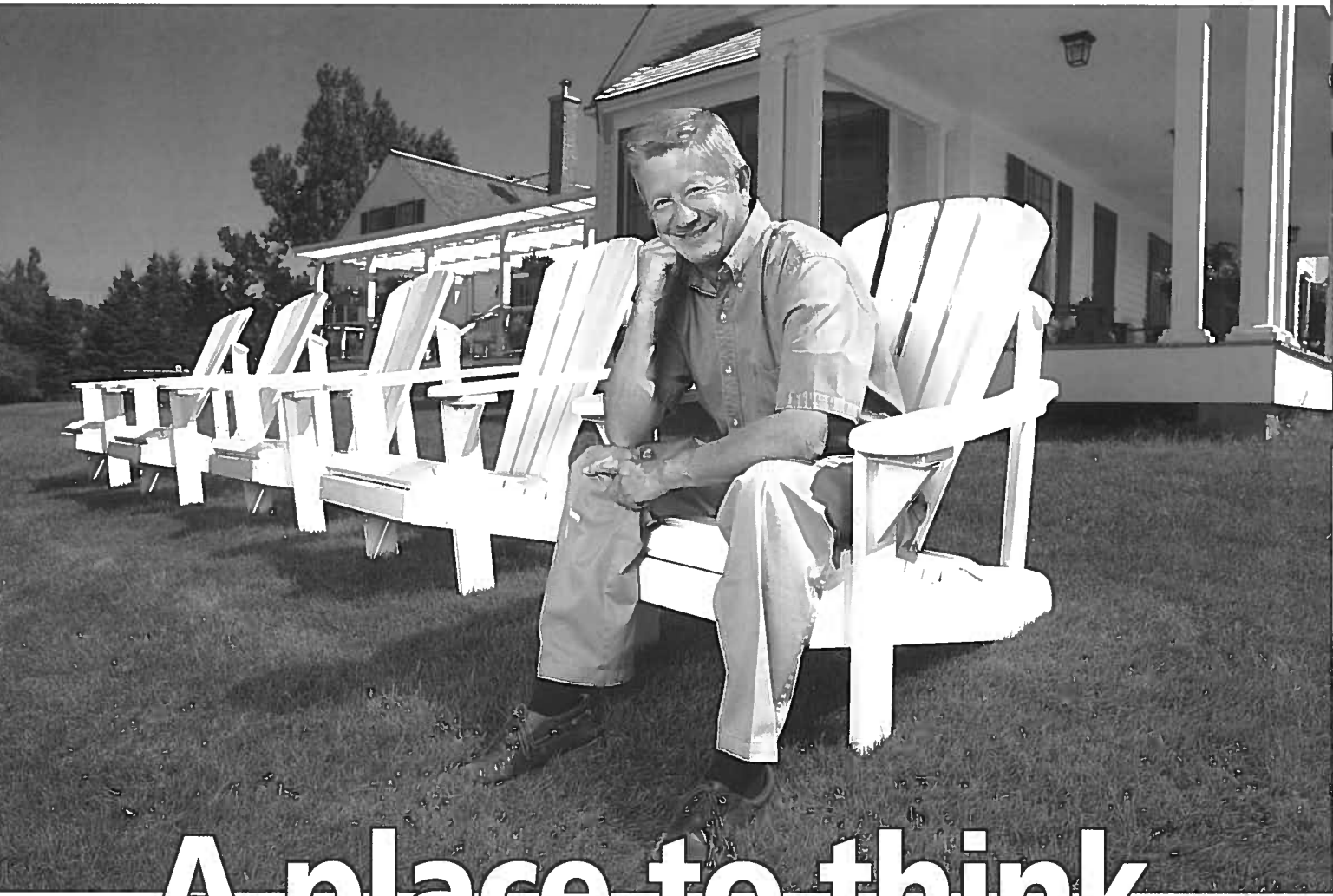


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## A place to think

**Preserving Thinkers' Lodge for the future**

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# A place to think

*Cyrus Eaton, whose ideas were ahead of his time, put Pugwash on the global map as a safe place to ponder the world's most pressing problems*

by CAROL MOREIRA



John Eaton at Thinkers' Lodge, which was declared a National Historic Site in 2008.

SANDOR FIZLI

In the 1950s John Eaton, his siblings, and his cousins spent each August at Deep Cove in Nova Scotia with their wealthy grandfather, Cyrus Eaton. It was a month of outdoor adventure and formal evening dinners. The elder Eaton, a multi-millionaire who read philosophy books every night, liked to begin each meal with a pensive question to encourage his 14 grandchildren to think. Then he would ask one child to reply.

"Somewhere between the main course and dessert, you'd get this frozen deer-in-the-headlights feeling because you knew he was going to choose someone to answer," says John, relaxing on a sofa at Thinkers' Lodge in Pugwash ([www.thinkerslodge.org](http://www.thinkerslodge.org)). Each grandchild knew they could expect to get a ribbing from their cousins if they didn't respond accordingly, although any well-considered answer was acceptable to the old gentleman.

Now a resident of northern California, John was in Nova Scotia recently to help with the preservation of Thinkers' Lodge, formerly a private home and then an inn, where in 1957 his grandfather hosted the first Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs, thus turning a tiny Nova Scotia village into the home of the Pugwash Movement for nuclear disarmament.



Canada declared Thinkers' Lodge a National Historic Site in 2008. As the home of the Pugwash Conferences, the site is an international symbol, and the aging Lodge, converted Lobster Factory, and Gate House are being carefully restored by an association of local organizations. After two years of work, the lodge now looks almost as it did in 1957, and there's an air of excitement and achievement among the people working in its light-filled and spacious rooms. The satisfaction is shared by many Pugwash residents who are proud of Cyrus Eaton and the white-framed buildings that represent their link to the peace movement.

As John Eaton sits in the Lodge's Great Room, he recalls the man who made Pugwash an enduring international symbol and who dominates many of his earliest memories. "Once Grandpa asked us, 'Who do you consider the three most important people in history?'" he says. "You had to be careful with a question like that, because if someone was silly enough to say Jesus Christ, for example, they'd soon be in a conversation about religion for which they were wholly unprepared."

Even then, John knew that his grandfather was cultivating the



At Thinkers' Lodge in 1957 (from left): Antoine Lacassagne, Joseph Rotblat, Cyrus Eaton, and Dmitri Skobeltsyn.

*In 1955, Cyrus' inaugural conference was attended by North American and British academics. The event was co-organized by British biologist Sir Julian Huxley, who introduced Cyrus to the philosopher Bertrand Russell*

habit of independent thought. "Paddle your own canoe," Cyrus would tell his grandchildren. A tall man with white hair and sharp blue eyes, Cyrus had never bought into conventional wisdom. Born on a Pugwash farm in 1883, he grew up beside the gentle slopes of the Northumberland Strait at a time when residents prospered by building sailing ships. As a young man he studied to become a Baptist minister, but an early meeting with John D. Rockefeller made him decide to become an entrepreneur. He built a fortune in utilities, which he lost during the Great Depression. His second fortune included investments in resources, manufacturing, and venture capital financing.

According to John, Cyrus was a competitive and prodigious risk-taker. He was also a philanthropist with a passion for education. It was his love of the company of intellectuals that brought Cyrus and his remote Nova Scotia birthplace to international attention. Cyrus had become an American citizen in 1913, but in 1929 he grew worried about his birthplace. Pugwash had declined as steamships superseded sail and two great fires devastated the village. Cyrus established the Pugwash Park Commission to work for community revival and bought

the home of the Pineo family (now Thinkers' Lodge) for his sister to run as an inn. But by 1954 the inn was losing money, and Cyrus decided to use it to advance his passion for education.

In 1955, Cyrus's inaugural conference was attended by North American and British academics. The event was co-organized by British biologist Sir Julian Huxley, who introduced Cyrus to the philosopher Bertrand Russell. Like many intellectuals, Russell was worried about the growing threat of nuclear weapons. The U.S., the USSR, and their allies were recklessly testing the H-bomb. People worried about radiation poisoning and feared that nuclear war would destroy the human race.

Russell decided to invite top scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain to meet and start a dialogue, and in July of 1955 he and Albert Einstein published a call-to-arms. Signed by nine leading scientists, the *Russell-Einstein Manifesto* described nuclear weapons as the most "stark and dreadful and inescapable problem" and made the following heartfelt plea: "We appeal, as human beings, to human beings. Remember your humanity and forget the rest."

Cyrus offered to host and bankroll the conference, and Rus-

## UNESCO SITE

As the restoration work at Thinkers' Lodge wraps up, there's a community spirit reminiscent of Cyrus Eaton's own. Funds have been provided by the Cumberland Regional Economic Development Association (CREDA), Nova Scotia's Department of Economic and Rural Development, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Parks Canada, and the Pugwash Park Commission.

In the lodge, artifacts and books presented as gifts by scientists who attended meetings there will soon be back on display, and a ceremony to mark the site's historic status is slated for October, but there's still work to do. Before the Lobster Factory can be renovated, it must be elevated by more than a metre. Ron Burdock of WHW Architects says its proximity to the shore means the Lobster Factory has been flooded many times and must be raised in order to ensure its long-term survival.

The Lobster Factory is special, not only for historic reasons but because there are very few Lobster Factories left in the province, says Sheila Stevenson, who's involved in the restoration as an interpretive consultant. Burdock also worked on the nearby The Joggins Fossil Centre; he says the two diverse Cumberland County projects are similar in that both sites demand special respect and in that both sites are central to their communities.

The impetus to win UNESCO World Heritage Site status for Joggins came from local residents and was led by CREDA; it's the residents who have benefited from the increased tourism, employment, and economic spin-offs created by winning UNESCO status and building the Joggins Centre. "I get the same sense with Thinkers' Lodge," says Burdock. "The local success creates energy on many levels. We architects benefit from working closely with those doing the interpretive work, and that closeness informs the design." — C.M.

sell agreed. Scientists from around the world were hand-picked to attend, 22 of whom accepted and three of whom were Nobel Prize winners. Einstein wasn't among them; he died in 1955, and illness prevented Russell from attending, but the delegates arrived in Pugwash for the three-day event in July of 1957, transported from Montreal by Cyrus's private plane and cars.

According to John Eaton, the scientists had something in common. "Not one of them believed their own government, especially about the dangers of atmospheric nuclear testing," he says. It was a stance to which Cyrus could relate, as he often considered the opposite of conventional wisdom to be the likely truth. He felt that U.S. foreign policy was built on stoking fear of Communist countries.

Anne Eaton, Cyrus's second wife, described in a letter to her father the awkward atmosphere as the scientists congregated in the Great Room: "It had the feel of a railway station waiting room, full of silent strangers." Anne said the scientists felt an "awful sense of urgency" about the nuclear problem, and in the quiet Nova Scotia village they soon began to trust each other. They played croquet on the lawn, debated in the Great



Room, enjoyed lobsters and champagne in the Lobster Factory, and shared vodka and caviar, gifts from the Russian scientists.

One participant was Joseph Rotblat, a Polish-born physicist who became famous for his work and resignation from the Manhattan Project, the U.S.-led program that developed the nuclear bomb. Rotblat had also worked with Russell and Einstein on the manifesto. He became a leader of the Pugwash Movement, and in 1995 both he and the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

At the end of the first conference participants agreed to hold future meetings, and they issued a statement describing "the high degree of unanimity" they had found on their fundamental aims of abolishing war, breaking the arms race, and establishing lasting peace. They also decided to name their new movement after the village of Pugwash.

The conference was a success, but it caused problems for Cyrus and some of the other participants. Cyrus was accused of being a Communist sympathizer. His name was smeared by the Internal Revenue Service, and Congress wanted him

investigated for un-American activities, a demand they dropped after Cyrus declared that he would welcome the chance to state that the two sides should talk.

Doubts about Cyrus grew in 1960 when the Russians awarded him the Lenin Peace Prize, which was presented in a ceremony in Pugwash. Village residents had been supportive of the Pugwash Conferences over the years, even billeting participants in their homes, but some began to suspect

that their local hero was indeed the Communist sympathizer his adopted country accused him of being.

Giovanni Brenciaglia, a nephew of Cyrus and now, like John, a member of the Pugwash Park Commission's board, says that even some of Cyrus's own family suspected he had "gone soft on Communists"—an idea the tycoon himself laughed at. "Cyrus had a strong link to Pugwash, but he was very much an American, very much a capitalist," says

Brenciaglia, who lives in Peninsula Lake, Ont. "He'd laugh over dinner and say, 'People claim I'm soft on Communists, but can you imagine how much money I've made!'"

Still, Cyrus was devastated in 1969 when American scientists tried to divorce the movement from him and Pugwash—a move that was thwarted by Russell and Rotblat. Brenciaglia attended the 1959 Pugwash Conference as a student. For him, the conference was formative; he often swam in the invigorating Atlantic with his uncle, who was then in his 70s. Giovanni had grown up in Rome and moved to Canada to study physics at McGill University courtesy of Cyrus, who paid his fees.

Cyrus continued to organize and fund conferences in Pugwash almost right up until his death in 1979, although the work depleted his fortune. The Pugwash Movement remains an internationally respected scientific organization that strives to find solutions to pressing problems, such as the conflicts between India and Pakistan and Israel and the Palestinians. And, John Eaton believes the tradition of private dialogue remains integral. "A lot of dialogue occurs beyond the glare of headlines," he says. "It's common to have public meetings among politicians, and other meetings of which there is no public record."

In a world still plagued by weapons and war, it's natural to question the effectiveness of the Pugwash focus on dialogue, but it's widely believed that the dialogue that began in 1957 has influenced policy-makers and led to weapons-control treaties. The year 1957 also signalled scientists' willingness to accept involvement in international affairs as a social responsibility.

For John and Giovanni, the Pugwash legacy is deeply personal, and they have passed on the lessons they learned from Cyrus. John has taught his own children to think for themselves, while Brenciaglia managed nuclear fuel for Ontario Hydro after graduating from McGill. "My work didn't seem contradictory to me," he says. "I was very active against nuclear weapons but not against nuclear energy. I felt if we used uranium for producing electricity, it wouldn't be available for bombs. Cyrus had worried about nuclear energy, but he told his wife that the fact that I was working in nuclear energy reassured him." The tone in Brenciaglia's voice as he relates this story reveals that, even though he is now the same age his uncle was when they swam in the ocean, that comment still means a lot. ■

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