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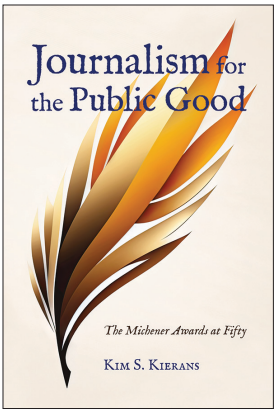


# JOURNALISM FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD: THE MICHENER AWARDS AT FIFTY

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# 1

# The Birth of the Michener Award

When Governor General Roland Michener's press secretary sliced open the envelope in September 1969, Guy Robillard likely recognized the signature. The letter was from C.W.E. MacPherson, president-elect of a new national journalism organization, The Federation of Press Clubs of Canada/*La Fédération des Cercles des Journalistes*. Robillard knew him as Bill MacPherson, the avuncular long-time managing editor of the *Ottawa Citizen*. His letter contained an intriguing proposition. Would His Excellency endorse a new national award for meritorious public service in journalism?

The time was right for a new award that focussed on journalism in the public interest. The 1950s and 1960s brought significant changes and prosperity for many. By the end of the 1960s, Canadians enjoyed subsidized health care and could look forward to government-funded pensions in their old age. The introduction of no-fault divorce and the legalization of the birth control pill led to more women studying in universities and joining the workforce.[1] Rapid changes in technology and industry had ignited "a substantial rise in the Canadian standards of living."[2] The growing middle class had more money to spend on luxury goods like automatic appliances and family cars. Television viewing had moved from crowds huddling in front of store-front windows into living rooms where families watched the six o'clock news sitting comfortably on their sofas eating supper. This was the era of TV trays and Swanson frozen dinners.

The images broadcast on those nightly newscasts were unlike anything Canadians had ever seen. "There were drug scenes and student revolts in universities and colleges, particularly at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, and Sir George Williams University in Montreal, where the computer centre was destroyed, and the love-in, or live-in, at Rochdale College in Toronto," historian Peter Stursberg observed.[3] Television brought these events, along with the daily carnage of the American war in Vietnam, into our living rooms. Young Canadians crossed the border to take part in anti-war

rallies, and Canadians welcomed a northern influx of idealistic draft dodgers into their communities. "The young people were really interested in the Vietnam War and civil rights. They didn't care about reading newspapers like their dad did," said Toronto writer and author David Hayes.[4]

"It was turbulent times. You had assassinations, you had civil rights movements. It was the 60s and everything was in motion. So, how can journalism not be in motion if everything else is," asked Cecil Rosner, author of *Behind the Headlines: A History of Investigative Journalism in Canada*.[5] "It was leading people to think that, hey, why shouldn't I hold some powerful interests to account, or maybe the *status quo* should be challenged, or maybe I shouldn't believe every statement a politician is making. Maybe I should test those. Maybe I should call out a tough question."[6] It was all part of the transformation of journalism that was in step with the times.

Like Canadian society, in the late 1960s, the journalism industry was in motion. In this climate of widespread change, the Michener Award for Meritorious Public Service in Journalism was conceived, developed and launched. It was created to recognize and encourage a new kind of journalism — fierce, hard-hitting journalism that served the public interest and had an impact. It emerged from an uneven and somewhat placid mainstream media in Canada.

Three particular historical developments set the scene for the award's creation. The first was the emergence of a new, more critical culture. The second was a growing concern about the concentration of media ownership in Canada that led to the creation in 1969 of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media. The third was the appointment of Roland Michener — a lawyer, politician, and diplomat with a reputation as the consummate public servant — as Governor General in 1967. In its very creation, the Michener Award recognized the changing Canadian landscape. It would spur positive changes in journalism, among media organizations and in Canadian society.

## *Canada's Pulitzer Prize for Public Service*

It's not that the quality of journalism went unrecognized before the creation of the Michener. Each year, Canada's journalists competed for individual recognition at a buffet of regional and national industry awards for excellence in news, features, columns and broadcast. The Canadian Women's Press Club Memorial Awards (renamed the Media Club of Canada in 1971) had been judging and honouring the best stories of its members since 1935, while the

National Newspaper Association started its awards ceremony in 1941.[7] In broadcast, the then Radio Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) television and radio awards began in 1962. But in 1969, none of these organizations had a category to acknowledge exemplary enterprise investigative journalism — defined by author Cecil Rosner as "stories that hold a powerful interest to account, and also use a rigorous methodology for doing so."[8] It was time to set the bar higher. Bill MacPherson, with his easy smile, even temper and gentle persistence, was the person to turn the idea for a Canadian Pulitzer and create the Michener Award.

Support for the idea grew from a new spirit of independence among Canadians — a confidence buoyed by the adoption of its own Maple Leaf flag in 1965 and Canada's proud welcome to the world for Expo 67. "If the Micheners hadn't come along something else would have had to come along because, in fact, it was part of that spirit of adventure that Canada suddenly found. We were no longer the kind of country that deferred to others. We were a country that could achieve really important things on our own," said Peter Herrndorf, a CBC executive, who in the 1970s led the creation of investigative programs such as *the fifth estate*.[9] The mindset and conditions were right for new ventures.

In the early 1960s, journalists from across the country started to discuss new projects to advance journalism. The concept of an award for public service journalism started to take shape at the founding of the Federation of Press Clubs of Canada in 1968 — a union of eleven independent press clubs in cities from Vancouver to Moncton. The umbrella organization's main job was to provide a national network to connect journalists from all media coast to coast. The group would provide professional and administrative help through supports such as a national directory of reporters and editors. But that wasn't enough. Organizers wanted a project that would knit the new group together and give the Federation a national profile. At its first national conference in Kitchener, Ontario, members settled on a single national journalism award; one that would stand above other industry awards given to journalists by their peers.

Delegates to the Federation of Press Clubs of Canada's inaugural meeting selected Bill MacPherson as the incoming president who set his sights on viceregal support. In a letter to the governor general's press secretary, MacPherson made his pitch. This journalism award would stand out from other journalism awards because it would honour the collective effort of a

media organization, not individual journalists working in a specific medium as the other awards did. As MacPherson wrote in his letter, "The Toronto Men's Press Club has, through its National Newspaper Awards program, a long-established record of recognizing individual efforts in journalism. There is, however, no national award to recognize such an effort by a Canadian publication or broadcasting station."[10]

With the support from the Federation of Press Clubs, MacPherson set out a vision for Canada's version of the Pulitzer Prize to honour "disinterested and meritorious public service" journalism.[11] In 1969, the U.S. Pulitzer Prize was in its fifty-second year. Like the Pulitzer, Canada's new journalism award would be truly national and embrace all media — broadcast, print and magazine journalism, big and small. "Just as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, for example, would be eligible to enter for some great national achievement, so should a small weekly newspaper that stretches its resources to the limit to achieve perhaps a modest but important community improvement," MacPherson explained to Robillard in a follow-up letter.[12] There was "a kind of flowering, a sudden awakening of Canada, that almost everything was possible in this country," recalled Herrndorf. Aggressive news coverage of the American war in Vietnam and the civil rights protests south of the border were inspiring a new generation of journalists in Canada to be bolder and bigger. From Herrndorf's perch at the CBC, the Michener was the perfect way to recognize that trend, and it came at a perfect time for Canada.

This idealism found its expression in a developing critical culture and optimism that investigative journalism had the power not only to point out injustices and wrongdoing but also to improve our institutions and communities. Canadian journalists were awake to the challenges. The unfolding events of the late 1960s and early 1970s were exciting times for many reporters and editors working in Canadian newsrooms. They read exposés such as Seymour Hersh's coverage of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. The New Journalism of Truman Capote, after the publication of *In Cold Blood* in 1966, attracted younger journalists. They were intrigued by the gonzo storytelling of counter-culture hero Hunter S. Thompson. "I think that had a ripple effect across journalism in that it increased the number of people going to journalism schools. It changed the ambition that newsrooms had to look into serious things," said John Miller, who started at the *Toronto Star* as a junior copy editor and was rising through the ranks when the burglary at the Democratic

National headquarters in the Watergate building in Washington, D.C., happened in 1972.[13]

When *All the President's Men* was published in 1974, "suddenly journalism, a romantic calling to begin with, became downright sexy, an outlet for all those baby-boomers wondering what to do with an English or History or Philosophy degree," wrote David Hayes.[14] Students lined up to get into journalism programs at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, Carleton University and the University of Western Ontario. Hayes saw it as "an expression of the times . . . growing out of the values of 'critical culture'."[15]

Compared to our colleagues south of the border, however, reporters working for the mainstream media in Canada had been slow to embrace investigative journalism and its watchdog role of exposing wrongs and corruption in institutions.[16] This emerging critical culture had a hard time finding a home in Canadian mainstream newsrooms of the late 1960s and early 70s — but a crack opened at the CBC in 1964 with the debut of *This Hour Has Seven Days*, a spicy television current affairs program. Co-producers Patrick Watson and Doug Leiterman wanted "to tell the truth about social inequities."[17] The two pitched a "program for a mass audience to be produced like a variety show, with live music, satire and a singing cover girl."[18] The producers and CBC management were at odds even before the first show aired on October 4, 1964. Watson and Leiterman flouted a CBC executive order that forbade broadcasting dissenting views of the Queen's visit, and the program mocked royalists.

*This Hour Has Seven Days* broadcast fifty shows over two seasons. Ratings soared as the "rebellious freedom fighters" defied CBC rules at every turn, using a hidden camera to do a story that resulted in a man being released from a psychiatric hospital. They grilled politicians "contravening CBC's demand for good manners."[19] In the end, CBC President Alphonse Ouimet had enough. Despite an audience of 3.2 million and a vocal national lobby called "To Save *Seven Days* and the Integrity of the CBC," Ouimet ignored appeals from Prime Minster Lester Pearson and cancelled the program.

This new journalism could not be suppressed. It found expression through alternative newspapers and magazines that became the editorial outlet for "disaffected conventional journalists" in the late 1960s and early 70s.[20] Young journalists such as Mark Starowicz at the *Last Post*, Donald Cameron (later known as Silver Donald) at the *Mysterious East,* Brenda Large and Nick Fillmore at the *4th Estate* and Cy Gonick at *Canadian Dimension* were

uncovering social, political and business wrongdoings, holding powerful interests to account and discussing new ideas in the public interest. Cameron described the role of the alternative press as "a corrective for a press that had fallen away from what we considered its duties to be."[21]

The introduction of an award that focused on public service journalism in Canada was overdue, not only because of the growing number of critical voices among journalists but also because of a newly released report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media. Senator Keith Davey, a former Liberal organizer and campaign strategist known as The Rainmaker, initiated the study "to investigate the mass media in Canada, particularly with respect to their influence and concentration of ownership."[22] The Davey report, released in 1970, painted a dismal picture of Canada's media with its low-quality journalism and trend to consolidation as a way to make more money. At public hearings held over fourteen months, his committee heard from a parade of 125 witnesses. Committee members also found their desks piled high with submissions from 500 individuals and groups. Everyone had an opinion on what was wrong with the media, how to fix the industry and how to improve the quality of journalism.

The committee's final report, *Mass Media: The Uncertain Mirror*, predicted further media concentration. It recommended government intervention to protect the public interest against "the greed or goodwill of an extremely privileged group of businessmen."[23] The Davey report didn't stop there; it dripped eloquently with contempt for the work of many of Canada's print and broadcast media organizations:

> Some newspapers dig. Some newspapers are a constant embarrassment to the powerful. Some manage to be entertaining, provocative and fair at the same time. There are a few such newspapers in Canada. The *Vancouver Sun*. The three Toronto dailies. *Le Devoir*. The *Montreal Star*. The *Windsor Star*. *La Presse*. The *Edmonton Journal*. A handful of others. There should be more. There are also newspapers which, despite occasional lapses into excellence, manage to achieve a consistent level of mediocrity. The *Montreal Gazette*, and the dailies in Ottawa, Winnipeg and Calgary fit into this category. There is a third kind of newspaper in Canada — the kind that prints news releases intact, that seldom extends its journalistic enterprise beyond the coverage of

> the local trout festival, that hasn't annoyed anyone important in years. Their city rooms are refuges for the frustrated and disillusioned, and their editorial pages are a daily testimony to the notion that Chamber-of-Commerce boosterism is an adequate substitute for community service. It is our sad impression that a great many, if not most Canadian newspapers, fall into this classification. Among them are some of the most profitable newspapers in the country.[24]

The point was that greedy media organizations were opting for profits and failing to honour their public service watchdog role. Broadcasters didn't escape condemnation for doing the bare minimum of reporting as required by law. The Davey report criticized the networks for filling prime time with imported programs. But even worse, the news had become "for the most part a sideline for broadcasters," with little original reporting; newscasts were re-writes of newspaper stories and the police blotter.[25] Private radio and television stations had not embraced Canada's new 1968 *Broadcasting Act* that required them to use the public airwaves "to safeguard, enrich and strengthen the culture, political, social and economic fabric of Canada."[26] Like their print counterparts, broadcasters had turned a blind eye to what Davey considered their primary purpose: to provide in-depth, accurate information so that citizens could make informed decisions as members of society. Davey, like Michener, set the bar high because both held firm to a view that journalism played an essential role as a pillar of democracy.

The Davey report shamed media owners about the quality of journalism, especially in smaller newsrooms across Canada. The committee didn't hold back: "Every reporter soon learns that there are only a few newspapers where excellence is encouraged. If they are lucky or clever or restless, they will gravitate to those newspapers. If not, they will stay where they are, growing cynical about their work, learning to live with a kind of sour professional despair. Often you can see it in their faces. Most Canadian city rooms are boneyards of broken dreams."[27] The report had a bleak, prophetic tone of Charles Dickens's novella, *A Christmas Carol*. Davey, the ghost of media present and future, wrote that if nothing was done to put the brakes on media concentration, then ownership's interests will collide "with the public interest."[28]

The Special Senate Committee on Mass Media recommended a Press Ownership Review Board with the power to prevent "*all* transactions that

increase the concentration of ownership in the mass media [that] are undesirable and contrary to the public interest."[29] The Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau faced a wall of resistance from independent and unregulated publishers. It had no appetite for a protracted tussle with the media, so the report with its recommendations gathered dust. The concession from media organizations was the creation of local and regional press councils. The first was in Windsor, Ontario, in 1971, followed by provincial councils in Ontario and Alberta in 1972, and in Québec in 1973 — with limited participation from publishers.[30]

While press councils adjudicated complaints and held participating media outlets accountable for their quality of journalism, they did nothing to stanch the primary concern of the Davey report — media consolidation and concentration. As CBC journalist Cecil Rosner explained — apart from the public broadcaster, CBC/Radio Canada — most media organizations are for-profit businesses, many with business interests outside journalism. "It can get sticky and tricky because the owners of a lot of large media corporations travel in the same circles as the powerful, the very people good investigative journalists are trying to hold to account."[31] Without some form of regulation, like a Press Ownership Review Board, Davey predicted the waves of media buying, selling, mergers and closures would accelerate and intensify the conundrum watchdog journalists and editors faced in pursuing stories in the public interest.

In 1970, in the aftermath of the Davey report, publishers and private broadcasters made it clear that they did not want any federal intervention. While frontline reporters and backroom editors wanted more resources for investigative reporting, most were not interested in shaming their bosses. The executive of the Federation of Press Clubs of Canada/*La Fédération des Cercles des Journalistes* had come up with a strategy to entice the media bosses. A new prestigious award that rewarded "meritorious and disinterested" journalism would surely co-opt media executives who managed budgets and made editorial decisions to put more money into investigative journalism. The award could be one industry response to the Davey report's criticism of Canada's lacklustre journalism.

The Special Senate Committee shared the view that publishers and broadcasters had to up their game and invest in serious journalism that served the public interest. Much of that burden, the Davey report observed, fell to the staid and somewhat dysfunctional public broadcaster, the Canadian

Broadcasting Corporation, in particular CBC television, "which has all too often been the empty-headed service."[32] When Peter Herrndorf, a newly minted graduate from Dalhousie University law school, joined the CBC television newsroom in Winnipeg in 1965, he found "the people there were not terribly ambitious, were not terribly aggressive. They had good jobs. . . . And the idea of somebody like myself coming in wanting to be much more proactive, to do aggressive work was thought to be a bit inappropriate."[33] Herrndorf was one of a class of new young bucks who would bring about change and transform news and current affairs at the public broadcaster.

Energetic and enthusiastic young journalists were finding ways into newsrooms and rapidly climbing the executive ladder. At CBC-TV, Herrndorf, inspired by the CBC radio revolution and the success of *As It Happens* (started in 1968), looked to shake up television news and current affairs by creating *the fifth estate* in 1975 and the *Journal* in 1982. Television programs such as *Connections*, a documentary series in 1977 about organized crime, "stunned people" and engaged audiences with "really serious, thoughtful, difficult, investigative reporting for the first time," Herrndorf recalls.[34] Media companies were starting to build a stable of reform minded journalists who found a hungry audience for their hard-hitting stories. The executives found that in addition to the public good, larger audiences were also good for business.

The Michener Awards emerged amid these changes, as journalists and the industry became more focused on public service journalism. At the *Globe and Mail*, long-time editor-in-chief (1963-1983) Richard (Dic) Doyle liked to brag about the members of the *Globe*'s SWAT investigative team — known as "Davey's Hit Squad" or "Davey's Raiders" in homage to Clark Davey, the managing editor — who were busy rooting out injustices in society.[35] On Canada's one hundredth birthday, Doyle wrote a front-page editorial that set out "an agenda for *The Globe* — if not the country to address: Nobody need starve to death, but people do. . . . Who writes with pride of our mental hospitals, our slums, our inability to plug the gaps in social grids conceived to guarantee that no one should live in hopeless destitution? What kind of a country is it that admits to a woeful shortage of housing and at the same time endures a heavy tax upon the materials houses are made of?"[36]

Over at the rival *Toronto Star,* Beland Honderich, the chairman and publisher, pushed a progressive agenda in the paper, based on influential early *Star* editor Joseph E. Atkinson's editorial principles: a strong, united independent Canada, social justice, individual and civil liberties, community

and civic engagement, the rights of working people and the necessary role of government.[37] In a speech at the University of Toronto in 1901, Atkinson declared that "the paper which is most human will in the end be found to have the most influence."[38]

His aptly named son, Joseph Story Atkinson, continued that crusading tradition. In a 1957 speech, he reminded employees that "from its inception in 1892 *The Star* has been a champion of social and economic reform, a defender of minority rights, a foe of discrimination, a friend of organized labour and a staunch advocate of Canadian nationhood."[39] The larger media outlets like the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail* and CBC embraced a new award to recognize exceptional journalism. Within smaller news outlets, the culture was rapidly changing as waves of young people fresh out of journalism schools joined the reporting ranks, ambitious to investigate, expose and make a change. An award to recognize public service in journalism would be something to aim for, and one that could garner the support of Governor General Roland Michener.

## *Michener's Award for Public Service*

There was a lot of good fortune and a certain amount of calculation when the president of the Federation of Press Clubs pitched a new journalism award to Rideau Hall in 1969. Bill MacPherson, the long-time managing editor of the *Ottawa Citizen*, was familiar with the political career of Roland Michener. As a young Toronto lawyer, Michener had served as an elected member in provincial and federal Progressive Conservative governments and later as Speaker of the House of Commons in the Diefenbaker government. After the Liberals took power in 1963, Prime Minister Lester Pearson appointed Michener Canada's High Commissioner to India and the first Ambassador to Nepal. Named Governor General of Canada in 1967, Michener had a sterling reputation among all political parties as the ultimate servant of the public.

When MacPherson mailed his letter to Rideau Hall, he knew that as, governor general, Michener's patronage would be vital to establishing the credibility of an award. This request was not out of order. The long history of governors general supporting artistic, cultural, charitable or athletic activities during and at the end of their terms goes back to Lord Stanley of Preston (1888-1890), who established the Stanley Cup. Vincent Massey patronized the arts and established the Governor General's Award for Architecture, while his successor Georges Vanier founded the Vanier Institute of the Family.

When it came to suggesting Michener embrace this new award, MacPherson promised His Excellency that the Federation would assume all administrative responsibilities, set and maintain standards and cover all costs. Like a typical journalist, MacPherson was in a hurry. He wanted His Excellency to respond to the proposal immediately so he could announce it at the Federation's second annual national meeting in a couple of weeks. Michener complied. His agreement "in principle" arrived from Rideau Hall before the October 11, 1969, meeting. As Michener later recalled, Bill MacPherson "soon convinced me of the value of such an idea and collectively we organized the competition, established the trophy and held the first competition."[40] Michener's interest and hands-on involvement were essential to the Award's growth, success and survival, especially in its early years.

The 1969 annual meeting of the Federation of Press Clubs of Canada concluded in a triumphal announcement that the directors of the Federation had unanimously "accepted the responsibility — and the honour — to administer The Roland Michener Award for Meritorious Public Service in Journalism."[41] The news found its way into newspapers coast to coast. "Governor General Roland Michener will present the first award in a ceremony at Government House early next year and his name will be permanently attached to the award," stated the headline in the *Hamilton Spectator* on October 14, 1969. It was a big coup for the Federation, which saw the award's potential to "rank with the most treasured in the field of Canadian journalism."[42] It also established the Federation of Press Clubs as a group that had some clout. The Federation hoped its growing reputation would entice other local press clubs to join the national umbrella group.

Now began Bill MacPherson's long and sometimes thankless work on behalf of the Federation of Press Clubs to establish the award, build its credibility and garner support among media groups nationwide. Over the next two years, MacPherson, with a lot of help from Rideau Hall and Roland Michener, was immersed in behind-the-scenes logistics for the new award. Letters went back and forth between MacPherson and Rideau Hall trying to find a hole in His Excellency's calendar to hold the first award ceremony. In early January 1970, a letter from Michener's assistant secretary to MacPherson suggested the first half of April, November or December of 1970.[43] It was a little premature. It took MacPherson ten months to respond. He was busy forming a judging panel and spreading the news of the new award to press clubs and media outlets with the zeal of a travelling salesman. In October 1970, he finally was

able to report that the panel was in place and a call would soon go out by mail to all newsrooms inviting them to submit their stories for "Meritorious Public Service in Journalism" for the calendar year 1970.[44]

The newspaper reports from the Federation's third annual meeting in October 1970 noted that "The item of prime importance will be the finalization of plans for the establishment of the Michener Award."[45] In the new year, MacPherson consulted with His Excellency and Rideau Hall staff about the award's criteria, judging and logistics for a ceremony. Together they drew up a to-do list. Chief among the thirteen points checked off at that meeting was a general agreement "that there would be no difficulty in future presentations by the following governor generals [*sic*]."[46] This statement implied that Michener and Rideau Hall expected the award to survive and to become part of the range of honours bestowed by future governors general, even those who might have little connection to journalism or even antipathy towards media organizations. It was a promise that would be tested to its limit over the coming decades.

Still to be settled was the name of the award. While it had been announced in 1969 as the 'Roland Michener Award for Meritorious Public Service in Journalism,' Michener's press secretary thought that title was too wordy. As a postscript in the minutes, he scribbled, The Michener Award for Excellence in Journalism/*Le Prix Michener pour excellence dans la presse*. It took a few more months before Michener and the Federation settled on a trimmed-down version: The Michener Award for Journalism/*Le Prix Michener du Journalisme*.

The dream of the Federation of Press Clubs was starting to take shape. "The Michener Award . . . establishes our credibility," wrote Barry Mather, a former journalist and the Federation's Secretary-Treasurer.[47] For Peter Herrndorf, who by then was CBC's vice-president for English Services, "It was kind of a Godsend." As he saw it, "a lot of journalists were looking for a big transcending award that could validate, that could in fact say, you did great work. And so, people very early on bought into the Michener Awards."[48]

This award had cachet. So much so that even before the first ceremony, at least one other journalism organization aspired to wrest it from Bill MacPherson. In the spring of 1971, the new award caught the attention of the Canadian Women's Press Club (CWPC). With its 541 members, the CWPC was confident that it was organizationally and financially stronger to represent the press in Canada and run this new award. "The Federation of Press Clubs of Canada has practically no funds, an executive of three and

is primarily set up to administer the Michener Awards," CWPC president, Jean Danard, wrote to Senator Keith Davey, former chair of the Senate Special Committee on Mass Media.[49] That was a fair assessment. Behind the scenes, the fledgling Federation of Press Clubs of Canada was struggling. Support from its member press clubs had flagged. Annual dues to cover the costs of the award were slow to come in. It is not clear if the CWPC bid ever reached the ears of Bill MacPherson, but he maintained a firm grip, thus preventing any other journalists' group from swooping in and scooping it up. With a stubborn Scottish streak, MacPherson pushed on with the firm conviction that Roland Michener was critical to the financial stability and success of this nascent award and the Federation.

To outsiders, Daniel Roland Michener might have seemed like an unlikely champion for a crusading journalism award. Roly, as he was called, was athletic — hockey, tennis, jogging — one might have expected him to endorse some athletic prize. Not so, said his daughter Diana Michener-Schatz, a chemist and founder of the Michener Institute. An award focussing on journalism in the public interest was a natural for her father "because he wasn't narrow." She pointed to his rural Alberta upbringing in a politically active Conservative family, his education and his career choices. "It fits with his approach to politics, and I think it fits with his approach to being governor general" — and his support for an award for public service journalism.[50]

Michener devoted his private and professional life to the values of public service — the award's *raison d'être*. After serving briefly in the Royal Canadian Air Force, he went to Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar in 1921, where he became fast friends with fellow Canadian Lester B. "Mike" Pearson.[51] The two shared a love of politics and sports. They played on the Oxford hockey team, "Roly at centre or left wing and Mike on defence."[52] As Peter Stursberg wrote in his biography of Pearson, "Some might say that's the way they went on to play politics. Despite their divergent politics, Michener said he regarded Pearson as a Liberal conservative and himself "as a liberal Conservative — a small 'l' liberal and a capital 'C' Conservative."[53]

Michener represented a political culture that today would be all but unthinkable. His daughter Diana says her father was not like typical politicians of today with their narrow one-party focus. "He was far more interested in the exchange between people, understanding people. . . . He was definitely interested in the broader spectrum."[54] When Michener died in 1991, a *Toronto Star* editorial described his life as: "King St. law firm, Bay St. directorships,

Rosedale friendships — he approached every task with enthusiasm and every person with civility."[55] But what elevated Michener above others was his service to the public good. For example, when the *Chinese Immigration Act* was repealed in 1947, Michener, a Conservative member of Ontario's provincial legislature, worked to reunite Chinese families. Later, as MP and Speaker of the House of Commons in Ottawa between 1957 and 1962, he won the respect of all parties for — among other rulings — holding to order his party's boss, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker.

When Governor General Georges Vanier died in office on March 5, 1967, Liberal Prime Minister Lester Pearson turned to "Roly," his old Oxford buddy, to take over. Expo 67 was opening in just a few months and Canada was expecting more than sixty official visits as part of the Centennial celebration.[56] Michener, born on April 19, 1900, was only the third Canadian-born individual to fill the position, following Vincent Massey and Georges Vanier. Because of Michener's sterling reputation across the political arena, no one accused Pearson of nepotism. In fact, it was the opposite. The announcement even garnered praise from Walter Stewart, a professed anti-royalist journalist. In the *Star Weekly Magazine*, he wrote, "Roly Michener could make an ideal governor general, but we should make him Canada's first president instead" because Michener brought "flair, dignity and that indefinable something called presence" to the position.[57]

Michener's colleagues from all political and social backgrounds would concur, describing the incoming governor general as civil, congenial, decent and energetic. He possessed perfect qualities for what would be his last public role, the 20th Governor General of Canada. In a moment of self-reflection, Michener said, "You know by temperament I am not a comet and not a rabid partisan and I am more judicial in mind."[58] As governor general, Michener quickly found he needed all his judicial, political and diplomatic skills to navigate the changing landscape of Canada. At the same time as Canadians waved maple leaf flags with nationalist fervour during the Centennial celebrations, in Québec, the growing separatist movement sparked a debate about the Office of the Governor General, the last vestige of colonial rule. Michener clearly saw the viceregal position as a national institution.[59] In that role, he recognized that journalism was essential in informing and encouraging a national conversation about issues and events.

Michener made this very clear in his public support for the higher calling of journalism. Soon after taking office in 1967, in a speech to the Parliamentary

Press Club, he paid tribute to the place of the free press of the Fourth Estate in the life and governance of Canada "for the indispensable service which you render in what I call the Canadian ideal."[60] Later, in a speech to the Canadian Press Association, Michener reminded journalists that when he was practising law in the 1940s at Lang, Michener and Ricketts, as it was called at that time, he worked on the incorporation of Press News Limited, an entity to supply news from Canadian Press to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. "I was sometimes called upon to give a snap opinion to your editors as to the risk of libel actions arising from some of the news stories."[61]

Many believe that Roland Michener's impetus for his vice-regal endorsement of the Michener Awards for Public Service Journalism was to honour his daughter Wendy, a celebrated cultural critic, arts journalist, broadcaster and experimental filmmaker, who died suddenly on New Year's Day 1969 from an embolism. She was just a couple of months shy of her thirty-fourth birthday. "It wasn't a story of [Roland] Michener setting out to do a memorial for his daughter and that kind of thing," said her husband, Les Lawrence. "I think of that as part of the background of the story, rather than the initial prompting."[62] As Lawrence remembers it, the Federation of Press Clubs of Canada came to Michener looking for viceregal endorsement. No doubt, Lawrence said, Wendy "must have been in Roly's mind when he accepted to put his name on the award. And I think it might have been in the minds of the press people as well. But I don't think it was a clearcut example of a man setting up something for his daughter." Diana Michener-Schatz agreed, saying her instinct was that her father supported the Michener Award because he was interested in journalism in the public interest and "wanted to see it continued and pursued." The premature death of Wendy may well have been "a catalyst to keep it going" and perhaps "strengthened his activity" in the Michener Awards, she said, especially after his term as governor general ended in 1974.[63]

In the early years of the journalism award, Roland Michener's dedication included pulling out his personal chequebook on occasion to save the fledgling organization from insolvency and pitching in to raise money. Michener said the Michener Award "appealed very strongly to me as a useful means of encouraging excellence in a field of endeavour which was not being given enough attention in Canada. . . . There is no doubt, however, of the importance of the journalist and his counterparts in radio and television as moulders of opinion and essential supporters of a democratic society."[64]

When it came to the logistics of setting up a new journalism award in 1970-71, Roland Michener was hands-on. He wanted "a visible and physical representation of the award — a fitting symbol of journalistic excellence — that a deserving organization could take back to the newsroom."[65] He had agreed to cover the costs of the design and production of the dies and remake of the trophies during his term.[66] Michener wanted a trophy that would stand out from all the other journalism awards, one that had some heft. He envisioned a large bronze sculpture with his personal Coat of Arms and the name of the award on one side and a symbol and its relation to media on the other side. It would be mounted on a wooden base that would have the winner's name and the year of the award.

Michener asked Bill MacPherson to come up with appropriate images to symbolize journalism. Three weeks later MacPherson reported that his efforts had not been very fruitful. He offered the symbol for Mercury and Hermes — "both at times were portrayed as bearing the caduceus, or herald's wand. Thus, I suppose, both gods as well as the caduceus could portray the dispatch of news." It was that or "the bell-ringing town crier."[67] There would be no town crier on Michener's trophy. Michener turned to Rideau Hall's historian and former chief curator of the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. Dr. Robert H. Hubbard recommended Michener hire John Matthews, a twenty-eight-year-old sculptor from Ottawa.

Matthews' vision for the trophy was a rectangular, sturdy plaque in bronze to represent permanency. It would sit on a white marble base sourced from Piggott Construction of Toronto. Together the sculpture would stand nine inches tall. "Initially, the Governor General was surprised the award would be so large, but eventually he realized it would be displayed in different locations, not just on an individual's desk," Matthews explained.[68] One side of the trophy had antique type in a random pattern along with the inscription — The Michener Award for Journalism/*Le Prix Michener du Journalisme*. The reverse side had crossing lines to suggest communication by airwaves and electronics. Michener gave his unreserved approval to the design.[69] Matthews was given a budget of $700 and a tight deadline of October 1, 1971.

That first Michener Award presentation started to take shape. As the administrator for the Federation of Press Clubs, Bill MacPherson had invited newsrooms and press clubs across Canada to submit stories of outstanding public service for the calendar year of 1970. There is no record of how many media outlets submitted entries that first year, where they came from, or the

stories they covered. MacPherson had enlisted four volunteers — who were arm's-length and independent of media organizations — to sit on the panel. The judges were a distinguished group that reflected the times: A. Davidson Dunton, former board chair of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and president of Carleton University, who served as the chief judge of the panel; George V. Ferguson, editor emeritus of the *Montreal Star*; Yves Gagnon, director of the School of Communications at Laval University; and Sam Ross, a retired Parliamentary radio correspondent living in Vancouver.

The panel was bilingual, represented print and broadcast and included one member from Québec and one from Western Canada. It would be another sixteen years before a woman and more than fifty years before a Racialized or Indigenous person would join the Michener Award judging panel. The judges convened at the National Press Club at 150 Wellington Street across from Parliament Hill in March 1971. Deliberations were held behind closed doors, but no doubt discussions were lively, given the slate of finalists for the 1970 award.

## *The First Michener*

The first Michener Award for Public Service Journalism was not the gala event that media organizations have come to expect. It was a modest and rather perfunctory affair. About fifty people gathered at Rideau Hall at 11:30 on the sunny, nose-chilling Monday morning on November 8, 1971. They stood in a semicircle in the Reception Room. Most were dressed for the office, or wearing, as the invitation from Rideau Hall advised, "leisure suits."[70] The president of the Federation of Press Clubs of Canada, Ken MacGray, opened proceedings by thanking His Excellency for his enthusiastic support and sponsorship. "The Michener Award is an important adornment to Canadian journalism, and you are to be warmly congratulated for such an initiative."[71] His Excellency Roland Michener stepped forward, welcomed "the press" and quickly got to business. "I know that every minute of your time is valuable, and I am therefore all the more grateful that you have found time to join us this morning for the award presentation."[72]

There was none of the suspense of an awards event. The announcement of the inaugural 1970 Michener Award winner had come seven months earlier, on April 13, 1971. The judges had picked two well-heeled media outlets, *The Financial Post* and CBC-TV, for the series, "The Charter Revolution" — a joint investigation into shady practices in the booming charter airline business.

In the early days of air traffic, large groups, who belonged to some club or organization, chartered aircraft to go on special ski adventures, religious pilgrimages or school trips. As Clive Baxter wrote:

> To make sure that these clubs didn't slip into the business of organizing large scale public travel, regulations were drafted that insisted that only clubs or organizations set up for some other purpose could qualify — this is the so-called affinity clause — and that anyone making a trip must have been a member in good standing for six months. What was meant to restrict the growth of charters, has in fact become a bonanza to a growing army of entrepreneurs . . . It becomes, in effect, a government license to charge the general public for — in too many cases — absolutely nothing but the right to qualify for a charter.[73]

Two other media outlets received honourable mentions: the *Windsor Star* for its investigation into the ownership and control of a local television station, and CKLG, an edgy top-40 radio station in Vancouver for its documentary series, "Drugs: A Search for Understanding." The five two-hour episodes probed all facets of drugs and drug culture. In an interview, Miles Murchison, the researcher and writer for the series, recalled how he brought in an outside journalist to grill the morning show host Roy Hennessy about why he played drug-themed songs such as "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." Nothing was off limits, Murchison said. "It was the first time I heard a doctor from Montreal say that heroin was easier on the body than alcohol," and according to the doctor, the problem was that heroin led to a life of crime. "We looked at how dope was brought into B.C. from across the border. . . . We explored all of it."[74]

That morning neither the winners nor the finalists had a chance to brag about their journalism and the outcomes. That may not have been such a bad thing, given the content of CKLG's entry and the formality of the event. Governor General Roland Michener was a "traditionalist" and a "stickler for protocol and liked all the ceremony and trappings of the vice-regal office."[75] His wife, Norah Michener, the doyen of good manners, wrote a booklet on etiquette for the wives of Members of Parliament. That could be why the citation from the judging panel for CKLG's "Understanding" series was artfully vague. It read that the radio programs "presented useful material in ways particularly appropriate for young people and to promote understanding

between generations."[76] The Michener judges rewarded journalism that investigated current issues in a controversial manner, but the panel, with its extensive experience and expertise, belonged to an older school of journalism where good taste and propriety still mattered. There would be no reference to dope, heroin, LSD or the Beatles, especially at the first awards ceremony with the Governor General of Canada at Rideau Hall.

The judges had no trouble describing in detail the winner of the first Michener Award, "The Charter Revolution," and heaping ample praise on the journalism. *The Financial Post* and CBC-TV combined the respectability of the conservative business press and the audience reach of the public broadcaster. The judges pointed out that the series broke new journalism ground not just because it was an "excellent public exposure of the dangerous developments in the air charter business" or that "the research was excellent and the presentation very striking," but because of the effective combined use of television and the printed media.[77] In those years, it was common for newspaper people such as the *Financial Post*'s Clive Baxter to guest host on a CBC-TV current affairs shows, but not typical for competing media outlets to work together on an investigative story. The cross-exposure of the same story benefitted both media outlets.

Along with Baxter, producer and director Alan Elrich accepted the first Michener Award on behalf of CBC-TV. "The only thing that stands out for me is the stupid grin on my face."[78] That morning when Elrich was getting dressed for the ceremony, he discovered that he had packed one black shoe and one brown shoe. "The shoe store down the street opened early due to my incessant knocking on the door at 9 a.m."[79] When Michener presented the newly minted bronze-and-marble Michener Award trophy, Elrich recalled him saying, "'Be careful it's very heavy.' It was much heavier than it looked."[80] Weighing eight pounds and eight ounces, the trophy could be a metaphor for the important heft of the stories Michener hoped would gain recognition through the award.

Cynthia Baxter beamed as her husband Clive grasped Roland Michener's hand as he accepted the Michener Award trophy on behalf of the *Financial Post*.[81] It was her first "solemn occasion" at Rideau Hall. "I was impressed by all of the pomp . . . and so I loved the whole ceremony, and of course, I was thrilled for Clive. But I remember I saw one dear man and a dear friend with moth holes in his jacket. I remember seeing a spectacular dress, not really a mid-day dress that another woman was wearing," she recalled.[82] The range of

attire that morning may well have reflected the newness of the award or the fact that despite all of Bill MacPherson's work, the industry still didn't know much about the Michener Award and occasion. Over the years, the Michener traditions would come to be made and remade.

After the presentation of the trophies and plaques, guests lined up to shake the hands of His Excellency and Mrs. Michener, then briefly mingled over refreshments in the Long Gallery. By 12:15 p.m. the ceremony was over, but not the celebrations. The Federation of Press Clubs of Canada would hold a dinner for the winners and finalists that night. CBC and the *Financial Post* broke new journalistic ground; their joint story foreshadowed collaborative teamwork among media organizations. "So, it was suddenly possible to partner with the *Financial Post*. It suddenly became possible to partner with the National Film Board. It became possible to partner with all kinds of others," recalled Peter Herrndorf. "There were really interesting initiatives that not only relied on the new talent that we had brought to the CBC but in fact relied on the talent that existed at other organizations and with the *Financial Post*. That was a perfect illustration of complementary talent working on a project, each one bringing a lot of expertise to bear."[83]

For the most part, co-productions, especially among competitors, remained the exception in the journalism world until the 2000s. The next collaboration to win a Michener Award would come in 2008. CBC/Radio Canada and The Canadian Press won for their research and reporting into the dangers of police Taser stun guns — thirty-eight years after "The Charter Revolution." The coming years would bring technological developments and new tools to help journalists investigate, expose wrongs and effect change.

It had taken three years for Bill MacPherson to shepherd the concept of a national award for public service journalism through to birth. Roland Michener's patronage gave it a name and won it recognition. As understood by one successor, it fit with Michener's deep belief in public service. Ed Schreyer, who would do much — as we shall see — to enhance the standing of the award during his time in office (1979-1984), believed Michener was motivated to support the award: "He felt that it really had to do with the existence of a free press and journalists of great energy and probity." said Schreyer in an interview. He remembered Michener as a person attuned to societal changes. The creation of the award could be understood as a response to a time of dissatisfaction with authority, criticism of media organizations and the desire for institutional change. The Michener Award was also an incentive for a

growing cohort of investigative journalists. More importantly and more specifically, Schreyer said Michener wanted "to continue developing standards of journalism. That's the main reason I think the awards were established."[84]