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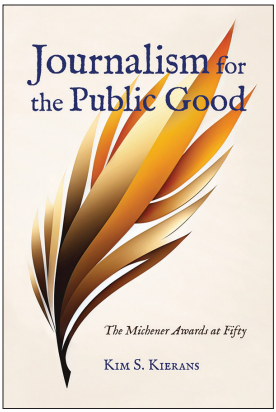

JOURNALISM FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD: THE MICHENER AWARDS AT FIFTY

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The Waves of Change

The twentieth anniversary of the Michener Award for meritorious and disinterested public service in journalism in 1990 was a time for reflection and celebration. It was the first Michener Award ceremony for Governor General Ramon (Ray) Hnatyshyn and his wife, Gerda, and they threw a gala that harkened back to the days of Edward and Lily Schreyer. Journalists, dressed to the nines in long gowns or black tie, received hand-calligraphed programs with a photograph of Rideau Hall on the cover, with the citations for the finalists and fellowships, and the dinner menu inside. Rideau Hall staff escorted guests into the ballroom. The tables were set with the finest china and silver. After the awards ceremony, the RCMP band played while journalists were served a lavish four-course dinner of *crème froide cressonnière, crevettes Fra Diavolo, tournedos gismonde, salade printaniere, vacherin estival* and *douceurs en bonbonnière* with the choice of wines *Clos du Château* 1986, *Pignan* 1985, or champagne, *Joseph Perrier* 1982.[1]

In a CBC interview to mark the occasion, Fraser MacDougall, who had been in charge of judging for eighteen of the first twenty years, explained the genesis of the Michener Award. It began in 1970 to "promote fearless, vigorous journalism, relentless probing for all the facts, particularly those deliberately hidden from the public eye, all without any thought of personal gain."[2] Inspiring words for a new decade that would see the Michener Awards Foundation lose its key founders — Roland Michener, Bill MacDougall and Paul Deacon — and welcome a succession of new leaders, including Gail Scott, Clark Davey, Norman Webster and Pierre Bergeron. Despite a fresh round of financial difficulties that emerged from the changing journalism landscape, these new leaders would work to expand the Michener Foundation's reach outside the golden triangle of Ottawa-Toronto-Montreal. They campaigned to reassure francophone and smaller media outlets that the Michener Awards Foundation was relevant and, like their journalism, it was making a difference. The Foundation was there to support media outlets and celebrate the

impact of their journalism — which, in the 1990s, was often directed toward scrutinizing public institutions and agencies. Toward the end of the 1990s, the Foundation would step into the digital age with the creation of a bilingual archival website that showcased its history and award-winning journalism since 1970.

Passing of the Old Guard

In June 1990, Roland Michener, the self-professed "father of the award," had just turned ninety years old and was recovering from his first-ever surgery, but that did not slow him down.[3] He was as enthusiastic and playful as ever at the Foundation's annual meeting. After thanking retiring president Paul Deacon for his eight years of service, Michener quipped that the success of the award "makes me feel as if I can retire." Without missing a beat, incoming president Gail Scott responded, "Mr. Michener don't you dare retire. I need you."[4] She knew that his constant support in those first twenty years had deepened the award's connection to Rideau Hall and had served as an example to successive governors general who might not have been as keen on the awards as Michener was.

Scott also knew that Paul Deacon was a hard act to follow. The creation of the Michener Awards Foundation in 1983 had been his initiative. During his tenure, he had moved the awards out of Bill MacPherson's spare bedroom, created a charitable foundation with a board of directors and worked to put the organization on a firmer financial footing.[5] From his savings, Deacon had contributed more than $150,000, helping to build a modest endowment and pay the bills. He had put together a dedicated team of volunteer directors, introduced special awards and study fellowships to expand the mission of journalism in the public interest and ensured the independence of the judging panels.

Gail Scott was a timely appointment in two ways. As a well-known and popular national television personality, she broke the stereotype of the Michener Awards Foundation as a bastion of male newspaper publishers and editors. She was also the first female to take on the top executive job at the Michener Awards Foundation. She had impeccable credentials. Scott started as a local TV reporter in her hometown of Ottawa, became a parliamentary correspondent for CBC and then CTV, hosted CTV's *W5* and co-hosted CTV's *Canada AM*. She taught broadcast journalism at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto (now Toronto Metropolitan University).

She was bilingual and knew her way around the organization. She had been a Michener Awards judge for three years and had sat on the board for two.

The twentieth anniversary of the Michener Award showcased journalism from across the country and demonstrated that the Michener Award was indeed national and bilingual. *Le Devoir* broke ground as the first French-language Michener Award winner with its bilingual — French and Inuktitut — "coverage of the issues and challenges facing the Inuit people in northern Québec" as they prepared to vote in the 1989 referendum on self-government. The forty-eight-page supplement, "*À l'heure du choix*" ("The Deciding Hour") involved working with fourteen communities in the high Arctic of Québec.

Associate editor-in-chief Paul Beaugrand-Champagne said the project presented a wide range of challenges for the small daily. Besides getting reports from and going to the isolated communities, the paper had to adapt letters and characters of the Inuk language for the electronic press. Then the paper faced the challenge of figuring out how to explain southern concepts and expressions for which there were no words in Inuktitut. The Michener judges commended the newspaper for "its enormous public service" and "the extraordinary effort made to communicate with the Inuit on an equal basis and for what it achieved."[6]

The stories of other finalists brought attention to emerging or systemic problems that would resonate from coast to coast for years to come. The "Donald Marshall Case," published in *Reader's Digest* in 1989, brought to the forefront the embedded racism against Indigenous and Black people in Canada's police forces, courts and prisons. The story documented how the white justice system had failed Donald Marshall, the Mi'kmaw teenager from Cape Breton, who spent eleven years in prison for a murder he didn't commit. The Marshall case would pave the way for the reexamination of other miscarriages of justice. For example, the case of William Mullins-Johnson, who spent twelve years in prison after being wrongly convicted of the murder of his four-year-old niece. The *Toronto Star* received a Michener citation of merit in 2005 for uncovering the "sloppy and incompetent work of a pathologist" and recovering the evidence that showed the child had died of natural causes. The coverage prompted Ontario's Chief Coroner to order a review of all autopsies involving murders and suspicious deaths of children.[7]

Another 1989 East Coast finalist, the weekly St. John's *Sunday Express*, put into print the whispers and rumours that members of the Congregation of Christian Brothers had sexually and physically abused boys in its Mount

Cashel orphanage. These revelations gave voice to others who experienced abuse in orphanages and boarding schools run by religious orders and private groups. More than forty years later, these organizations face new accusations and are providing apologies and financial compensation to victims.

These tough, important stories exposed ugly realities in society and, in doing so, led to incremental changes. However, societal problems are not remedied quickly; they persist and resurface with disturbing frequency. For example, a finalist at the twentieth anniversary celebration was from the *Kingston Whig*-Standard. The forty-eight-page article, "Rock-a-Bye Baby," focused on the failure of the criminal justice system. The investigation detailed the tragic life and death of Marlene Moore, the first woman in Canada to be deemed "a dangerous offender." Moore, aged thirty-one, was "a victim of incest and rape and of male violence" who died by suicide in the Kingston Penitentiary for Women after "a life of physical and mental pain inflicted on her by respected segments of society."[8] Shamefully, this was not a rare or isolated event in Canada's prisons.

Twenty-one years later, CBC's *the fifth estate* would win the 2010 Michener Award for its shocking account of the events leading to the death of Ashley Smith in 2007 at the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ontario. "Ashley Smith's story is not about some hardened criminal but a mentally disturbed kid who got 30 days for pelting a postman with crab apples,"[9] journalist Hana Gartner said at the ceremony. When Smith died in 2007 at nineteen, she had been shunted from institution to institution and spent more than 1,000 days in segregation over four years.

CBC's *the fifth estate*, with the support of Smith's mother, challenged the Correctional Service of Canada to get access to the deeply disturbing video of Smith's final hours. Guards — ordered not to enter her cell as long as she was still breathing — watched and videotaped Smith, as she strangled herself on October 19, 2007.[10] CBC's legal challenge went all the way up to the Ontario Court of Appeal. The judges in a landmark 3-0 decision ruled "that media have the right to unfettered access to all exhibits before the court," Gartner said. "Journalists and the public now have another tool to hold public officials accountable for their actions."[11]

Along with the legal precedent, *the fifth estate* broadcasts "Out of Control"[12] and "Behind the Wall,"[13] played a pivotal role in widening the scope of the inquest into Smith's death. In 2013, Ontario Coroner Dr. John Carlisle ruled that Smith died from ligature strangulation and potential lack

of oxygen (asphyxia), but her death was not a suicide; it was the result of homicide.[14]

It was Gartner's last big story before she left *the fifth estate*. "It was a good way to go out," she said. "The Michener Award meant a great deal to me. Along the way, you sometimes get Gemini Awards and all sorts of awards and it's very nice and you feel good for one evening and you forget. But this one, it was incredibly meaningful in that it was the story that got to me the most, in many ways, I still live with it."[15] The vigilance of media organizations in producing programs such as *the fifth estate* is vital to the health of our society. Investigative journalism brings systemic social problems to the attention of the public and those in authority, but change is slow, and issues are revisited.

Six years later, in 2016, the Michener Award went to the *London Free Press* for its two-year investigation into the death of Jamie High. The body of the forty-year-old father, athlete and successful real estate agent was found naked on a cell floor in solitary confinement at London's Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre. Reporter Randy Richmond wrote to High's family:

> The reason the *Free Press* and I have been driven to tell Jamie's story, and stick with it, is because he never should have had a story like this.
>
> He never should have been "jail guy."
>
> He should have had the chance to become, at least, some guy who had some trouble once and got some help and moved on.
>
> He should have had the chance to become again some guy you played hockey with, or saw in a gym, or met in a bar watching football and liked because of his cockiness or didn't like because of his cockiness, maybe a good friend, or a business partner, maybe your brother, or son, or husband, or ex-husband, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend, or father.
>
> Jamie's last days should not have been spent naked and alone on the floor of a jail cell.
>
> His last words should not have been incoherent mutterings.

> He never should have had a story written about him called "Indiscernible".
>
> No one should.[16]

The Michener judges wrote the *London Free Press* series "exposed serious shortfalls that produced changes in policing, bail, community mental health care, hospital mental health care, the relationships between hospitals and police, the role of courts and the treatment of inmates. Their work exemplifies the critical value of local media relentlessly pursuing stories and seeking accountability to counter what too many others choose to overlook and let slide as simply indiscernible."[17] Three years later, in June 2019, Bill C-83, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, passed. It was supposed to end the inhumane practice of segregation, but it is still happening in Canada's prisons, now under another name — structured intervention units (SIU).[18]

These stories cover thirty years. Combined, they show how Michener stories do not end on awards night. They have consequences. As Governor General Hnatyshyn said at the twentieth anniversary in 1990, all the nominated stories had a common focus: " . . . they were disinterested, meritorious and performed a public service. In my view, however, they are more: they are examples of how professional men and women use their intelligence and determination to meet the highest standards of journalism and how, if they are very fortunate, they work for organizations willing to bet on their talents and resourcefulness."[19]

Hnatyshyn, a former lawyer and politician, understood the importance of the message he was sending about the role of journalism in a democracy through viceregal support of the Michener Awards. His emphasis on the excellence of journalism was in keeping with the idea — painstakingly established over the previous two decades — that this night was only for the best. If he had any doubts when he received the annual request from the Michener Foundation, they were put to rest by his secretary, Judith Larocque. "Your participation in this event assures the prestige of the award and provides a great boost to journalists and media organizations interested in encouraging public service and high standards in journalism," she wrote to Hnatyshyn.[20] What's more, Larocque noted in her memo that the event earned good national media coverage that was well worth the expense.

Rideau Hall documents from 1990 estimated that an evening including the presentations and a formal dinner would cost $13,000. The other option from Larocque was that the Michener Award ceremony be followed by a reception and no dinner, which is what Hnatyshyn's predecessor Jeanne Sauvé had done in the last three years of her tenure. "This alternative is not advisable, however, as it would detract from the prestige of the award," she advised. Hnatyshyn followed her advice. It was welcome news to Michener president Gail Scott and the board. A ceremony and gala at Rideau Hall demonstrated that the State, through the office of the governor general, valued the journalism of the Fourth Estate as an essential pillar of a democratic society, precisely what Bill MacPherson and Roland Michener had intended twenty years earlier.

The Michener Awards Foundation's annual meeting in May 1992 was tinged with sadness as President Gail Scott remembered founder and patron, Roland Michener who had died in August 1991. "It was more than 20 years ago," she recalled, " that Mr. Michener had lent his name to a journalism award to honour those who were able to effect social change and had the courage to do so." At the awards ceremony that evening His Excellence Hnatyshyn paid a tribute to his predecessor. "Here was a man with unrelenting energy who did the most serious and significant kind of work on behalf of his country and did it all with a twinkle in his eye."[21] Before presenting a special commemorative plaque to Michener's daughter, Diana Michener-Schatz, Hnatyshyn praised Roland Michener's loyalty and advocacy that helped to make the Michener Awards an annual highlight of Rideau Hall.

Hnatyshyn reminded journalists and media executives that Michener appreciated journalism that made for a better society. "These awards celebrate content, depth and understanding. They become even more important as economic pressures squeeze at the heart of both our print and electronic media, and publishers and producers look desperately for every possible way to attract readers, listeners, viewers — and, of course, advertisers. If those pressures ever gather to the point that the custodians of the Michener Awards have trouble gathering journalists of the quality that we have represented in this room today — any of whom are worthy of this prize — then Canada will be the lesser for it."[22] Technological changes and an economic downturn were starting to erode media organizations. For the industry, this connection to Rideau Hall and the governor general's spotlight on journalism in the public interest became more valuable than ever.

Hnatyshyn surprised everyone that night when he stood up at dinner and called upon each of the six Michener Award finalists to talk about their stories. That was a first. Up to now, the tradition had been for the president to read the judges' report and citations, and then for the governor general to present the awards and announce the fellowship recipients. But that night, the audience heard moving accounts from the journalists on the front line of the most important stories of 1991. The Michener Award winner was CBC-TV's investigative team with a package of seven stories that focussed on corruption and failures in government administration.

Journalists Gloria Lowen and Susan Papp spoke about the abuses and malfeasance uncovered, including loopholes in federal tax law, abuses of Indigenous band funds, fraud and "blowing the lid off" widespread abuse of Ontario's health insurance by drug addicts in U.S. treatment centres.

Another CBC story in the package described "how the director of immigration in Manitoba was in league with an immigration consultant in various corrupt practices. He was removed after our story," recalled Cecil Rosner, then producer of the CBC Winnipeg I-Team.

In another story, the CBC journalists exposed a group of corrupt Winnipeg police officers who were stage-managing break-ins. "They would hire one criminal, in particular, to get all his buddies together, do a break and then they [the police] would burst in and arrest everybody since they had kind of instigated it and get all the accolades of having made a bust. They would let him go and charge the others. . . . This is not a script from a Netflix series, it was actually going on in Winnipeg," Rosner said, reflecting on the series years later.[23]

The other finalists shared heartbreaking stories about child exploitation, sexual abuse, and municipal and judicial injustices. *L'Actualité*'s exposé about children as young as eleven years old working sixty hours a week for fifty cents an hour sparked outrage, especially in Québec, where the government had scrapped the minimum age requirement in 1974. The *Globe and Mail*'s Paul Taylor explained how the series involving sexual abuse by psychiatrists and therapists in Ontario led to the creation of a task force and new regulations by the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons. Ruth Teichroeb's *Winnipeg Free Press* investigation into sexual abuse and exploitation of youth at Manitoba adolescent treatment centres prompted a public inquiry.

In response to city hall secrecy in St. Thomas, Ontario, radio station CKSL-Q103 took unprecedented action and allowed its reporter David Helwig

to open a freedom-of-information advocacy service for citizens, which played a role in municipal elections. Stories written by Constance Sampson of the *Prince Albert Herald* forced the Saskatchewan government to review the sentence of a white supremacist who pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the shooting death of Leo LeChance, a Cree trapper. Sampson said it is "a case that won't go away."[24] Each speech brought the stories to life that resonated with the Michener values of public service.

"I thought the unscheduled, spontaneous introduction of the finalists for brief speeches was the best innovation I have seen in the course of attending Michener nights," Chief Judge Arch MacKenzie wrote in a thank-you letter to Hnatyshyn. "The fact that His Excellency became the impromptu Master of Ceremonies gave the proceedings a down-to-earth friendliness and informality that is impossible usually to plan. I hope it becomes part of the format because I'm sure it is a special memory for this year's participants."[25] The innovation stuck, and to this day, the most memorable part of the annual Michener Awards ceremony is when the finalists stand and talk about their work and the impact their stories have had on the public good.

Tremors: The Industry and the Foundation

Gail Scott was three years into her tenure as president when she resigned in the spring of 1993, to take an appointment to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). In her short tenure Scott had brought energy and enthusiasm to renewed fundraising and publicity efforts. She also found herself asking for the resignation of a member of the board and executive after internal conflicts had affected the future of the Foundation.[26]

The board elected founding member Clark Davey as the third president of the Michener Awards Foundation. Davey was the dean of newspapers in Canada — a former managing editor of the *Globe and Mail* and former publisher of Southam News in Vancouver, Montréal and Ottawa. Among his peers he was respected as a "champion of the sort of investigative journalism that, in his words, have 'the kind of impact that moves peoples' hearts and their minds, that stirs their sense of justice, and changes the rules and laws, to make our society a better place."[27] Many young reporters owe their careers to Davey's mentorship, especially during his time at the *Globe and Mail*.

Davey's connection to Roland Michener went back a long way, to 1962. Roland Michener was the MP for St. Paul's in Toronto and Speaker of the House of Commons. Michener had come to ask Davey for "special attention

to regain the support" in his riding because "as Speaker of the House of Commons, he was required to be non-partisan." As Dic Doyle noted in his biography *Hurley Burly*, it was a reasonable request, but Davey refused to make an exception. He told Michener, "If you make news, we'll report it."[28] Davey brought that astute sensibility as one of the new leaders shepherding the Michener Awards Foundation through what would be a tumultuous era.

Davey saw the work of the Foundation as "celebrating the best of the best in our business" and stated that his mission as president would be to ensure that "by this time next year, we'll have won the kind of support that will give us confidence in the future."[29] By May 1994, the treasurer, Grant MacDonald, reported a balanced budget and noted that the Foundation had met the investment target of $150,000.[30] Davey and vice president Bryn Matthews successfully raised money from libel-law firms and private broadcasters. Even board members had increased their annual donations. There was more good news. Paul Deacon, described in the board minutes as "an old friend of Roland Michener," had given the Foundation a considerable gift. He had deposited $100,000 with the Ottawa Community Foundation with instructions to hold it until the Michener Awards Foundation could raise matching funds. "Paul Deacon was a lifesaver . . . having Deacon's $100,000 sitting out there, that made all the difference in the world," Clark Davey said in an interview years later.[31]

At that time, Davey thought this would be the end of the exhausting and somewhat frustrating cycle of fundraising. At the 1994 annual meeting, he gave the optimistic prediction that "in a year or two the Foundation would be fully funded and could stop further fundraising."[32] At the 1994 awards ceremony that night, Davey announced that the board unanimously elected Paul Deacon as president *emeritus*, praising his work as "instrumental in keeping the Michener Foundation vibrant and strong."[33] Successive boards would work to ensure that momentum continued.

Two media outlets tied for the 1993 Michener Award.[34] The *Ottawa Citizen* series had scuttled a multi-million-dollar secret deal to privatize Toronto's Pearson airport, while the *Globe and Mail* investigation blew open the tainted blood scandal, considered Canada's worst public health disaster. The *Globe and Mail* stories detailed how tainted blood transfusions in the 1980s were responsible for more than a thousand AIDS-related deaths. Reporters Rod Mickleburgh and André Picard followed with a series on "how the provinces conspired to deny compensation to victims of tainted blood and how many

of them were dying destitute because federal support had run out. Federal and other reviews followed quickly. Within weeks the provinces had reversed their seven-year-old policy and provided $159 million."[35]

This was just the beginning of the fight for compensation. In the obituary for Janet Conners — the "crusading activist" from Nova Scotia who contracted HIV in 1989 from her husband Randy, a hemophiliac who had unknowingly been infected by tainted blood products — André Picard wrote that, after the couple went public in 1993: "The political dominoes began to tumble, with every province and territory following suit on compensation and the federal government ordering a commission of inquiry — the Krever Commission — that would eventually result in more than $5 billion in compensation, the bankruptcy of the iconic Canadian Red Cross blood program, and a complete revamping of how drugs are approved in this country."[36] The *Globe* held those in authority to account and, as a result, changed public policy and saved the lives of citizens.

Four years later an "extreme sense of loss" marked the Michener Awards ceremony. Foundation members mourned the deaths of two of the people in 1998 who were instrumental in its founding and growth: Bill MacPherson from cancer at the age of sixty-seven, and Paul Deacon from a heart attack at seventy-three. MacPherson, the founder, had shared a vision with Roland Michener in 1969, and for those first twelve years he was the driver in shaping and sustaining the award. "Bill was for the entire first 25 years and particularly in the early and somewhat chaotic years, the administrative glue which held together the various organizations which oversaw the award," said president Clark Davey.[37]

Without MacPherson it is unlikely that the Michener Award would have survived and become a charitable Foundation in 1983. He had protected it against poachers. He had protected the integrity and independence of the judging. He had protected it from financial insolvency. He remained active on the board, serving as executive secretary until 1994. The Michener Awards Foundation planted an Aspen tree just off the traffic circle in the Arboretum at the Experimental Farm in Ottawa to honour his service.[38]

If MacPherson germinated the idea and nurtured the Michener sapling, then Paul Deacon ensured that the tree grew deep roots to become strong and tall. At the May 1996 meeting, the Michener board honoured Deacon's urbane leadership, fundraising and personal generosity, noting that he was "directly responsible for the creation of the Michener fellowships and of the

investment fund which guarantees both the award and the fellowships."[39] The following year the board honoured his dedicated service by re-naming the fellowships the Michener-Deacon Fellowships.[40] Deacon's greatest legacy — the scholarships — also became the Foundation's greatest ongoing financial challenge. Providing them was a way to demonstrate a commitment to journalism that went beyond the annual night of wine and self-congratulations and affirmed to the Foundation and media organizations that "what we do" is important.

Days after Deacon's death in March 1996, Senator Richard (Dic) Doyle, former editor of the *Globe and Mail,* stood up in the Red Chamber and paid tribute to his former colleague and all Deacon had done "to improve the calibre of his craft," particularly through his contribution to the Michener Awards Foundation. "It was Deacon's perseverance that secured the financing of the Foundation' program of annual 'Micheners' awarded for public service in the media. The Micheners are the most coveted prizes in Canadian journalism."[41] Deacon, alongside MacPherson and Roland Michener, had seen the awards through the thick and thin of the first two decades. The next thirty years would see new leaders meet new challenges — prompted mainly by the crumbling media business model — head-on.

The world of Michener, MacPherson, Deacon, Doyle and Davey was changing quickly. By the late 1990s, the number of media companies closing and consolidating started to escalate. With the rise of the Internet, audiences and advertisers were drifting away, and legacy media found they had no budget for beneficence. "The glory days of record advertising, however, were coming to an abrupt halt as the recession of the early 90s set in, with our revenues plummeting by a staggering one-third," wrote *Toronto Star* publisher John Honderich.[42] Furthermore, the Foundation was in competition for donors with other media organizations like the Canadian Journalism Foundation.

By April 1996, the Michener Foundation was showing an operating deficit of almost $20,000 mainly because three publishers — Thomson, Hollinger and Maclean-Hunter — had "dropped out as donors."[43] There also was little support from private broadcasters for the Micheners. "They weren't adamantly opposed. They were just smiley and indifferent,"[44] said Bryn Matthews, Michener vice-president (1994-95) who spent most of his later career in private broadcasting with CJOH in Ottawa. Davey appealed to board members to identify donors with "a vested interest in supporting public service

journalism."[45] With fewer donations, the board dipped into its investment fund, now down to almost $280,000, to cover the cost of the two fellowships. It was time to tighten the belt and the board cut back and awarded only one in 1997.[46]

Once again, Michener directors started looking for options to get out of the annual fundraising cycle because "the job of raising annual operating funds for the Foundation, notably to finance the fellowships, is becoming increasingly difficult."[47] Bell Enterprises, the parent company of CTV, had been through a round of layoffs. Conrad Black's Hollinger had bought the controlling interest in the Southam newspaper chain. By the end of May 1996, Hollinger was the controlling shareholder of Southam's twenty dailies and could boast of a stable of fifty-eight newspapers. One company had control of nearly "41 per cent of Canada's total daily newspaper circulation."[48] The media buying and selling spree in Canada would continue and accelerate over the next decade, further destabilizing the Micheners' fundraising abilities.

Clark Davey was discouraged. "Most of the rest of the board seems to exist in a vacuum 364 days of the year, 365 in a Leap Year," he wrote to board member Tim Kotcheff, who had been sending out appeals for donations to various media and other groups. Davey advised, "Don't waste time with major paper publishers. Southam is becoming more centralized."[49] The one bit of good news for the Micheners was that after four years, the Foundation had finally met Paul Deacon's challenge. It had raised $100,000 to match Deacon's donation held in trust with the Ottawa Community Foundation. The goal was met thanks to Michener director Cynthia Baxter, widow of Clive Baxter, the first Michener winner and a close family friend of the Deacon family.

Cynthia Baxter appealed to Deacon's former work associates and single-handedly raised the difference, including $5,000 from the Audrey and Donald Campbell Foundation. Ten years later, the Baxter family would add to the endowment with a $200,000 donation to help sustain the work of the Foundation.[50] The investment fund with the Ottawa Community Foundation had reached $358,000 — nowhere near enough to generate enough income to cover two $40,000 fellowships or the Foundation's annual operating budget of $50,000. It must have galled Michener directors to hear that CJF was swimming in money and had passed an annual operating budget of $270,000.

By the time Clark Davey stepped down as president in 1998, he had managed to nudge the investment fund to $441,000 and whittle the operating budget deficit down to $1,200. Interest from the investment fund

barely covered one fellowship. The directors wanted a larger annual draw from the investment fund and considered moving their money out of the Ottawa Community Foundation. This time, Adelle Deacon, wife of the late Paul Deacon, stepped in. She pledged $10,000 a year for five years to help the Michener Foundation bridge the gap between the fund's 4.5 per cent capped payout and the Michener's budget requirements.

Deacon was a long-time supporter of the community foundations in Toronto and Ottawa, so the board agreed to Deacon's request that the Micheners keep their money invested in the Ottawa Community Foundation. Her generous offer came at the right moment. Newly elected president Norman Webster understood that the board had "no appetite for another major round of fundraising." After all, the Foundation had already promised its faithful donors that an earlier appeal was the "final request."[51] For the most part, the Foundation has kept that promise, limiting fundraising to corporate sponsorships for the two fellowships.

The Foundation's new leaders had seen it through yet another period of financial insecurity, and by the end of the 1990s, the annual cycle clicked along. Each autumn, bilingual brochures went out to newsrooms across the country, advertisements were placed in media magazines inviting submissions for the awards and fellowships, and nominations opened. In March, judging began, with the finalists announced in the spring. The Michener executive spent each winter in a dance with Rideau Hall to find a hole in the governor general's itinerary to set a date for the awards ceremony. When that was settled, the executive would scurry around. The auditor general — holder of the envelope with the Michener winner — had to be invited, a guest list drawn up, the trophy engraved, the citations of merit printed and the annual general meeting called for the day of the ceremony.

The annual general meeting was a perfunctory affair. Board members entrusted the day-to-day operations of the Foundation to the executive — the president, past president, chief judge, treasurer, and at least one board member. This governance structure and protocol would eventually be challenged in 2017.

In the 2000s, discussions at the annual meeting centred on familiar issues — finances, fundraising, the need to raise the profile of the award and fellowships and the lack of French entries. In more recent years, the website and social media made it onto the agenda. If the meeting went on too long, some board members would start to fidget and sneak a look at their watches

or phones. Everyone was keen to get to their hotels or go home and prepare for the awards ceremony. The excitement of the awards ceremony lasted for a single day, but the Foundation's behind-the-scenes work was an ongoing endeavour for the board executive.

Bridging Two Solitudes

From its creation in 1983, the Michener Awards Foundation was a tight-knit group, mainly from the Toronto-Ottawa establishment — former newspaper editors and publishers with Southam News service and Canadian Press pedigrees. To outsiders it might have seemed as if Gail Scott stepped into an old boys' club when she became president in 1990. But in an interview, Scott shrugged off any suggestion that she had entered a closed shop. "It was their charity. This was their cause."[52] She respected them as guardians of the integrity of the award. However, board members from the regions were not always as generous and pushed back when coming face-to-face with the Ontario compact.

During one of the perpetual board discussions about increasing entries from French publications and the regions, J. Patrick O'Callaghan, the plain-speaking Alberta newspaper publisher, cut through all the Upper Canadian niceties. With his acid tongue, he observed that the core directors were all in Ottawa and suggested that had given rise to a perception that the awards are a "Central Canada concoction." O'Callaghan's accusation at the 1992 annual general meeting brought a sharp retort from fellow director Clark Davey, who would become president in 1993. "I don't sense any feeling that the Michener is anything but a national award."[53] The Michener Award was national, but what Davey side-stepped was the fact that the organization administering the award was rooted in Ottawa with tentacles that reached not much farther than Toronto and Montreal.

"I think there was always a bit of national alienation. Those on the outskirts, the west coast, and prairies and the Maritimes felt that it was all controlled from Toronto, which wasn't far from the truth," said Bryn Matthews, who joined the board in 1992 and spent a year as vice president. "It still is to some degree, but that's not unusual."[54] Toronto was the centre for media and Ottawa the centre for political journalism.

Regardless of who occupied the seats at the board table, the focus remained on journalism in the public interest. "Everybody had an important story to tell," said Tim Kotcheff, former Toronto board member. "This was the

award (*snaps his fingers*) that gets public attention and changes policy, which is what it's designed to do. So everybody on the board really pushed hard."[55] Regardless of geography, board members swallowed their institutional dissatisfaction. They stood united on the purpose of the award and fellowships — to encourage the Michener values among the scribbling class and to build a culture of public service journalism among media organizations.

Le Devoir's Michener Award win for the twentieth anniversary signalled a breakthrough with the French media for the Michener Awards Foundation. Since the founding of the award, almost every report of the judging panel included a note to the administrators about how much they "deeply regret the lack of entries from French-language newspapers and broadcasters."[56] In the early years, the judging panel did not keep data about the number and categories of entries. However, in the twenty years before *Le Devoir*'s 1989 Michener Award, sixty-one finalists received honourable mentions and citations of merit. Of those, only two were for a French-language medium. *La Presse* received an honourable mention in 1972 and a citation of merit in 1981.

The big question for the Michener board year upon year, as they tried to create some buzz in Québec and French-speaking communities in other provinces, was, why so few entries? Alienation from English Canada, nationalistic sentiment, the Anglo make-up of the Foundation, its association with Rideau Hall and by inference, the Queen? Or was it that the effort just wasn't worth it? Lindsay Crysler, executive editor of the *Montreal Gazette* (1972-1977) and founding director of Concordia University's journalism program, understood the French media's lacklustre involvement in the Michener Award as a "chez nous" attitude. French media organizations placed more value on provincial awards because the perception was that the Michener Award was "an English Canada thing."[57]

In late 1987, the Michener Foundation hired Margaret Pearcy of National Public Relations to develop a communication plan to increase awareness and participation in the Michener Awards and fellowships, with a focus on Francophone journalists and media from the regions.[58] Pearcy delivered an ambitious, albeit pricey, $40,000 communication plan that included national advertising and bilingual pamphlets, and a suggestion that the Michener Awards Foundation work with *La Fédération des Journalistes du Québec* and other Francophone organizations.[59] The action resulted in a rush of applications for the 1990 study fellowships — nine of nineteen came from Québec that year — but it did little to move the dial on French-language submissions

to the award. Bridging the two solitudes would remain a struggle for the Foundation.

The election of Norman Webster, managing editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, as president of the Michener Foundation in 1998 was a nod to Québec. Though he came from an English background, his roots were in the Eastern Townships of Québec.[60] As one of the Michener Awards Foundation's new leaders, the bilingual Webster would work hard to build ties with his French-speaking peers. His privilege was offset by the fact that he rose through the journalism ranks the old-fashioned way, with hard work and talent. Webster's first job was as a summer student at the *Globe and Mail*, at the time owned by his uncle, R. Howard Webster.

It was soon clear to then-managing editor Richard Doyle that Norman Webster was not one to trade on his family ties or that he was an Oxford Rhodes Scholar. "He is a personable youngster who is genuinely interested in newspaper work for which he has demonstrated — so far — considerable aptitude," wrote Doyle in a 1959 memo. "Norman knows all about type lice and rubber lead."[61] Webster started at the *Globe*'s magazine *Weekly* for a princely sum of $45 a week and the privilege of working for another reporter on the youth page as a "leg man" doing research and other behind-the-scenes work.

By the time Webster became president of the Michener Foundation, he had distinguished himself as the *Globe*'s bureau chief in China and London. He succeeded his mentor, Richard Doyle, as editor-in-chief at the *Globe*, a position he held from 1983 to 1989. "Webster was part of the new generation who saw themselves as members of a profession," wrote David Hayes in *Power and Influence*. "He brought a social conscience rooted in *noblesse oblige*."[62] At the virtual book launch of Webster's book, *Newspapering: 50 Years of Reporting from Canada and Around the World,* in 2020, retired senator and journalist Joan Fraser aptly put it this way: "However faithful he was to journalistic codes, he was even more faithful to his sense of duty to the public," all of which aligned with the Michener values.[63]

Even though Webster spent most of his career in big media, he always retained his Eastern township Québec roots. During stints as a young reporter at John Bassett's *Sherbrooke Record* and later as "publisher-in-training" at the *Winnipeg Free Press* with Brigadier Richard Malone, he saw first-hand how smaller publishers had to work with few resources.[64] In his two years as president of the Michener Awards Foundation, Webster enlisted board members from Québec — André Préfontaine, who would later become the president of

Transcontinental Media, and Pierre Bergeron of *Le Droit* — to help make inroads with the francophone media publishers and those smaller newspapers with fewer resources.[65] It was clear that it would take more than bilingual pamphlets and advertising to attract French-language entries.

When work obligations forced Webster to step down in 2000, his vice president, Pierre Bergeron, took over. As the Foundation's first francophone president, Bergeron made it his mission to continue Webster's work by tapping into his contacts in the Québec media. As publisher of *Le Droit*, the French daily in the Ottawa area, Bergeron had a "can do" reputation. When he arrived, *Le Droit* was starting to break even. Under his leadership, the paper started to make money and, at the same time, invest in quality journalism. He put all its news and editorial resources into a community fight to save Montfort Hospital, the only francophone hospital in urban Ontario, from being closed by the province.

Directing the energies of the Ottawa-based French-language daily newspaper to be an advocate was something that Bergeron had never thought possible. In a 2019 interview, he recalled, "Going on stage at the stadium as the publisher speaking to 10,000 people and in front of everybody saying that we would continue the fight, but we did it."[66] The coverage included 371 news stories, thirty-one editorials and 177 letters to the editor. The sustained and noisy protests convinced the government to keep the hospital open and enhance services. It earned a Michener honourable mention.

As Michener president, Bergeron embarked on a different type of advocacy — to get more French-language media to participate in the awards. The challenges in breaking down language barriers soon became apparent. "Unlike major English language media, the French language organizations do not have senior editors designated to identify award-potential stories and prepare their entries," he explained.[67] Bergeron enlisted the help of board members René Roseberry, a former news editor with *Le Nouvelliste* in Trois Rivières and president of the *Grands Prix des Hebdos du Québec*, and Alain Guilbert, a distinguished senior editor and former manager of various Québec newspapers. Together the trio mined their deep connections and good relations with the French media. They systematically contacted every media manager to urge them to identify and submit their best public service journalism. "Keep the pressure on" was Bergeron's mantra. Five entries for 2002 were good, he said, but not good enough. Bergeron set a goal of eight. This push for greater Francophone representation met with the frequently

expressed desire of Rideau Hall for more outreach to and involvement of French language media, which was emphasized yet again by then Governor General Adrienne Clarkson.

The one-on-one contact paid off. By the time Bergeron stepped down in 2005, the number of French-language entries had increased dramatically, from zero to an all-time high of eleven. Bergeron's leadership had helped to chip away some of the *ennui* Québec media had towards the award. Perhaps other media were encouraged when the 2003 Michener Award went to *La Presse* for its reports on the inhumane treatment of older people living in long-term care homes. The judges' citation praised the coverage: "The first series of stories by *La Presse* drew a shocking portrait of care provided to the elderly in residential and long-term care centres (CHLSDs) that made readers shudder and resulted in public protest. The second series of articles raised awareness about the wrongful treatment of patients at Saint-Charles-Borromée Hospital in Montreal."[68] The family of a patient at Saint-Charles-Borromée suspected that their fifty-one-year-old sister, a long-time resident with head injuries suffered in a car accident, was being sexually abused at the home. They installed a recording device that caught two staff making mocking, scornful, violent and sexual comments. The reports by investigative journalist André Noël resulted in quick action. The Saint-Charles-Borromée Hospital was placed in trusteeship. Québec established a task force to review the complaint system and started surprise inspections at residential and long-term care centres. The Human Rights Commission investigated 125 cases of suspected assault and financial exploitation of older adults and people with disabilities.[69] The *La Presse* stories provided heft for a 1999 class action suit by 600 victims against the institution, which was settled out of court ten years later for $7 million.[70]

The robust number of French entries received in 2005 did not hold, and over the next twenty years, French entries fluctuated between one and eight entries. Among the French-language media, the Michener Award had neither the recognition nor the star appeal of a home-grown award from *La Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec*. Before becoming governor general in 2005, former CBC Montreal journalist, presenter and news anchor Michaëlle Jean regarded the Michener Awards ceremony as a venue "for Francophone and Anglophone journalists to get together and to have a good discussion and to speak about the world, their work, their concerns, the challenges."[71] But too often the ceremony would be a reminder of the Anglo nature of the Michener Awards Foundation.

Many a French publisher, producer and reporter have squirmed uncomfortably in past years as a Michener official stood on stage and stumbled through the French-language citations. "It's a very Anglo group and you have to sometimes take for granted that you are the token Francophone, and it's not pleasant," recalled Pierre Bergeron.[72] "The elephant in the corridor is the problem of quality journalism in regional newspapers."[73] The issue was reflected in the paucity of Michener Award nominations.

Nominations among French-language media tend to go to the usual suspects: *La Presse* and Société Radio-Canada, occasionally *Le Devoir, Le Droit* and the magazine *L'actualité*. Submissions from smaller outlets such as *Le Courrier de Sainte-Hyacinthe*, a finalist in 2008, are rare. "If you remove *La Presse* and *SRC* participation looks even worse," said former president David Humphreys. "With this in mind we needed to try harder, and in reality, we have tried less." In his analysis, individual Québec colleagues worked hard and attracted interest through their personal contacts. But when they stepped down, there were no sustained efforts. "Outreach has been limited to one advertisement in the *Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec* journal, no social media," Humphreys wrote in an email in 2019.[74] The problem, he said, was that the Foundation was patronage-rich and resource-poor. "We have perhaps ridden on all the patronage side of things too much [the Office of the Governor General and Rideau Hall] and neglected the resource side of things," he said in another interview.[75]

Experience has prepared French-language finalists to head to Ottawa with the expectation that they will be bridesmaids at the awards ceremony to an English-language winner and go home with the bride's bouquet, a citation of merit. "Those French entries have to be on the same level as the others and at some point, one of those French entries will win," Bergeron said."[76] Over fifty years from 1970 to 2020, French-language media have brought home just less than 10 per cent of Michener Awards (five of 57). They have received a little more than 10 per cent of citations of merit (23 of 221). The lower rate of French entries is the result of a combination of factors — attitude, newsroom mergers and cutbacks resulting in fewer reporters producing impactful stories, and the Michener Awards Foundation's inconsistent and under-resourced promotion of the awards among French media.

The lack of French entries is an issue that does not sit well with the Michener board. In 2019, when Pierre-Paul Noreau took over as Foundation president, he revived the focus of past presidents Norman Webster and Pierre

Bergeron. Noreau was a well-respected journalist and media executive in the francophone press. He started in the 1970s at *La Tuque*, reported in Ottawa and Québec for *Le Soleil,* and was publisher of *Le Droit* before retiring and taking on the role of president of *Le Conseil de presse du Québec* (CPQ). During his three-year tenure, Noreau made a concerted effort to speak with every Francophone publisher and broadcast outlet in Québec and as past president remains a huge promoter of the Michener Awards in Québec.

Small Towns, Big Stories

When it comes to winning a Michener Award, the perception is that the big media organizations with a lot more resources have a better chance of winning.[77] But data for 1970-2020 show smaller media have done well: 25 per cent (14/57) won Michener Awards, and about 27 per cent (60/221) received citations. Even so, publishers and reporters from French-language and smaller media organizations often say that when they receive a nomination, they temper their expectations. They welcome the trip to Rideau Hall, the ceremony and the chance to mingle and nosh, but most expect to go home with just a citation, and many do.

For example, in 1987, the *Eastern Graphic*, a small weekly on Prince Edward Island, led the debate over building the Confederation Bridge to connect PEI to New Brunswick. Publisher Jim MacNeill jumped in the ring with both fists up and the newspaper punched above its weight. The paper printed secret reports that provided Islanders with the necessary information to make an informed decision for an upcoming plebiscite.[78] In Québec, *Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe* was recognized in 2008 for exposing financial mismanagement at the local college.

In 2010, *Eastern Door* was honoured with a citation for its courageous stand against the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake in Québec and its plans to actively evict thirty-five non-Indigenous people from the community. For Steven Bonspiel, publisher/reporter, it was a human rights story. In retaliation against the coverage, the Mohawk Council slashed advertising, called for a boycott of the paper and tried to enact a media blackout. With support from the community, Bonspiel held his ground. Council did not proceed. Bonspiel called the decision a victory for compassion and inclusion against "racial tyranny."[79]

The *Prince George Citizen,* a small daily (now a weekly), was nominated in 2006 for its in-depth coverage of trucker fatalities on logging roads. Reporter

Gordon Hoekstra had written stories about how dozens of truckers had died in the past decade. His stories identified the problem, suggested solutions and asked why the province had not acted. As a result of his in-depth coverage the province appointed a coroner to look at forestry-related deaths and announced a $20 million upgrade to logging roads.

Hoekstra considered the Michener nomination to be a "token" to recognize the work of small media. When Michener Foundation president David Humphrey declared the *Prince George Citizen* a winner, Hoekstra's surprise was written all over his face; his jaw dropped, his eyes popped wide open and his hands shot up to cup his cheeks. Others seated in the row, who thought they were a shoo-in for the award, smiled tightly and tried to mask their shock and disappointment. It is natural for journalists from larger, better-resourced media organizations to expect a win, and those from smaller organizations, who run on a shoestring, to gauge their chances of winning the main prize to be slim. So, when smaller media outlets win a Michener Award, it is because their coverage demonstrated public service impact despite limited resources.

It is gratifying when a smaller media outlet breaks the glass ceiling. For example, the 1990 Michener Award went to the feisty and often controversial *Elmira Independent*, a small Ontario newspaper with 7,400 subscribers, for its "blanket coverage of a prolonged legal battle over contamination of the municipal water supply."[80] For president Gail Scott, Elmira's Michener was a demonstration that "meritorious public service in journalism can be attained without the benefit of a large operating budget."[81] It was only the second weekly newspaper to win a Michener.[82] There would be fewer submissions from smaller outlets in subsequent years, as media outlets continued to consolidate, close and cut staff to cope with reduced advertising and subscriber numbers and the arrival of the Internet. But that night, the owner-editor of the *Elmira Independent*, Bob Verdun, had the swagger that harkens back to the shepherd David of biblical fame after he slew the giant Goliath.

Uniroyal Chemical was the biggest employer in Elmira. Verdun had been covering the multinational since 1970 when he began as a reporter for the weekly *Elmira Signet*. Fired by the *Signet* in 1974, Verdun started the *Elmira Independent*. He took the newspaper's watchdog role seriously. Uniroyal's "waste disposal practices historically were outrageous," Verdun said.[83] Dangerous levels of the cancer-causing chemical, dimethylnitrosamine (DMNA) — a byproduct from the production of rubber products — had seeped from Uniroyal's lagoons into the aquifer and poisoned the

groundwater. "It's an unintentional pollutant that they didn't really even know that much about it until it started to show up," said Verdun. The Ontario Ministry of the Environment ordered Uniroyal Chemical Ltd. to stop dumping its wastewater. In an attempt to quash the order, the company went to the Environmental Appeals Board, knowing full well the appeal hearings would clog up the system. Hearings dragged on for most of 1990 and into 1991.

The *Elmira Independent* was the only media outlet that showed up to every session of the appeals process and stayed to the end, even when the meetings ran until 3:30 in the morning. Each week, details of the hearing filled the paper — not what the business establishment wanted to read because they felt "it was giving the community a bad name," said Verdun.[84] He said they blamed the *Independent*'s coverage saying, "Elmira was never going to be known as anything but the pollution capital of Canada." On top of that, Uniroyal was also the largest employer in the region with 200 to 250 employees.

The *Independent* lost readers, but Verdun was chuffed when the three-member appeal board bought subscriptions. "They said it was extremely valuable for them for two reasons. First of all we were summarizing for them. And we were reporting from the point of view of the community." In the end, Uniroyal was forced to change its disposal practices. The environment ministry gave the company thirty years to clean up the contaminated aquifer and soil.[85] Uniroyal Chemicals Ltd. has changed hands and names several times, each company taking over the cleanup. Since 2017, a German company, LANXESS, has been manufacturing "synthetic lubricants and additives for lubricants, plastics and rubber" at the site.[86] Its website states that, by the 2028 deadline, 99 per cent of the pollution will be cleaned. But, "we are at a point in the remediation where there is no known scientifically available methodology to remove that last bit of contaminant from such a massive aquifer."[87]

Bob Verdun sold the weekly in 1999 to Metroland, who shuttered it in 2015. Verdun remains proud because out of the *Elmira Independent*'s news coverage grew a "permanent and influential environmental committee that has never given up monitoring Uniroyal."[88] The grassroots community action group, APT Environment, still watches for new infractions and monitors the cleanup[89] — a lasting legacy of the Michener values of public service.

As with the 1982 Michener winner, the *Manitoulin Expositor*, Verdun didn't expect to win, so he had no speech prepared. "I tried not to be too long, be brief and be off," he said with a laugh. He still remembers the way

the bigger outlets reacted to his win. "There's a kind of touchiness about it, a weekly newspaper should not be winning their award." He was not far off. There may be a latent attitude among the bigger media with all their resources that they have earned the top prize, and it is an act of benevolence for smaller media outlets to get a nomination. So, when smaller media outlets win the Michener Award, they may encounter some indignation after the ceremony.

Verdun recalled that the best part of the awards ceremony in 1990 had been spending time with Roland Michener. "I was so privileged because it was his last presentation in his lifetime. And he attached himself to me and I spent most of the evening with him." Verdun found Michener "so down to earth for somebody who has been so important in Canadian history."[90] Michener died four months later, in August.

For twenty-one years Roland Michener was deeply committed to the values of public service in journalism. In his mind "meritorious and disinterested" journalism in the public interest were integral to Canada's democracy and worthy of being recognized and encouraged by the state. It was something that all media regardless of size or language — including the *Elmira Independent*, *La Presse*, the *Le Devoir* and the Kingston *Whig-Standard* — could aspire to. The Michener Award provided validation to media outlets — both big and small — that what they were doing mattered.

As the Foundation approached the end of its third decade, it grappled with the persistent challenge of how best to share excellence in public service journalism with a wider audience — to amplify the impact of the award. One avenue to be explored was the emerging technology, the Internet, a new medium of communication. Ironically, it would be the very medium that would soon drive the news industry into a more profound crisis. Tuned-in members of the Michener Foundation board regarded the arrival of the World Wide Web as an ideal platform to house stories of award-winning nominees and the work of fellowship recipients.

At the 1999 board meeting, director Tim Kotcheff made what was at the time considered a radical suggestion. He said that if the Michener Awards Foundation wanted to be part of the twenty-first century, it needed a website to showcase journalism in the public interest to a national and even global audience. Kotcheff, a former vice president of news for both the CTV and CBC television networks, was an early adopter. In 1994, he was part of a team working on an online multimedia news service for Bell Canada. His proposal to create a website for the Michener Awards sparked a lively discussion. Some

directors were sceptical and wondered out loud if the Internet might be a fad. But Kotcheff said more journalism was appearing online. Ida Entwistle, manager for CBC International Affairs, pointed to several international awards including the *Prix Italia* that had special digital categories.

Board member Ed O'Dacre, a writer and editor with the *Globe and Mail,* supported the idea of a Michener website which "by its very presence and example, might lead to better journalism on the Internet."[91] But there was a bigger question that no one that day knew how to address. Beyond providing a virtual gallery for inspiring impactful journalism, how would this trend to news on the Internet fit into the Michener Awards project?

The board gave Kotcheff tentative approval. Within six months, he returned with a mockup for a Michener website. At the 2000 annual meeting, the board gave Kotcheff a budget of $5,000 and free rein to produce "a quality, colorful (*sic)* website and to get it up and running."[92] Page by page, year after year, Kotcheff worked away. It was an obsession and a passion. At every opportunity he travelled from his home in Toronto and spent thousands of hours of his own time and money digging through files at Library and Archives Canada and Rideau Hall in Ottawa.

The bilingual website went live on December 22, 2000.[93] Kotcheff worked closely with his francophone colleague, the genial René Roseberry. In 2002, Alain Guilbert joined the board and signed on for "the onerous task" of translating the news releases, speeches and fellowship reports back to 1970. Guilbert was a warm man with an easy smile, always ready with an encouraging word. His breadth and depth of experience as a distinguished senior editor and manager in several Québec newspapers and marketing and communications "resulted in faithful and free adaptation, the expression of what is called 'the genius of the language'."[94]

If you build it, they will come, or so the saying goes. At the annual meeting in 2003, Kotcheff reported that the site had 9,000 visits and 34,000 hits in the past year. These numbers would only grow. Kotcheff and Guilbert had created a living bilingual archival history of the journalism of media organizations recognized by the Michener Award, the mid-career fellowships and the Foundation. It honoured public service journalism going back to its beginnings in the late 1960s. Much of the information in this book has been informed by the material on the archival website that Kotcheff lovingly created and maintained until he left the board in 2014.[95] (The website was discontinued in 2021 when the Michener Awards Foundation redesigned its

website.) Kotcheff and Guilbert had taken the Foundation off the printed page and into the twenty-first century of the Internet.

Back in 1999, it was hard to imagine how online journalism would compete with established newspapers, magazines and broadcasters. Board member Pierre Bergeron was not far off base when he worried that "the awards deck would be stacked against that kind of [online] journalism."[96] It has taken time for small, independent online news organizations to mature and produce journalism that is both substantial and has an impact. The first entry from an online media outlet came in 2007, but the first online news organization to be a Michener finalist was the *National Observer* in 2016. The *Observer*'s hard-hitting investigation derailed the Energy East pipeline hearings after revelations that the panel members had met with former Québec premier-turned-lobbyist Jean Charest. "As the media landscape changes, I think it's important for us to demonstrate that responsible journalism matters and that it's critical for strengthening public trust in our democracy," said Ottawa bureau chief Mike de Souza at the awards ceremony. The Michener Award by its very mission would play a role in this debate, and the website helped to expose the award-winning stories from large and small media to a growing virtual audience.