

SUSAN CREAN

Susan Crean was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario and is of Scots/Irish descent. She is a freelance writer and activist who has lived, besides Toronto and Paris, in Florence and New York City and in Vancouver and Gabriola Island in British Columbia.

Susan has worked as a current affairs producer for CBC-TV, an arts management consultant, a magazine editor (*This Magazine*), teacher, and broadcaster. Susan has two degrees in art history and a diploma in museology from the École du Louvre in Paris, and since her return to Canada in 1970 has had academic appointments at six Canadian universities. She was the first Maclean-Hunter Chair in Creative Non-Fiction at UBC in 1990 and taught at the School of Journalism at Ryerson University from 2000–2006. Susan is a former chair of the Writers' Union of Canada and a founding co-chair of the Creators' Rights Alliance/Alliance pour les droits des créateurs (CRA/ADC). She served on the Minister's Advisory Committee on the Status of the Artist in British Columbia from 1993–1994 and on the board of Access Copyright from 1992–1995. She has represented creators on copyright issues for over thirty years, latterly at the international level through the CRA/ADC, attending meetings at the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva and Hong Kong.

She has written and lectured extensively on the subject of intellectual property. Her articles and essays have appeared in magazines and newspapers across Canada, and she is the author of seven books, the first, *Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture*, appearing in 1976. Her latest book, *The Laughing One – a Journey to Emily Carr*, was nominated for a Governor General's award and won a BC Book Prize in 2001. She serves on the board of Native Earth Performing Arts and, in 2007, was awarded a Chalmers Fellowship. She is currently based in Toronto.

BOTH SIDES NOW: DESIGNING WHITE MEN
AND THE OTHER SIDE OF HISTORY

Like a great many Anglo-Canadians, I was taught creation stories at school where the history books we studied celebrated the heroics of Champlain and Brébeuf while double-damning Louis Riel for betraying his non-Native ancestry as well as the State. The fact was that the only event involving Aboriginal peoples that conveyed any sense of the First Peoples' view on things was Riel's Rebellion. Even so, the Métis war of resistance was downplayed, and Riel, the feckless leader of the doomed uprising, was characterized as a cross between Rasputin and Bonnie Prince Charlie. At my school, an Anglican Church school for girls, we collected money for the missionaries teaching "the Indians up north," and we venerated Duncan Campbell Scott as a Confederation poet. We played lacrosse and basketball on teams called Iroquois, Cherokee, Sioux, and Ojibway though no one explained that the Iroquois are the Six Nations Confederacy, (one of the first structures in world history that resembles the United Nations) or that the Cherokee lived in the southeastern United States until 1838, when the American government forced them off their ancestral lands and marched them a thousand miles west to Oklahoma on what they called the Trail of Tears (*Nunna Daul Tsunny*).¹

Along with the narrative about the founding of Canada by both the French and the English came the notion—preached by the likes of Emily Carr and Marius Barbeau, as well as D.C. Scott—of Aboriginal culture constituting Canada's ancient past, the prehistory upon which the modern nation could be built and with which an authentic Canadian culture could be fashioned. This was the idea of Canada embraced during the 1920s and 1930s by the emerging national elites who borrowed indiscriminately from Indigenous cultures while enacting the laws and policies that encouraged their extinction, all the while ignoring the existence of pre-existing Aboriginal title and rights. The story of Canada I was raised on, thus, denied the connection between assimilation and appropriation, between the past and the present. So, when my Great-Uncle John joined the Queen's Own Rifles and headed west in 1884 to fight Riel at Duck Lake, it apparently had nothing to do with the legacy of deprivation and death left to the Métis by the encounter—the "Prison

of Grass” that the late Métis author and leader Howard Adams would describe eighty-five years later.⁴ By the same token, the beaded tobacco pouch Great-Uncle kept all his life has been passed down as a mute souvenir, with no story or provenance attached.

This de-personalization of history is one way to forget it. Psychologically, you can construct a moat around the nasty bits, declare immunity through distance: *It didn’t concern me; it was someone else’s fault; it happened way too long ago to matter now.* This is why truth and reconciliation requires proactive remembering. For white Canadians, for all non-Native Canadians, I think, this requires owning—not just owning up to and saying sorry, which is the easy part, but actually taking ownership of—the residential schools story. There is no requirement for us to have been there to be affected by it or to benefit from the arrangement of privilege that had my eight-year-old self collecting nickels for the enterprise. It is an old argument, but everyone is implicated when the State takes after one group of citizens or dispossesses one whole race of people, because it does so in the name of everyone. Moreover, at this stage in our collective history, simple fairness in the process of reconciliation demands that candour be offered on all sides; the disclosures of residential school Survivors need to be met with something more than *pro forma* apologies from churches knee-deep in lawyers, jail sentences for the few perpetrators who managed to get caught, and silence from a comfortable majority.

To my mind, ownership means understanding the how, who, and why of something like the residential school solution—how it was set up, who helped it function, and why the abuse was tolerated. Like other chapters in the saga of white/Aboriginal relations, we need to go deeper than just recognizing that Aboriginal peoples were betrayed and victimized. We need to acknowledge that such damage has been inflicted that it will indeed take seven generations to heal. We need a public reckoning with the fact that whole cultures were broken, children brutalized, and poverty and racism institutionalized by design. We need to acknowledge that all this was sanctioned by the prevailing value system, which is to say the race-based conventions of British imperialism, and that it required institutions and individuals to pull it off. It is true that D.C. Scott has ended up better known for his assertion that “Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic”⁵ than any line of poetry he wrote. He has rightly

Emily Carr spoke “through a tradition that was already well established by 1928—the tradition of White people writing about Native peoples, representing their ideas, telling their stories, and speaking for them on the one hand, using their technology and exploiting their art on the other.”²

Charles Marius Barbeau (1883–1969) was an anthropologist who, although spending much time in fieldwork among many First Nations in Canada, held an attitude towards Aboriginal people as being tragic figures doomed to extinction.³

been identified as the chief architect of the residential school system and of the policy of assimilation; he was also the man who devised a way to secure convictions under the potlatch laws and who came up with the concept of *involuntary* enfranchisement (which was actually on the books for two years, allowing the government to unilaterally remove a person's name from the band rolls and confer full citizenship and the right to vote without that person's consent).⁶ As the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs for nineteen years who spent fifty-three years with the Department, he arguably has had a greater impact on the lives of Indigenous people than any other single individual. So it stands to reason that his legacy would be held up to the light first, but there were others and other incidents that require remembering.

Rarely do we connect the dots to see, for example, the pattern of governments resorting to the exclusion, discrimination, and exploitation of the disadvantaged and the racially other. It started with the *Indian Act*, which was followed by the *Chinese Head Tax*, the *Chinese Immigration Restriction Acts*, and the internment of Japanese Canadians. These are merely the highlights, for the list is long and the pattern is ingrained. Even with the *Charter of Rights*, equity laws could come and go, and no apology in the House of Commons, made to the sound of land claims stalling in the background, can atone for, much less change, the culture that produced the residential schools. That culture must take it upon itself to alter the stereotypes, correct the history, fill in the gaps, or re-educate the public. What is the public to make of it anyway, given the government's continuing refusal to sign the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*? This confusion is symptomatic. The mixed signals are a product of a lack leadership by non-Native elites and intellectuals and an absence of any real discourse in mainstream society.

I imagine it is hard for an Aboriginal person to know what to make of Trutch Street in Vancouver. I am not sure I know myself. I have often wondered if the residents there are aware of the man's claim to fame or of why Joseph Trutch would be so honoured in that area of Kitsilano where most of the streets are named after trees or famous British battles (such as Trafalgar, Waterloo, and Balaclava). Well, Trutch was lieutenant-governor of the province in the 1870s and the first commissioner of Lands and Works. He was instrumental in the imposition of a reserve system and dismissed the Aboriginal people as

The Douglas Creek Estates in Caledonia, Ontario, has become the focal point for tensions between local residents and members of the Six Nations of the Grand River after barricades were set up by Six Nations members in February 2006. The friction stems from claims by Six Nations that thousands of acres of the tract of land granted to them in 1784, in recognition of their loyalty to the Crown during the American Revolution, have been stolen or sold without fair compensation. There are charges of violence and of racial discrimination from both sides of the dispute.

“utter savages.” He wrote, “I have not yet met with a single Indian of pure blood whom I consider to have attained to even the most glimmering perception of the [C]hristian creed ... the idiosyncrasy of the Indians of this country appears to incapacitate them from appreciating any abstract idea, nor do their languages contain words by which such a conception could be expressed.”⁸ Trutch was not carrying out orders; he was issuing them. He was part of a generation of white men, intent on having their way with the land. Not surprisingly, Trutch initiated the campaign for the removal of the Songhee people living in Victoria, using his office to encroach on their rights and to pressure them into leaving, which they eventually did in 1911.⁹ Two years later, in 1913, the Squamish living on the south shore of Burrard Inlet were herded from their homes, loaded onto barges, and relocated to North Vancouver.¹⁰

“From 1885 to 1923, approximately eight-two thousand Chinese immigrants were forced to pay a head tax to enter Canada ... In 1923, the Government of Canada enacted The Chinese Immigration Act ... which was tantamount to a complete prohibition on immigrants of Chinese origin or descent and lasted until 1947 ... Over twenty-two thousand Japanese Canadians were arrested, taken from their homes, separated from their families, and interned in prison camps during World War II.”⁷

In today’s world you would have no compunction about identifying this behaviour as unjust, racist, and probably genocidal. But, there is something anachronistic about judging Trutch and his fellow zealots as extreme when their attitudes were perfectly acceptable at the time. To my mind, it is the juxtaposition that matters; the comparison of the old days with ours illustrates just how far democracy has travelled in Canadian society over 150 years. To remember Trutch is to remember that his perspective did *not* exactly prevail; Stephen Point of the Skowkale First Nation is now Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. To remember Trutch is to see his legacy at New Caledonia in 2008 and to realize how high and how barbed the cultural barriers still are and how limited the understanding and memory are in the non-Aboriginal community.

Dredging up detail serves to anchor the past to the present and allows history the colour and voice of personal experience. It introduces nuance and illuminates the sidelines where you can always find dissent. Indeed, in my travels through the archives researching the life of Emily Carr and the relationship of her career to the history of land claims, I came across letters-to-the-editor from individuals objecting to the potlatch laws. I also found information on the amazing Arthur O’Meara who made a reputation for himself as a meddling class traitor.¹¹ A one-time Ontario lawyer and Anglican lay-minister, O’Meara spearheaded a coalition of reform and labour groups in 1910 called the Conference of Friends of the Indians of British Columbia that supported land claims and Aboriginal title. Seventeen years later, he reappeared as

a key figure in the campaign of the Nisga'a chiefs who, after decades of foiled attempts to get their case heard in court, finally appealed to Parliament. Astonishingly, a joint Senate-House committee was set up. By April 1928, the politicians had rendered their report and, by summer, Parliament had passed amendments to the *Indian Act* to prohibit the raising of monies to pursue Aboriginal land claims.¹² It could be called the O'Meara provision, for as counsel to the Allied Indian Tribes of BC, O'Meara had appeared with Peter Kelly and Andrew Paull before the Committee. What had transpired has to be one of the most sustained and vicious attacks on a witness in the annals of Canadian politics. It was a very rare moment where an act of collective villainy was committed in public.

O'Meara was jeered and heckled all through his presentation, the worst of it coming from the Conservative MP from Vancouver Centre, H.H. Stevens. There was no restraining the man who accused O'Meara of manufacturing the evidence. Everyone went along with the attack, and O'Meara was eventually required to produce the document he was quoting from (the rare and precious compendium known as the *Papers Connected with the Indian Land Question*,¹³ the authoritative record on the question between 1850 and 1875, although everyone in the room knew he did not possess it. The document appeared to have been deliberately withheld from Native leaders, and the villainy is in the revelation that there was actually a copy of it in the room. The Indian Commissioner for British Columbia, A.E. Ditchburn, was not prepared to surrender his own copy to the Committee, but D.C. Scott, who did have his copy with him, eventually allowed O'Meara to read passages from it, claiming that he was not aware that the document in question was, in fact, the one he had on hand. However, Stevens continued to pressure O'Meara for evidence, questioning him on every point.

The Committee report declared that there was no such thing as Aboriginal title and laid blame for the long and fruitless appeal of the Nisga'a on manipulative outsiders. It deplored those "designing white men" by whom "the Indians are deceived and led to expect benefits from claims more or less fictitious."¹⁴ O'Meara, a lightning rod for the Committee's anger, also gave the Members of Parliament and Senators the scapegoat they needed. To the public, they could thus present themselves as saviours of Aboriginal integrity, fending off white men who would exploit and

mislead the innocent Aboriginal people (who were, after all, wards of the state). As spin-doctoring goes, it was masterful. As defining moments go, it needs work.

In deconstructing the legacy of Emily Carr, I came to the conclusion that until land claims are honourably settled and Canada, as a nation and a community of newcomers, comes to terms with its legacy of appropriation, there will be no way to honourably claim Carr as a national icon. The same can be said for a great many other things in Canadian life. This is not a plea for outpourings of guilt, it is a plea for the work of reconciliation to include the wider public and address the mainstream need for connection with the past through the present ... which brings me back to Howard Adams.

Howard was a scholar, teacher, and activist. He was also a leader in the Métis community and a seasoned politico who lent his energy and acumen to many progressive causes, which is how I met him through the Writers' Union and the "Writing Thru Race" Conference of 1994. Our friendship led to conversations about his projects (he was writing *A Tortured People* then) as well as mine, and I often wondered what Great-Uncle would have thought ... a glib question worth taking seriously for a moment. What *would* young Captain Crean, then aged twenty-six, have known about the life and achievements of someone like Howard's remarkable grandfather Ambroise Lépine? Lépine was the adjutant general in Riel's provisional government who had been tried and sentenced to hang for the murder of Thomas Scott, though granted a last-minute pardon.¹⁵ A tall, handsome, educated man, he and his brother were legends on the prairie, fiercely loyal to Riel and the dream of co-existence, collaboration even, with white society. How would Great-Uncle have conceived of that idea? For that matter, how would he have viewed the displacement of Indigenous people happening before his eyes? To me, the parallel with the displaced Irish, ravaged by famine and left to rot in the bogs, seems unavoidable. To Great-Uncle, such comparisons might have seemed a luxury.

Such questions are not answerable, of course, and are not meant to be. The personal contact with history does not need to be through benighted ancestors, but through personal connection in the here and now with the survivors of assimilation. Think of the success of Aboriginal artists, the

accessibility of Indigenous culture, and the presence of urban Aboriginal communities right across Canada. It is, I believe, through reconciliation that dots grow, circles expand, and patterns change.

The author would like to thank the Aboriginal Healing Foundation for providing the resources below.

NOTES

¹ A sampling of historical insight from a First Nations or Native American perspective can be found in the following: Grinde, Donald A., Jr. and Bruce E. Johansen (1991). *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, American Indian Studies Center (draft version retrieved 12 January 2009 from: http://www.ratical.org/many_worlds/6Nations/EoL/); Anderson, Kim (2000). *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Toronto, ON: Second Story Press; Cherokee Nation official website (<http://www.cherokee.org>); Debo, Angie (1983). *A History of the Indians of the United States*, Seventh Printing. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press; Allen, Paula Gunn (2004). *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (originally published 1986). Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Bruchac, Joseph (2000). *Trails of Tears, Paths of Beauty*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society; Birchfield, D.L. (2004). *The Trail of Tears*. Milwaukee, WI: World Almanac Library; and Cherokee Nation (no date). *Trail of Tears Era*. Retrieved 22 January 22 2009 from: <http://www.cherokee.org/Culture/History/TOT/Cat/Default.aspx>

² Crean, Susan (2001:178). *The Laughing One: A Journey to Emily Carr*. Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Publishers Publishers Ltd.

³ Nurse, Andrew (2001). "But Now Things Have Changed": Marius Barbeau and the Politics of Amerindian Identity. *Ethnohistory* 48(3):432–472.

⁴ Adams, Howard (1989). *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View*, Revised Edition. Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House Publishers.

⁵ Government of Canada (1920:63). *Report of the Special Committee of the House of Commons examining the Indian Act amendments of 1920* (Duncan Campbell Scott testimony on 30 March 1920). Library and Archives Canada, RG10, volume 6810, file 470-2-3, part 7.

⁶ See Government of Canada (1920). *Report of the Special Committee of the House of Commons examining the Indian Act amendments of 1920*. Library and Archives Canada, RG10, volume 6810, file 470-2-3, part 7. See also the letter from D.C. Scott to Minister of Justice, Ottawa, 18th December 1916. LAC, RG10, volume 3629, file 6244-3. In 1884, the potlatch, along with other

ceremonies, was banned, and later amended in 1914 through the influence of D.C. Scott to ensure enforcement of this law by changing from criminal to summary conviction. The inclusion for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians in the *Indian Act* was first introduced in 1869 and later amended in 1920 to include the provision for *involuntary* enfranchisement. All *Indian Act* amendments can be found in the National Aboriginal Document Database retrieved 13 January 2008 from: <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/aboriginaldocs/m-stat.htm>

⁷ Morse, Bradford W. (2007:237-238). Reconciliation Possible? Reparations Essential. In Marlene Brant Castellano, Mike Degagné, and Linda Archibald (eds.), *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation: 233–256.

⁸ Trutch, Joseph W. (1871). Correspondence to the Secretary of State for the Provinces, 26 September 1871. In Government of British Columbia (1875:101). *Papers Connected with the Indian Land Question. 1850-1875*. Victoria, BC: Government Printing Office. Retrieved 14 January 2009 from: <http://www.archive.org/details/papersconnectedw00britiala>

⁹ Kanakos, Jeannie L. (1982). *The Negotiations to Relocate the Songhees Indians, 1843-1911*. [Unpublished M.A. thesis.] Retrieved 26 January 2009 from: <http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/bitstream/1892/7545/1/b16167624.pdf>

¹⁰ See: *Mathias v. The Queen*, 2001 FCT 480. Retrieved 5 March 2009 from: <http://decisions.fct-cf.gc.ca/en/2001/2001fct480/2001fct480.html>

¹¹ Haig-Brown, Mary (2006). Arthur Eugene O'Meara: Servant, Advocate, Seeker of Justice. In Celia Haig-Brown and David A. Nock (eds.), *With Good Intentions: Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal Relations in Colonial Canada*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press: 258–296.

¹² See: *An Act to amend the Indian Act, 1927*, S.C. 1926-27, c. 32. Retrieved 13 January 2008 from: <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/aboriginaldocs/m-stat.htm>

¹³ Government of British Columbia (1875), see note #5.

¹⁴ Government of Canada (1927:ix). Appendix No. 2: Special Committees of the Senate and House of Commons. Meeting in joint session to inquire into the claims of the Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia, as set forth in their petition submitted to Parliament in June 1926, Session 1926-27, *Proceedings, Reports and the Evidence*. Ottawa, ON: King's Printer.

¹⁵ Siggins, Maggie (1994). *Riel: A Life of Revolution*. Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.



Photographer: Fred Cattroll

