

“Back to Pugwash!”

On Sunday, July 20th, 2003, as ‘Pugwashites’ from around the world arrive in the Nova Scotia village from which their global movement takes its name, a circle becomes complete.

Members of the ‘Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs’ holding their 53rd World Conference in Canada, find themselves “coming home”.

Entering the village today one sees signs proclaiming Pugwash “world famous for peace”. Other villages around the craggy coastline of Nova Scotia might feature lobsters or lighthouses, fortifications or sailing ships, but the emblem of proud choice here is the dove of peace.

It is a story that started half a century ago.

A Humanistic ‘Manifesto’ from Scientists

In the desperate depths of the Cold War, with the world tautly poised in hostile confrontation and perilously armed with nuclear weapons, eminent leaders of the scientific community Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, Max Born, P.W. Bridgman, L. Infeld, J.F. Joliot-Curie, H.J. Muller, Linus Pauling, C.F. Powell, Joseph Rotblat and Hideki Yukawa signed a ‘manifesto’.

Made public July 9th, 1955, in London, England, it called upon scientists to accept responsibility that their discoveries and inventions be put to peaceful purposes not deadly use. In particular, the manifesto called for a meeting of world scientists “to appraise the perils that have arisen as a result of the development of weapons of mass destruction” and discuss a resolution of the “tragic situation” confronting humanity. That resolution of the crisis, they urged, should be in the spirit of the manifesto, a document that sought abolition of thermonuclear weapons and the renunciation of war.

It was a humanistic appeal as well as a scientific one. “We appeal, as human beings, to human beings: Remember your humanity, and forget the rest.”

A Capitalist Heeds the Call to Conscience

Cyrus S. Eaton was among the many moved by this call to conscience.

Cyrus had been born at his parents’ farm near Pugwash in 1883, grew up in the village of Pugwash, and then left for greater adventures in a wider world. Paying with money earned working summers for John D. Rockefeller in Cleveland, Ohio, he put himself through McMaster University with the stated intent of becoming a Baptist minister. Yet Cyrus had also learned from Rockefeller the arts of American capitalism. Agonizing at life’s crossroads, he decided after a year as a lay minister near Cleveland to follow Rockefeller’s calibrated advice about being able to do more social good creating employment for people than preaching at them from a pulpit.

A smooth exterior belied Cyrus Eaton’s flinty courage. Using his intelligence, good ear for patient listening, pleasant manner and quiet diplomacy, the handsome young man applied his studious nature to markets and heeded Rockefeller’s adage to “supply something basic that people need”. Resolute in the face of serious setbacks, Cyrus plugged away at what he believed possible. Despite the odds and opposition, he became a

millionaire by age 27, owner of a growing utilities empire he kept piecing together in the Canadian and American Midwest — all starting from his first utility company in Brandon, Manitoba.

Following more than two decades of phenomenal success, Eaton lost his business empire and personal fortune through the double whammy of the Great Depression and over-extended efforts in a gigantic corporate takeover battle against Samuel Insul of Chicago. He rebounded and built up an even larger economic empire a second time. His new enterprises were in iron ore mining, railroads, steel manufacturing, rubber and paint industries, venture capital financing, and cattle.

Eaton's storehouse of wealth awaited its destiny with history.

A Continuous Connection with Nova Scotia

Cyrus Eaton, the village boy from Pugwash, had become a powerful man of means. Now a red-blooded American capitalist and a United States citizen since 1913, he nevertheless retained some core Canadian values. As well, there was his instinct to “do good in the world” which had first directed him into the ministry but was now assuming its secular expression instead.

With the attentive and conscientious interest in political developments and public affairs he had displayed since childhood, Cyrus preferred, instead of cavorting with his fellow tycoons and captains of industry, the quiet and reflective life. Even in the most hectic of his days, he could be found reading books of philosophy and poetry, staying close to nature in everything from daily walks to matters of diet. This son of Nova Scotia, even when Chairman of Chesapeake & Ohio Railway, invariably returned to Canada to spend summers in his native province.

Cyrus Eaton never forgot Pugwash, the village of his youth. In 1929, at his urging and with his financial support, a statute enacted by the Nova Scotia legislature created the ‘Pugwash Park Commission’ to revive the community, and Cyrus became its Chairman. The word ‘park’ in the Commission’s name reflected, in the ethos of North America in the 1920s, both the beauty of parkland settings in built up communities, and a place where economic and industrial activity could take place in clean, modern and efficient settings. Acquisition of waterfront lands into what is today named ‘Cyrus Eaton Park’, and operation of an historic lodge, were among the actions taken by the Commission in the small community on the Northumberland Strait coast.

How would the Russell-Einstein Manifesto and Eaton’s small Lodge in Pugwash intersect to make history? Perhaps Shakespeare provides a clue: “The spark from heaven, who picks it up? The individual always...” In the large cause of addressing the peril of nuclear weapons and war, it was principally the leadership of one man, Bertrand Russell, who sparked other scientists in 1955. In the cause of bringing diverse people together to build bridges of understanding, it was the individual Cyrus Eaton who acted his belief that the real world had no borders.

An Emphasis on Education

Eaton had always seen the close connection between education and success in human well-being. Widely read, well connected in academic circles, scholarly throughout his own long life, Cyrus had become a major benefactor of many institutions of higher learning, including Laval University in Quebec, McMaster University in Ontario and Acadia University in Nova Scotia. In the United States he also supported several colleges and universities, but was most closely connected with University of Chicago, on whose board he served for decades as a trustee.

His emphasis on learning also found expression in the village of Pugwash, where in the 1920s he built the Margaret L. King School, named to honour a devoted teacher who profoundly influenced his early years. He spared no expense, engaging a leading American architect to design the beautifully proportioned brick edifice with white Grecian columns. Over the years Cyrus would also help lift bright and deserving young people out of poverty or a social backwater by assisting financially with their education.

Yet for the wider world, the most notable expression of Cyrus Eaton's emphasis on education was the Lodge. A white frame structure on a promontory of land at the mouth of the Pugwash River, this place in time would become, as Cyrus' ardent peace activist wife Anne Eaton once remarked, "the house that made Pugwash famous".

During the 1950s Cyrus began using the Lodge to host diverse people in a unique space for discussion and reflection. One by one, various groups and organizations arrived as his guests. The rustic setting and relative isolation in this small village on Nova Scotia's northern shore proved highly conducive to a relaxed yet focused examination of fundamental issues.

Setting a Pattern for the Pugwash Movement

The first meetings drew together local officials from regions of Nova Scotia, dealing with subjects from rural schools to the education of police officers, but soon Cyrus realized, reflecting his own interests and global preoccupations, that the Lodge would be a great place to think through even bigger questions.

In 1955 a conference of university presidents and professors from Canada, the USA and UK included Sir Julian Huxley. A 1956 conference, with representatives from 11 countries, concentrated on the problems of the Middle East, including the Suez Crisis.

A 1960 Pugwash International Conference on Continuing Education at Thinkers' Lodge engaged 40 people, including Dr. J. Roby Kidd of the Canadian Association for Adult Education and Princess Sermsri Kasemsri of Thailand, Premier Louis B. Robichaud of New Brunswick and Kwa O. Hagan of Ghana. In the summer of 1967 some 20 participants met during July and August for the Pugwash Conference on Islamic Civilization.

Throughout this period also came more gatherings of university presidents, from the United States, Canada and beyond, seeking to recreate a leadership role for institutions of higher learning. Sessions of the American Association of Colleges and Universities at Pugwash began a movement within circles of higher education in North America, and what they dubbed "the Pugwash Experiment" took place both at the Lodge in Pugwash and at other meeting centres around the continent. Many presidents brought along university chairs, black with their gold insignia, as gifts to Thinkers' Lodge, a fitting symbol now part of the furnishings on the premises.

'Thinkers' Lodge' provided not only a real context for Cyrus Eaton's instinct to support education, but equally expressed his profound drive to "build bridges" between diversities and across the chasms that separated people. Although he could be resiliently combative in matters of economic struggle and survival, he was in a larger way a true peacemaker. The considerable financial resources he had amassed, moreover, provided the means to support and develop a grand design for human betterment in the world. Julian Huxley, with whom he became close, described Eaton as "an ardent rationalist".

It is also relevant, in this unfolding story, how Huxley appraised Eaton: "He achieved success by his calm appraisal of situations, his extraordinary grasp of possibilities and his capacity for bold decisions."

World Scientists in 'Pugwash'?

In the midst of such meetings taking place at Thinkers' Lodge, it seemed, at least to Cyrus, just as logical and natural as it was necessary and urgent to invite the world scientists to come. Immediately upon reading the newspaper reports of Bertrand Russell's statements at the London press conference for the manifesto, his response was instinctive. He wrote Russell offering to make his Lodge at Pugwash available for the proposed world conference of scientists. He supported this initiative utterly, offering to underwrite all costs of the gathering.

Eaton's letter arrived in Russell's hands only to cause perplexity. Why would an American capitalist in Cleveland be so helpful to world scientists concerned about atomic war? The clue that this was just a hoax was in the reference to 'Pugwash', an odd name then known in Britain only for 'Captain Pugwash', the unusual pirate character in a popular cartoon strip. Besides, even if true, the locale was some small village in rural Canada. Eaton's letter was set aside. Russell had in mind a more famous locale for this momentous gathering. He had set his sights on New Delhi, India.

Yet Cyrus, accustomed to being rebuffed and as persistent as he was patient, courteously wrote again some months later. By this time international tensions and regional conflicts had rendered India a hopeless venue for such a conference. Russell and Joseph Rotblat, who was working very closely with him, became keen to investigate the Eaton offer more closely.

Birth of the World Pugwash Movement

On July 6th, 1957, some 22 world scientists and their associates began arriving from Australia, Austria, Canada, China, France, Great Britain, Japan, Poland, U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. in the isolated village of Pugwash. Their beaming host had everything in readiness.

Russell, himself too ill to travel to this meeting, sent a taped message that was played to the scientists who listened in solemnity with a mounting sense of mission. As Joseph Rotblat pushed the play button, those in attendance from around the world, including both sides of the Iron Curtain, silently listened to the tape recorder as the liquid tones and forthright clarity of Bertrand Russell's voice was heard to say: "The only hope for mankind is the avoidance of war. This conference of scientists has the purpose of developing a way of thinking which will make such avoidance possible. The warning already pronounced by scientists [signatories to the 1955 manifesto] brings notice to all the powerful governments of the world in the earnest hope that they may agree to allow their citizens to survive."

The original intent was to convene one meeting. Yet by the time the scientists at Thinkers' Lodge had completed this inaugural session on July 10, the singular importance of their activity so impressed them they resolved to meet again. On that day, the World Pugwash Movement was born.

The 'Pugwash Conference of Scientists' established among other things a 'Continuing Committee' of five members, of which Bertrand Russell was chair, to organize further conferences. It established the form that future conferences followed, with a number of plenary meetings at which important papers were read, and a great number of meetings of the small committees at which particular aspects of the general subject were discussed and decided. "For the sake of continuity:" noted Russell in his autobiography, "the movement has continued to be identified by the name Pugwash." In time it would evolve to become officially named The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs.

"Most important of all." he also wrote in the third volume, the 1957 meeting "was held in an atmosphere of friendliness. Perhaps the unique characteristic of this and subsequent Pugwash Conferences was the fact that the members consorted with each other in their spare time as well as during the scheduled meetings,

and grew to know each other as human beings rather than merely as scientists of this or that potentially inimical belief or nation. This most important characteristic was in large part made possible by the astute understanding by Cyrus Eaton of the situation and what we wished to accomplish and by his tactful hospitality.

The Work Begins, and So Does the Controversy

Work began, but with great difficulty because of the intense animosity and deep suspicions of the Cold War. In addition to CIA and KGB agents who orbited around their gatherings, the Pugwashites faced a range of intimidating practices. In 1961, the United States Senate Sub-Committee investigating internal security, for instance, issued a report on The Pugwash Conferences, documenting this plot by the Communist sympathizer Cyrus Eaton, the Russians, and their other "fellow travelers" who met secretly "in Eaton's home" at a remote rural locale in northern Nova Scotia. This report, given wide circulation by Senator Thomas Dodd, was consistent with the Connecticut Democrat's efforts the previous year to denounce Eaton on the Senate floor, and to seek his arrest and imprisonment under the Logan Act barring private citizens from negotiating with foreign powers.

Yet the Pugwash Movement, alone among world organizations, began to provide high-level scientifically informed discussion between East and West focused on controlling nuclear weapons. Bit by bit, and in many unpublicized ways, the Pugwash Movement influenced policy makers in many parts of the world, and on both sides of the bleak ideological divide between Communist and anti-Communist nations. The cumulative effect of these meetings helped pave the way for the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, by which the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and the U.K. agreed to discontinue nuclear tests, except those conducted underground.

Thinkers' Lodge and a Growing Pugwash Movement

The second meeting from March 31 to April 11, 1958, was also in Canada but, due to winter conditions rendering Thinkers' Lodge inaccessible, took place at Lac Beauport in Quebec. The third Pugwash Conference was in Kitzbuehel near Vienna in Austria, and the fourth, also in Austria, at Baden during June and July of 1959. The fifth Pugwash conference returned to Thinkers' Lodge, as scientists reconvened in the village of Pugwash from August 24th to 29th, 1959.

The small centre lacked facilities for the growing number of guests, so for the first conference in 1957 Cyrus Eaton ordered a train, consisting of sleeper cars and dining cars from his Chesapeake & Ohio Railway Company, pulled up on the siding at the Pugwash Station. The best chefs of the railway prepared sumptuous meals, while the Russian delegation happily found themselves ensconced in private railway cars of Hollywood stars and American celebrities loaned for the occasion and pulled north to the Pugwash train station. By the time of later conferences, instead of in railway cars, eminent scientists found themselves billeted in homes around the village. The Lodge had accommodation for a small number of the 'Pugwashites', and Joseph Rotblat himself developed such a strong preference for room No. 4, returning to it faithfully at each subsequent workshop or meeting over the years, that the Pugwash Park Commission has officially designated it 'The Joseph Rotblat Room'.

Over the years of these Pugwash gatherings, gifts ranging from Russian tea service sets to volumes contributed to the Thinkers' Lodge Library, and various other ornaments and objects of art, came to form a unique collection still housed on the premises. Together with photographs of the historic gatherings – including one of Cyrus Eaton and his wife Anne with Bertrand Russell and Lady Russell at the 3rd Pugwash Conference in Vienna in September 1958 – the collection constitutes not only a trophy room for intellectuals and scientific leaders, but a modest archive and museum to an era and a place that, through the timely action of individuals who understood and cared, helped change the course of world history.

Joseph Rotblat's Central Role

Joseph Rotblat, who had gone to England in 1939 to pursue his research interest in nuclear physics, found himself still there when Nazi Germany's forces swept into his native Poland and enclosed his family in their death grip. Because Germany under Hitler was thought to be developing an atomic bomb, Rotblat soon found himself with other top British scientists working in Midlands laboratories in a race to make it first. As the war deepened and the U.S.A. became a party to it, the letter which Albert Einstein had written in August 1939 to persuade United States President Franklin Roosevelt that a bomb could be made from fissionable material had resulted in the top-secret Manhattan Project. British scientists, including Rotblat, were transplanted to the USA, more secure from enemy bombardment and free from the wartime shortages increasingly constricting Britain.

While working at Los Alamos, the town of scientists and laboratories atop a New Mexico mesa that officially did not exist, Joseph Rotblat learned the Germans had abandoned their efforts. He became adamant that the 'arms race' was over and no one should work any longer on such a devastating weapon. Yet the juggernaut could not be stopped. The only choice Rotblat had left was as an individual, to act in conscience. Even before the detonations at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945 he resigned from the Manhattan Project, thereby becoming the world's first protestor against the atomic bomb.

Joseph Rotblat went on to apply his knowledge to peaceful and humanitarian uses, working in London hospitals to pioneer radiation treatment. He also worked closely with Bertrand Russell, as the two shared growing concerns about the nuclear arms race and prospects of global devastation in war. They were responsible for organizing the 1955 London press conference to unveil the manifesto, and then the first meeting of world scientists at Pugwash.

Joseph Rotblat fully recognized the suitability and significance of this out-of-the-way place in Nova Scotia. Many others who subsequently came to Thinkers' Lodge for meetings have been in awe of what transpired here, knowing the international giants of science and public affairs who came to this place to discuss transcending issues of global impact.

The Struggles Behind a Name

The cost of the first five Pugwash Conferences (three in Canada and two in Austria) was borne largely by Eaton. Clearly the idea of the manifesto would not have materialized into the Pugwash Movement had not Cyrus retained (in Huxley's words) "throughout his strenuous career a missionary spirit" which he combined with his considerable financial resources.

By the time of sixth Pugwash Conference in 1960, however, the Movement came close to dropping both the name 'Pugwash' and Cyrus Eaton in an effort largely led by some American scientists to distance themselves from him. In a 'separation' letter written in September 1959 it had been stated that because Cyrus Eaton had come to play "an increasingly active and controversial role in political affairs", no financial support would be accepted from him. Eaton was invited to attend the Moscow meeting as a guest and not as a sponsor or active participant. Eaton did not attend. He was devastated.

Cyrus Eaton's clear views about United States foreign policy in general and what he considered the confrontational and belligerent practices of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in particular, put the two men on a collision course. Cyrus found it rough being an American opposed to his country's hard-line foreign policy, but held his ground. Yet because his sponsorship of the Pugwash Movement was seen, at least in the United States at the height of McCarthyism, to be little more than consorting with communists, he was condemned for providing cover to Soviet subversion. On top of that, he had provocatively asserted on

American national television that the U.S.A. had become “a police state”. A survey of national newspaper editors ranked him one of the Ten Most Controversial Men in America.

Cyrus Eaton and his businesses were subjected to aggressive and extensive Internal Revenue Service investigation, the leaked reports of which to select newspaper reporters made it appear this tycoon was avoiding payment of taxes, thereby undermining his credibility and, with it, the Pugwash Movement. It would not be until the years of the Nixon Presidency that Americans learned how the IRS was used by the executive branch of the American government to hound and persecute and smear those with whom it had, not taxation but ideological and political, differences.

On the other hand, the sensibilities of some scientists were understandably ruffled. Cyrus undoubtedly could be a little grandiose and somewhat patronizing in his own statements, criticizing the U.S. Government’s Cold War policies by invoking such authority as “My scientists tell me...” A number of the scientists rankled at such public political exploitation of them. Some of the American scientists in particular, being leaned upon heavily by their government and in the general political climate of the era, sought to fully divorce themselves from Cyrus Eaton and the name Pugwash.

“The Essence of the Matter”

Yet other scientists, including many from the Soviet Union who had been at Thinkers’ Lodge, saw matters differently. So did Bertrand Russell and Joseph Rotblat, who understood the concerns being raised but also knew that Cyrus Eaton’s heart was in the right place. They managed to preserve the good elements in the relationship –and the Pugwash name.

Perhaps the Russian Boris Leontyev, writing an article in the Moscow New Times following that 1960 Moscow Pugwash Conference in which he mounted an enthusiastic defense of both Eaton and Linus Pauling, another American equally under attack by the hard-line anti-Communist elements, captured it best. “Cyrus Eaton has no place in the cold war,” Leontyev said, “but he has a big place in the campaign for peace. That is the essence of the matter.”

Time has passed. The Pugwash organization continues to proudly use the name of its birthplace. Annual donations from the Cyrus Eaton Foundation in the United States are graciously and gratefully accepted by Pugwash organization. The Cold War has ended and revisionist views of that era enable different perspectives and interpretations. Former United States President Jimmy Carter, himself a Nobel Peace Prize winner, spoke of Cyrus Eaton as “a true pioneer in leading us to detente between East and West”.

Thinkers’ Lodge a Symbol for Pugwash Movement

As the Pugwash movement spread throughout the world, it outgrew Thinkers’ Lodge, and found financial support beyond Cyrus Eaton’s bank accounts –financial resources that he had virtually depleted, by the time of his death, in the cause of world peace. Eaton had been “a passionate believer in the possibility of reconciling the communist East with the capitalist West,” said Julian Huxley, who added, “not only believing, but acting on his belief.”

Yet Thinkers’ Lodge has remained a symbolic focal point for this organization, as both its birthplace and, despite the early 1960s controversy, its enduring namesake. The Pugwash Newsletter, issued by the Council of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, often features photographs of historic interest involving Thinkers’ Lodge or some of the editorial page cartoons that appeared during the Cold War on Pugwash ‘thinking’ themes.

Pugwash Workshops and working group sessions continue to be held at Thinkers' Lodge, such as the 1994 Workshop on World Citizenship, or the 2002 joint meeting of the Pugwash Working Group on Humanitarian Intervention with representatives from the United Nations Task Force on that subject in the formative stage of its report "The Responsibility to Protect".

Making "a New Way of Thinking" into a Reality

When Joseph Rotblat first set eyes on Thinkers' Lodge and the Village of Pugwash in 1957, he carried a tape recorded message of Bertrand Russell in his attaché case and, in his heart, a deep personal resolve to eradicate the scourge of nuclear weapons. At the time he might not have fully envisaged the form this quest would take – the Movement with its accomplishments including international treaties, a high-level back-channel dialogue that helped prevent nuclear war, his own presidency of a global organization that would be born here, or sharing 40 years later, with the Pugwash Movement itself, the Nobel Peace Prize. Sir Joseph not only served for many years as President of Pugwash, but also today remains its strongest voice and inspiration as President Emeritus.

Forty-six years ago this month, in this small Nova Scotia village where Joseph Rotblat and Cyrus Eaton first met, they discovered a shared commitment to world peace. Both men in their own ways took resolute action to bring it about. They used the power of education as one means to achieve that goal. Today the proud village has a public school named for Cyrus S. Eaton, and when its students graduate, they enter the Pugwash District High School through the Joseph Rotblat Hall. Such structures reflect a reality that is understood well in a village world famous for peace.

From its first meeting in July 1957 in the Village of Pugwash, the Pugwash Conferences have made significant contributions to the effort to restrain the nuclear arms race and ultimately eliminate nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. As already mentioned, in the 1960s the Pugwash Conferences helped lay the groundwork for the first two major nuclear weapons treaties, the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968.

In the early 1970s, Pugwash expertise and analysis were instrumental in demonstrating the destabilizing effects should the US and Soviet Union deploy missile defenses against nuclear weapons, which led to the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the SALT I Accords. Pugwash meetings generated support for the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972 and the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993. Pugwash continues to analyze how to ensure global compliance with destruction and non-production of chemical and biological weapons.

As an internationally respected scientific organization, Pugwash retains its unique position to keep open lines of communication between policymakers and scientists in areas of conflict and tension. As can be seen from the Pugwash website, Pugwash is currently doing this with workshops focusing on the India-Pakistan dispute, the military standoff on the Korean peninsula, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Through its international network of scientists, Pugwash is well placed to examine and propose solutions for many of the major scientific and technological issues facing the international community. "From the challenges of global climate change to food security and public health," as the organization itself points out, "Pugwash scientists seek cooperative solutions that can overcome political and cultural divisions for the benefit of the entire international community."

Founded on the principle of the individual responsibility of scientists for their work, the Pugwash Conferences continue to make their mark in working toward the abolition of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction and the peaceful application of new advances in science and technology.

Up to now the world has survived, sometimes just barely, without its nuclear holocaust. The resolute commitment to world peace, through the original 'Pugwash' goal of elimination of war as a social institution and the eradication of weapons of mass destruction, is today as urgent and important, as it is still challenging and arduous.