrialized world into northern society...hard liquor was introduced almost overnight to a town that had always been 'dry'...cheap liquor and a sudden influx of lonely men had predictable results...About the only good that can be said of this," Dr. Thomas writes evenly, "Was that it infused much new blood into the community. Genetically, if not morally, the area got quite a boost."

After 1959, when Gordon Thomas became head of the Grenfell Mission, he oversaw the building of a 170 bed, 15 department hospital, enlarged the air ambulance service, improved radio communication, and eventually, in 1981, helped turn the mission over to become part of the Newfoundland provincial medical system.

Throughout, Dr. Thomas retained his respect for the people of Newfoundland: "Taking each day as it comes is a hard lesson to learn, but one these people had learned well. It gave them great serenity in times of stress, and they had plenty of that...Their faith in God did not need rationalization or defence. they felt his presence in their daily lives."

Gordon Thomas will read from and discuss Sled to Satellite at the Court House in Port Hood on Friday, May 1 at 7:30 p.m., as the guest of InScribe, the Inverness County Writers, and the Inverness County Council of the Arts. Everyone is welcome to attend.

JUDIQUE PARISH HALL

ADULT CEILIDH

May 2 9-1:00 $5.00

Featuring BUDDY MACMASTER THE CALEDONIA PIPE BAND COISIR EN EILEAN

stepdancing, Highland dancing, eighthand reel

government Id's required
lunch will be served

NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL

NATIONAL BOOK WEEK APRIL 25-MAY 1
SPONSORED BY CANADA COUNCIL

Public Reading by Dr. Thomas

THE PUBLIC IS INVITED TO A RECEPTION IN HONOR OF DR. THOMAS AT THE COURT HOUSE IN PORT HOOD AT 7:30 p.m. ON FRIDAY MAY 1ST. THE EVENING WILL INCLUDE A READING FROM HIS BOOK, AND SPEAKERS JAMES ST.CLAIR AND DR. BERNIE MACLEAN.

Refreshments will be seved. No admission charge.

This event is sponsored by IN-SCRIBE, a group of Inverness County writers, and THE COUNCIL OF THE ARTS.

Lesley Choyce Reading and Workshop

Funding is provided through the generosity of CANADA COUNCIL. All interested are invited.

Lesley Choyce, poet, editor, and short story writer, now residing in East Lawrencetown, Nova Scotia is the instuctor for a short story workshop hosted at SAERC on Saturday, May 9 at 10 a.m. This two hour workshop will deal with techniques of short story writing with a focus on characterization, dialogue, and economy of expression. At 2 p.m. there will be a public reading from his works, followed by informal conversation and refreshments.

Lesley Choyce has edited a number of books which are well-known in Atlanic Canada, including THE CAPE BRETON COLLECTION, and CHEZZETCOOK, which is an anthology of contemporary poetry and fiction from Atlantic Canada.

He is a first place winner of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia Literary Competition and numerous other awards, and has contributed to various magazines including THE ANTIGONISH REVIEW, ARC, EVENT, FIDDLEHEAD, AND NEBULA.

The workshop and reading are co-sponsored by the Eastern Counties Regional Library, In-Scribe, a group of Inverness County writers, and The Council of the Arts.

There is no admission charge and refreshments are served.

Volume Two of WINDROW ANTHOLOGY available at Festival

The second edition of WINDROW ANTHOLOGY will be made first available to the publlic at the FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS at MARBLE MOUNTAIN on AUGUST 22. This will become an annual magazine of new writing from Inverness County, produced by IN-SCRIBE, a group of local writers.

WINDROW ANTHOLOGY, edited by Phyllida Kent, includes short stories, poetry and non-fiction, and welcomes submissions for consideration for the next issue. Deadlines will be announced in the next PARTICI-PAPER.

The magazine will look radically different from its pilot issue, for IN-SCRIBE has opted for book-quality paper, a glossy cover, and a more professional appearance. Part of the cost of volume two will be covered by the Inverness County Department of Recreation and Tourism, but In-Scribe hopes that the August issue, which will be for sale, will cover the cost of the next volume, so that the magazine can gain financial independence and stand or fail on its own merit. Meanwhile, those who would like to make a donation to ensure the realization of volume two are welcome to do so and will recieve credit in the publication as patrons. While WINDROW ANTHOLOGY is still in its infancy, financial and moral support are vital to those who are struggling with their writing to make WINDROW a high quality effort that will be a credit to Inverness County.

For further information or to make a donation of behalf of Windrow Anthology, write to WINDROW ANTHOLOGY, care of Mary Anne Ducharme, R.R 2 Whycocomagh, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Phone: 945-2982 (H) or 787-2274 (O). Or contact any other member of IN-SCRIBE.

Current active members are: Ann Sherrington, Cathy Rory Gillies, Francene Gillis, Frank MacDonald, Barry Fraser, Carmen Van Zutphen, Jim St.Clair, Phyllida Kent, Mary Anne Ducharme, *John Gillis*.

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