



The Probe

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Probus Month

Probus Canada recently declared March to be “Probus Month”. March was chosen because the first Probus Club in Canada was formed in March, 1987. The concept is to celebrate Probus, enrich its meaning among members and enhance its visibility throughout each community.

Our Management Committee decided that the first official Probus month should be used to recognize our original members. Those who joined in 1999 and have been to meetings recently are:

Phyllis Kingston
Lucille Muldoon
Dan Kelley
Eva Hammond, and
Ada Gale

Of the 22 members at the first meeting, some have passed on, some have moved away, and some have just stopped coming.

Our first speaker was **Frank Fesco** on 'History through Coinage'.



Dan Kelley - a founding member and our Rotary Liaison for many years, being presented with a Probus pen by Robin Rousham to mark “Probus Month”.

The celebration concluded with cake.

The Joys of History

George Laidlaw gave us an entertaining and educational trip through history from 1812 to the Avro Arrow, challenging us with “Did you know...” several times along the way.



George autographing a copy of one of his 91 books from his display of over 70 of them.

The story of **Dief. and the Arrow** was familiar to all, but George added some detail. It was by far the best war plane in 1959 and even now could challenge the F35. There were 40 in production when the program was cut. The US was not interested in the Arrow because it was not designed and built in the States and pressured Canada to rely on the Bomarc for defence. The day after the cut many of the designers were hired by US companies. Half of NASA’s designers for the lunar landing were from Avro.

George continued by selecting a series of books and giving us some background on each

The Missing A-bomb. A USAF bomber with an a-bomb on board
... continued over

PROBUS’ Vital Purpose ...

To stimulate thought, interest and participation in activities at a time in life when it is easy to become complacent and self-centered.

George Laidlaw - *from page 1*

had three engine failures and fires in each of them. The crew bailed out. The engines re-started and the plane flew off. Fortunately the bomb was not armed.

First Boer War, 1879-1881. Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts - with the motto "Be prepared", held Mafeking through a siege of over 200 days. One of his preparations was an elaborate telephone system which allowed him to move his defence forces to the right places, at the right times and in the right numbers. Did you know that a Boer tactic was to shoot horses rather than their riders? This thwarted the rapid deployment of Empire troops. They accounted for about 246,000 mounts.

In passing, he mentioned the **Zulu War** and the battle of Rorke's Drift. 183 British troops held off 3,000 to 4,000 warriors. Did you know that 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded? (Movie, "Zulu", with a young Michael Caine).

The Fenian Raids. The snippet of information was the participation of Alexander Muir, an Orangeman, who served with the Queen's Own Canada Rifles at the Battle of Ridgeway against the Fenians. While serving with the regiment he wrote *The Maple Leaf Forever*.

The Arctic Howler. Did you know that Sir John Franklin's ships Erebus and Terror are still on active service? The British Admiralty does not retire a ship until it knows where it sank. Among the mistakes which condemned the expedition to find the North-West Passage was using lead solder on the cans of food and failure to recognize that breaking up the trapped ships to build huts would have given a chance of survival.

US Civil War. 50,000 Canadians fought for the North and 10,000 for the South. Did you know that John Wilkes Booth was supposed to kidnap Lincoln, not shoot him?

War of 1812. One of Canada's heroes was General Brock, a Channel Islander who wanted to fight against Napoleon and did not want a posting to Canada. Early in his career he was challenged to a duel and proposed pistols at one foot. His challenger backed down. At one stage in the war, Brock had his 500 available Indians running around in circles making the invaders think there was more like 5,000. He also let it be known that he could not control the warriors once battle had commenced. The enemy commander had a son serving under him whose hair he valued and so decided to surrender.

Shards of Crystal. Waterford is one of the first names in the making of fine crystal. Did you know that the firm

had its origins in the gin houses of London? There were 17,000 gin houses and they needed bottles. In 1615 the British Parliament passed a law forbidding the felling of hardwood trees for fuel in kilns (they wanted hardwood floors). The glass makers moved to Ireland and settled in Dublin and Waterford.

George finished with the story of one lady's embarrassing moment. Unfortunately it is not suitable for a family publication such as this.

After answering several questions, George continued one-on-one conversations with his eager book buyers.

He has promised to return to delve into ancient history.

Kulula Airlines (South Africa)

Our featured flyer in January was a Kulula Airlines plane with "This Way Up" helpfully written on its fuselage. Another aircraft is "Flying 101" with even more helpful information, such as arrows pointing to "The Big Cheese", "Windows" and the "Throne Zone".



Their in-flight announcements are a little non-standard.

"We'd like to thank you folks for flying with us today. And, the next time you get the insane urge to go blasting through the skies in a pressurized metal tube, we hope you'll think of Kulula Airways."

"Please take a moment to locate the nearest exit to you bearing in mind that it might be behind or on top of you at the time."

How to find us

We meet on the 4th Wednesday of each month except December (2nd Wednesday) in the Hall of Gloucester Presbyterian Church, 91 Pike Street (corner of Lorry Greenberg Drive).

Our meetings begin at 10 but members start arriving soon after 9:30 for coffee and chat. Guests are welcomed.

'Jeep' Jeffries - Opera Lyra

The fortunes of Opera Lyra seem to have followed Richard Strauss' tone poem *Tod und Verklärung*. The 'death' part was in 2011 when the company had to cancel its two scheduled productions. The 'transformation' started with the appointment of John Peter Jeffries as General Director. We asked Jeep to tell us what was involved.

He started by telling us about the early days of his 34 years in opera.



Jeep Jeffries, at the 'front of the house' for a change.

Jeep studied scene design and construction and received a BA from the University of Michigan. After a year in theatre (156 performances of 4 shows in 56 cities, \$125/week but no expense money), he got a job as a shop carpenter, rigger and later, master carpenter at the Boston Opera. Sarah Caldwell was the driving force behind the company and created chaos as well as opera. Jeep recalled one working shift as 10 am Monday to 10 pm Thursday.

His next stop was at Lake George Opera - something of a farm club for the NY City Opera - first as carpenter and then in at the deep end as Technical Director. After the performance the staff would head for the boathouse where there was a fridge full of Canadian beer and a jetty ideal for jumping into the lake.

Florida Grand Opera as technical director was nerve racking. He spent the first six months wondering if he would have a job at the end of each day, and then got promoted to Director of Production.

Florida featured many stars. One evening the staff were heading out for a beer when Placido Domingo stuck his head out of the dressing room door - "Going for a beer? Can I join you?" Three hours later

Mezzo-soprano Victoria Vergana had a pre-performance routine of smooching every man between her dressing room and the stage - Jeep was there.

From Florida to Toronto and the Canadian Opera Company as Director of Production Operations. In its biggest year they did 86 performance of 9 operas in two theatres on a \$6.5 million budget.

On to Portland, Oregon, where he helped create several new productions. Jeep is particularly proud of *Le Marchand de Venise*, a double bill of *Pagliacci/Carmina Burana* and (his favourite) Janacek's *Cunning Little Vixen*.

The Opera Idaho (one of North America's smallest and brokest opera companies), was followed by a period as Executive Director of Opera Grand Rapids. His task there was to get the company out of financial trouble. He started work the day before '9/11'. It took 7 years to turn the company around.

Tulsa Opera was another company in financial trouble. By the end of year two, the deficit was down to \$11,000.

So, when Opera Lyra was in trouble and wanted a 'turnaround expert', John Peter Jeffries had the experience. The opera-goer sees good productions and performances of some of the best loved operas. Behind that is the hard work.

Ticket sales have risen from 60% in 2011 (*Cav & Pag*) to 81% in 2012 (*La Bohème*) and 94% in 2013 (*Carmen*). Subscriptions have increased from 1200 last year to 1800 this year. The School Tour program had 21 performances last year, there will be 32 this year and 42 next year. The focus has been on building public awareness in the company. On the financial side, one of the issues has been to build a stronger relationship with the NAC management, resulting in an omnibus agreement which includes a schedule for retirement of the remaining debt.

There is still much to be done. New corporate sponsors are needed and gifts from individuals and foundations must be increased. Adding a third production at a less expensive venue which features young Canadian artists and presenting opera in nearby communities, are two initiatives under study.

Jeep was asked about the effect of "HD from the Met". There are two schools of thought. Greater exposure to opera is a plus. Expectations become higher.

Opera Lyra Garden Party

Jeep Jeffries mentioned the annual Garden Party. This year it will be at the Italian Ambassador's residence on Tuesday, June 17th with a rain date of June 18th. The residence is just across the Island Park bridge, east of the Royal Ottawa GC.

It is an excellent event with good food, good wine, interesting fashions and, best of all, good voices.

By the way, there is a performance of *Madama Butterfly* at the NAC tonight (Wednesday, April 23rd). There may be a few tickets left.

An April Day by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

When the warm sun, that brings
Seed-time and harvest, has returned again,
'T is sweet to visit the still wood, where springs
The first flower of the plain.

I love the season well,
When forest glades are teeming with bright forms,
Nor dark and many-folded clouds foretell
The coming-on of storms.

From the earth's loosened mould
The sapling draws its sustenance, and thrives;
Though stricken to the heart with winter's cold,
The drooping tree revives.

The softly-warbled song
Comes from the pleasant woods, and colored wings
Glance quick in the bright sun, that moves along
The forest openings.

When the bright sunset fills
The silver woods with light, the green slope throws
Its shadows in the hollows of the hills,
And wide the upland glows.

And when the eve is born,
In the blue lake the sky, o'er-reaching far,
Is hollowed out and the moon dips her horn,
And twinkles many a star.

Inverted in the tide
Stand the gray rocks, and trembling shadows throw,
And the fair trees look over, side by side,
And see themselves below.

Sweet April! many a thought
Is wedded unto thee, as hearts are wed;
Nor shall they fail, till, to its autumn brought,
Life's golden fruit is shed.

(Contributed by **Paul Stumes** - one of our very early members)

May 28th - Craig Greenwood - *The Fantastic White Bears of the Ice*

"A round peg in a round hole, a person perfectly suited to his vocation. Craig's passion for the polar bears of Southern Hudson's Bay quickly connected to all of us. His presentation sparkled with a bevy of facts that fascinated us while his pictures wowed our senses. His stories of researching Ontario's polar bears in the mid 80's and tagging along with the current researchers in 2007 more than held our attention."

That quote is from Probus Perth's newsletter. As soon as we read it we contacted the Perth Club and asked how to get in touch with Craig . The result is that Craig Greenwood will be our May speaker.

He has asked to have a little longer than our usual talks (around 75 minutes). If the Perth write-up is anything to go by, the time will fly by.

June 25th - Irene Richardson - *Nordic Pole Walking as a Total Body Wellness Program*

Nordic Pole Walking has developed into a wonderful all-in-one exercise that not only develops good physical and muscular conditioning but it is also a safe and effective form of exercise for everyone, regardless of age or fitness level. It is proving to be a fun, social, safe, and a very efficient way to exercise.

Irene Richardson is a strong advocate for NPW and was an organizer of a walk for the Maplesoft Cancer Survivorship Centre last fall which involved over 500 walkers. Irene says, "Once people understand the benefits of NPWalking and how easy it is to walk they are hooked for life."

10-Minute Talks - July

We still need two or three more speakers for our 10-minute talks.

Are you a collector - stamps, autographs, porcelain, sea shells, bird's eggs, ??? Have you been somewhere where most people don't go - Tierra del Fuego, Tristan da Cunha, Tasmania, Toronto??? Do you keep notes of your favourite restaurants or great day trips, or places around town you like to visit? If you can give a short talk on any of these or anything else of interest to you, please let **Patt Macpherson, Lynne Bond** or **John Wright** know.

We can help to arrange your pictures from prints or from a computer into a presentation.

The audience is friendly.