

JOURNALISM FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD: THE MICHENER AWARDS AT FIFTY

Kim S. Kierans

ISBN 978-1-77385-536-3

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Journalism for the Public Good

The Michener Awards at Fifty

KIM S. KIERANS

JOURNALISM FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD



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Bighorn Books
An imprint of University of Calgary Press
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, Alberta
Canada T2N 1N4
press.ucalgary.ca

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LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Title: Journalism for the public good : the Michener Awards at fifty / Kim S. Kierans.

Other titles: Michener Awards at fifty

Names: Kierans, Kim S., author.

Description: Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20240355741 | Canadiana (ebook) 2024035575X | ISBN 9781773855356 (softcover) | ISBN 9781773855349 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781773855387 (EPUB) | ISBN 9781773855370 (PDF) | ISBN 9781773855363 (Open Access PDF)

Subjects: LCSH: Journalism—Awards—Canada. | LCSH: Journalism—Canada. | LCSH: Journalists—Canada.

Classification: LCC PN4914.A87 K54 2024 | DDC 071/.1079—dc23

The University of Calgary Press acknowledges the support of the Government of Alberta through the Alberta Media Fund for our publications. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada. We acknowledge the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Copyediting by Brian Scrivener

Cover art: Олег Фадеев, Golden feather logo icon illustration design template, generated using AI tools, downloaded 2024, Adobe Stock, File #603425379, https://stock.adobe.com/ca/images/golden-feather-logo-icon-illustration-design-template/603425379?prev_url=detail

Cover design, page design, and typesetting by Melina Cusano

*For the media outlets that invest in in-depth news and
to the teams of reporters, editors and photo/videographers
who produce journalism that makes a difference.*

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Acknowledgements

This book honours the in-depth journalism of Canadian reporters, editors, producers, broadcasters and publishers who, over decades, have stood up to bullies, uncovered secrecy, fraud and wrongdoings, and given voice to marginalized communities. Their stories had an impact. They mobilized voters to defeat corrupt officials and brought down governments, they explained and exposed systemic injustices, and they shamed politicians to change laws and policies and forced transparency. *Journalism for the Public Good: The Michener Awards at Fifty* pays tribute to their ongoing mission to speak truth to power and in the process strengthen our democratic institutions. Their journalism is the heart and soul of the work of the Michener Awards Foundation and this book.

As a Michener judge, I had the honour to read, watch and listen to twelve years of the best in investigative journalism from across the country. I am grateful to the Michener Awards Foundation and my fellow judges — you know who you are — for your combined wisdom and shared purpose. A special thank you to former board member Tim Kotcheff for giving me unfettered access to the Michener archives, which he single-handedly built and maintained until he left the board in 2014.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank Bill Lahey, president of the University of King's College, and my colleagues in the School of Journalism, Writing and Publishing. King's was my intellectual home, first in the Foundation Year Program as a student, and years later, as a journalism professor. King's was the springboard that launched this project.

Journalism for the Public Good was conceived, researched and written at Massey College at the University of Toronto. Thank you to the late Hugh Segal, principal of Massey College, and Amela Marin, registrar, for opening the iron gates to welcome me as a visiting scholar in 2018, to Tom Kierans and Mary Janigan for their support, to principal Nathalie Des Rosiers for inviting me back in 2021 as a Senior Fellow and resident, and to the Junior Fellows at

Massey College. These phenomenal graduate students encourage and inspire me daily with their intellect, humour, compassion and dedication to making the world a better place.

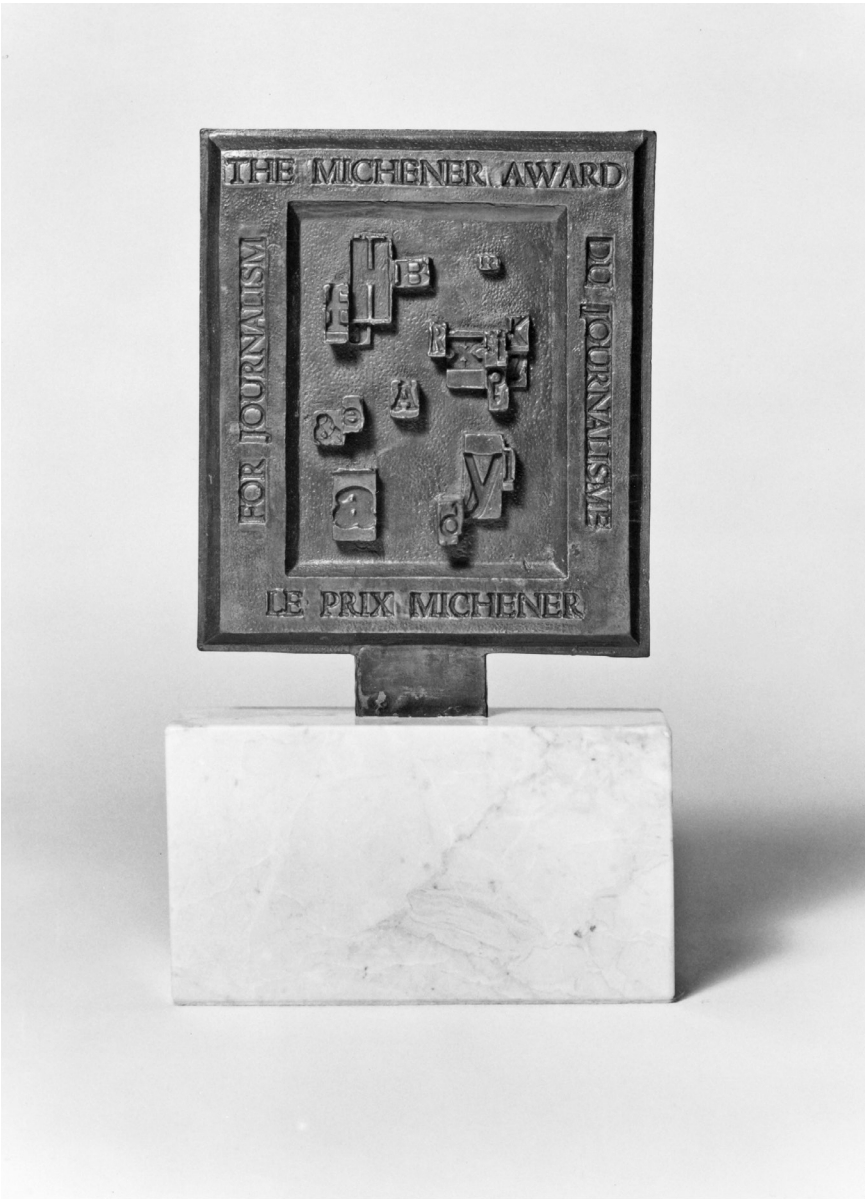
In researching this book, thanks go to Sophie Tellier at Library and Archives Canada, Liseanne Cadieux and Mélanie Frias from Rideau Hall Library, and Allan Thompson, Emily Hotton and Cindy Kardash-Lalonde at Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication.

I am ever grateful to the collective of people who kindly waded through the manuscript at various stages. Their sage advice and editing helped to shape my ideas into this book: developmental editor Karen Dewart McEwan, Elizabeth Hanton, Henry Roper, Sally Reardon, Margo Goodhand, James Baxter, Chris Waddell, Pierre-Paul Noreau, George Cooper, Alexander Sallas, and Jamie Deacon.

I also want to thank the many people not mentioned in these acknowledgements who contributed to this book over the years. All omissions and errors are mine alone.

To the wonderful team at the University of Calgary Press, director Brian Scrivener, editorial coordinator Helen Hajnoczky, designer Melina Cusano, and marketing specialist Alison Cobra. You got me to home base.

A special thank you goes to my partner, Ian Porter, who believed in what I was doing even when I had my doubts. Thank you for your ears and eyes and encouragement, and for keeping the home fire burning while I've been away researching, writing and editing.



The Michener Award.

Special News Feature Edition

THE COVERDALE REPORT

A CONSULTATION COMMITTEE APPRAISAL OF COVERDALE PRISON FOR WOMEN
IN NEW BRUNSWICK, NOVA SCOTIA
AND MANITOBA

25¢

The additional costs involved in research and production of this special issue are \$2.00. The next issue, on the street August 11, will be 15¢ as usual.

Straight from Dickens: Fiasco exposed: SHOCKING EXTREMES — ABUSE, HEALTH HAZARDS

The Scotian JOURNALIST

Page 8 - 16

Vol. 2 No. 37 August 3, 1972 Phone 425-5710 Halifax, N.S.

COVERDALE UNMASKED:
In isolation: 'Denied food, water, sanitary napkins'
'Talking taboo'
Previous Reports were Ignored
Chamber pots in bedrooms
Informers richly rewarded
Judges taken to task in Report

'Staff ill-qualified'
Staffer: 'Dogs get better treatment'
More than ninety changes recommended
'As good as a bridge - I'm not guilty of these things'
Muriel Lord in personal interview with The Scotian Journalist

WANT A DIVORCE? Do-It-Yourself Kit soon available
JOHN CAMERON Page 3
Return to Birchlee: More trouble at that Trailer Court
***** Page 2
Kingston's Isabel MacNeil: Some strong talk about penology
RUSS KELLY Page 5
TROUBLE LINE!
425-5710

The front page of the *Scotian Journalist*, a co-winner of the 1972 Michener Award, August 3, 1972. Nova Scotia Archives, microfilm 8178.

Below: Toronto Star's ongoing coverage into Rob Ford, mayor of the largest city in Canada, November 8, 2013. Accessed from newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/950983900/>

A6 | TORONTO STAR FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2013

CNS/CPG

FORD VIDEO SCANDAL

Eight nights: A timeline of Ford's week of scandal

For more than a week, Torontonians have been transfixed by a series of bombshell revelations relating to Mayor Rob Ford, his drug and alcohol use, and potential ties to illegal activity. Here's a look at the past eight days of the Ford saga.

THURSDAY OCT. 31

10 a.m.
The release of a 465-page document relating to a search warrant on the mayor's professed friend, Alexander (Sandro) Lisi, reveals a six-month police investigation into Ford's behaviour. The document describes secret meetings between Lisi and Ford. It also includes photos of Lisi placing an envelope in the mayor's Escalade, and of Ford urinating on a tree.

11:30 a.m.
Toronto police Chief Bill Blair confirms the existence of the "crack" video, first reported by the Star and Gawker.com in May. "As a citizen of the city, I'm disappointed," Blair says. He also announces that Lisi had been arrested and charged with extortion.

2:30 p.m.
In a brief statement, Ford tells media outside his city hall office: "I have no reason to resign." He refuses to speak to the contents of police documents, the video or Lisi's extortion charge. "I wish I could come out and defend myself. Unfortunately I can't, because it's before the courts," he says.

FRIDAY NOV. 1

10 a.m.-11 a.m.
Lisi appears in court, facing an extortion charge for trying to retrieve the video from two alleged gang members through "threats or violence or monies".

At the same time, Councillor Doug Ford calls into AM640 to defend his brother, the drug use, and calls on the police to release the video.

11:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
The Ford brothers hold a meeting at their mother's Etobicoke home, along with staffers from the mayor's office. They leave without speaking to media.

9:50 p.m.
The Star publishes a story detailing how a "very intoxicated" Mayor Ford turned up at city hall on St. Patrick's Day 2012, struggling to walk, swearing and carrying a half-empty bottle of brandy.

SATURDAY NOV. 2

12 p.m.-115 p.m.
Ford appears at city hall and brushes by media without answering questions.



Deputy Mayor Norm Kelly

5 p.m.-7 p.m.
Ford meets with Deputy Mayor Norm Kelly at the Scarborough Civic Centre. Kelly delivers a message from the mayor's executive committee on how Ford should deal with the current scandals.

SUNDAY NOV. 3

1 p.m.-3 p.m.
The Ford brothers hold their weekly radio show as scheduled. The mayor offers an apology for unspecified "mistakes" and vows to stay on as the city's chief magistrate. Ford later dodges a question about his drug use, and promises to cut back on his drinking.

"I'm the first one to admit I'm not perfect. I've made mistakes," Ford says. "I sincerely apologize to my family, to the city, the taxpayers of this great city and to my colleagues on Toronto city council."

"Curb the drinking, not out in public, you can stay in your backyard, have a few peps. That's it," says Councillor Ford.

Both Doug and Rob Ford call on the police chief to release the video.

MONDAY NOV. 4



Mayor Rob Ford arrives at his city hall office.

10 a.m.
In an interview with AM640 radio host John Oakley, the mayor repeats his apology for past mistakes. Asked directly if he's ever smoked crack cocaine, Ford says, "I'm not a crack addict... I'm not an alcoholic."

Rob Ford and his brother Doug on their regular Sunday radio show.

TUESDAY NOV. 5

10 a.m.
Councillor Doug calls on police Chief Bill Blair to resign, alleging the city's top cop is biased against the mayor.

"(Blair) believes he's the judge, the jury and the executioner. He wanted to go out and put a political bullet right between the mayor's eyes," Ford says on AM640.

He later accuses police board member Andrew Pringle of going on an inappropriate fishing trip with Blair, and says Pringle should step down.

11:15 a.m.
In a spontaneous scrum with reporters, Mayor Ford tells the city, "Yes, I have smoked crack cocaine. But no, I am not a crack addict. No."

4:30 p.m.
The mayor holds a press conference at his office, where he apologizes for his mistakes, and reiterates his commitment to stay and run in the next election.

WEDNESDAY NOV. 6



One of the many messages protesters wrote on city hall walls.

11 a.m.
Policy adviser Brooks Barnett quits his job in the mayor's office.

12 p.m.
Demonstrators convene at Nathan Phillips Square, waving placards and calling on Mayor Ford to resign.

THURSDAY NOV. 7

12:30 p.m.
The Star posts a new 77-second video on its website. It shows the mayor gesticulating manically while saying he is going to kill someone.

12:40 p.m.
Mayor Ford emerges from his office to comment on the video.

"All I can say is, again, I've made mistakes. All I can do is reassure the people that I don't know what to say," he says.

The mayor walks away without explaining the context of his apparent rage in the video.



(Right) Mayor Rob Ford leaves city hall with his new driver on Thursday.

COMPILED BY ALEX BALINGALL, STAFF REPORTER

PHOTOS: VINCE TALOTA, REN JONSTON, RICK MADONNI/TORONTO STAR; NARR: NIKOLAI CHIRIS YOUNG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

GRAPHIC BY BRIAN MUGGERIDGE/TORONTO STAR



CANADA'S OLDEST DAILY NEWSPAPER
FOUNDED IN 1841, DAILY SINCE 1849

The Whig-Standard

CITY FINAL • HOME EDITION



KINGSTON • TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 1979
20 CENTS A DAY 10 PAGES

Fluoride pollution killing Cornwall cattle: Human health in danger, pathologist says



By SYLVIA WRIGHT
Staff writer

Thursdays photos from the Reynolds Meriah Company near Masson, New York, is killing cows on Cornwall Island in the St. Lawrence River.

Dr. Leonard Krusk, a U.S. pathologist who has just completed a two-week study of the pollution, said The Whig-Standard that cattle on the island are suffering from "severe, chronic fluoride poisoning."

"The cows can't even drink water and they have great difficulty chewing hay," Krusk said. "Therefore, they starve. Their life expectancy is not more than five years."

There is no escape.

The life expectancy of cows is normally about 10 years. But at the St. Regis Indian Reserve, it's located in Canadian waters, less than one mile downstream from the aluminum plant and 100 miles east of Kingston.

Krusk documented the decline of livestock on the reserve since the Reynolds plant began operations in 1950 and the attributed the decline to

Krusk says that when Reynolds began operations it was putting 300 pounds of fluoride per hour into the air.

Three to four years later, he said, cows on Cornwall Island began to lose their ability to digest food and then died in the next place to land.

"Cows died during delivery," he said. "Neonatal calf mortality was high. If cows survived the third delivery, they were sold for slaughter."

In 1966, the company's fluoride emissions to 112 pounds per hour and in 1973, reduced emissions further reduced to 75 pounds per hour.

That's 1,600 pounds per day, said Krusk.

On a long-term basis, he said, the current emissions are in excess of Ontario standards two-thirds of the time. And they exceed proposed Canadian standards 99 per cent of the time.

The plant is operating on U.S. territory. But the damage is done on Canadian land.

Krusk says that clinical evidence of fluoride poisoning in the very young calves included an acid dentition, he

Sunday Star 25 years old

NEWS, A7

THE SUNDAY STAR

Partly cloudy. High 11C

October 20, 2002

thestar.com

Police target black drivers

Star analysis of traffic data suggests racial profiling

■ Reaction, A9
■ The Star's view, A12

Race and Crime

STAR INVESTIGATIVE TEAM: ANTONIO LAMAR, ROBERTO DOMENICER, MORTIMER BERNSTEIN, JOHN GUNZBERGER, SCOTT HARRIS

the first place.

It's assumed random checks would generate a pattern of charges that mimics the racial demographics of the city as a whole. So the rate at which minority drivers are charged is

raw race-based crime data, racial

racism might use the results. Police would know that rate, and don't need race statistics for the purpose of apprehending by police. However, the rate, color is

Now, for the first time, empirical evidence suggests police have in fact been targeting black drivers. Items that routinely surface only after a stop has been made. Or driving while under suspension. Police usually discover such

Above: Race and Crime. A Toronto Star investigation into Race and Crime led by investigative reporter Jim Rankin won the 2002 Michener Award. The ongoing series revealed the Toronto police department treated blacks differently than whites in the world's most ethnically diverse city. The ongoing reporting has led to the end of carding and other discriminatory practices. Image courtesy of Jim Rankin, Toronto Star.

Right: Daily News (Halifax) wins the 1997 Michener Award for its series covering the mistreatment of children at Nova Scotia reform schools over several decades. Accessed from Halifax Regional Library, Central Library microfilm.

Daily News wins national award

Abuse series takes Michener Award for 'public service in journalism'

The Daily News has won the 1997 Michener Award for its System of Abuse series covering the mistreatment of children at Nova Scotia reform schools over several decades.

The award — given for "meritorious public service in journalism" — was announced yesterday at a ceremony in Ottawa by Chief Justice Antonio Lamar, acting on behalf of Gov. Gen. Roméo LeBlanc.

"Grim details of beatings, molestations and rapes emerged as The Daily News detached David Rodenhiser, one of its nine reporters, for a three-month study," said a statement from the Michener Foundation.

Providence columnist Parker Barnes Donham was also cited for a substantial contribution to the project.

"This is very gratifying," said Daily News editor-in-chief Doug MacIsaac. "Rodenhiser and Donham were steady and tenacious in bringing this material to light. The several editors and reporters who helped along the way, especially managing editor Bill Turpin, also share in the credit."

Rodenhiser, Donham and Turpin were in Ottawa last night to accept the award. Rodenhiser said he is extremely honored to win the award on behalf of the victims of abuse.

"I think this honor is a testament to the victims of abuse who had the courage to come forward and tell their stories and hold the government accountable for what it failed to do," said Rodenhiser. "This honor should really go to them."

Publisher Mark Richardson said the award is a great honor for the newspaper. "It's a great day — especially for David and Parker,

System of Abuse RG-72: A Daily News special report

Over the past 30 years, evidence that children in Nova Scotia institutions were suffering from sexual and physical abuse was ignored or suppressed by public officials. Much of the evidence is in a file named RG-72.

who have contributed a lot to The Daily News over the years. They deserve it."

Le Druik, the Ottawa French-language daily, won an honorable mention for its "energetic reaction to the decision by Premier Mike Harris's hospital restructuring process to close Montfort, Ontario's only wholly francophone institution."

"Massive sealed archive" Clusters of merit were awarded to the Calgary Herald, The London Free Press, The Toronto Star and the CBC television program Market Place.

Collectively called System of Abuse, the Daily News series drew the public's attention to the plight of abuse survivors of the province's reform schools and helped prompt the largest investigation in RCMP history. The RCMP's Operation Hope task force has received allegations involving 1,500 alleged victims and 400 alleged abusers.

A key discovery in the paper's investigation was a "massive sealed archive" of government correspondence, known as RG-72. The archive had been off-limits even to the RCMP.

RG-72's existence was brought to the paper's attention by abuse victims and amateur archivist Paul Dauphinee, who had happened upon a restricted file at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia in Halifax.

A search by the Justice Department's Internal Investigation Unit



David Rodenhiser (left) accepts award from Chief Justice Antonio Lamar.

turned up a report filed in 1966 by Sydney probation officer Edward Roy Cannon. Cannon had discovered that several of the boys in his charge had been raped at the Shelburne School for Boys.

After abuse survivors, represented by lawyer William Leachy, were disclosure of parts of RG-72, more evidence of abuse in the province's reform schools began to emerge, including letters to and from government officials about staff practices and abusive treatment of children.

Rodenhiser and Donham also uncovered evidence politicians stepped in during the 1980s and

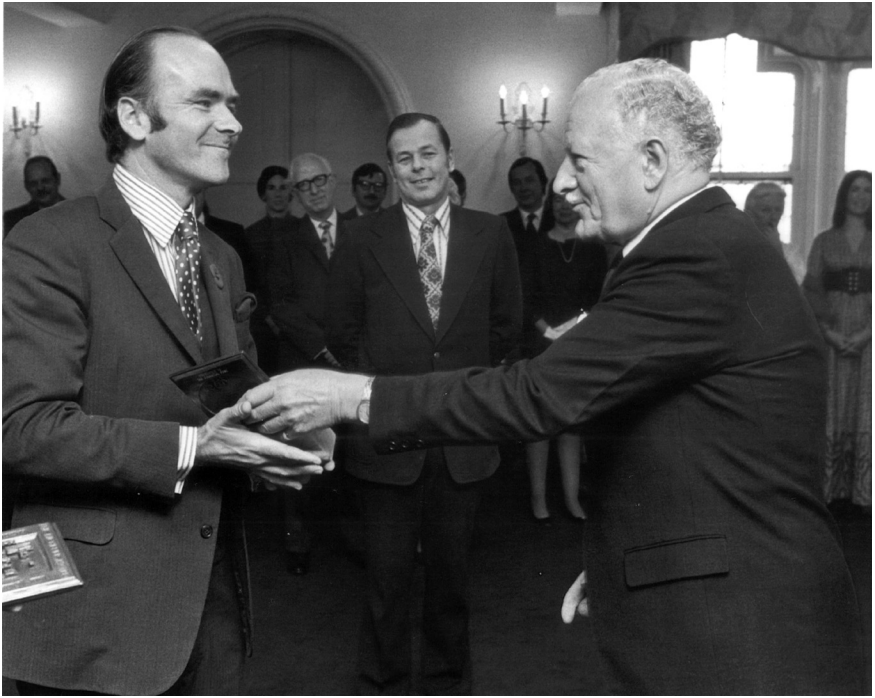
"to protect the jobs of people at provincial youth centres."

Earlier this year, Leachy won a court order requiring the government to dig deeper into RG-72 for evidence.

The newspaper series began as a three-month-long project in April 1997, and scores of follow-up stories have appeared since then.

The series was also an Atlantic Journalism Award nominee at an awards ceremony earlier this month.

The Michener Award was founded in 1979 under the auspices of then governor general Roland Michener.



His Excellency Roland Michener giving the first Michener Award to Clive Baxter of *The Financial Post* and Alan Elrich of CBC-TV for the 1970 series “The Charter Revolution.”

Foreword

*The Honourable David Johnston, 28th Governor General of Canada
and Chair of the Rideau Hall Foundation*

Robert Schuman, a founder of the European Union, once observed that the successful creation of the union comes about through people and institutions together — people of courage and wisdom focussed on the public good and specific organizational institutions that are part of a broader network of connected institutions which, if good fortune prevails, ensure a fully functioning democracy and a healthy, constantly reinvigorated society.

This book embraces both observations. First, it is about the people who created and supported the Michener Award for public service journalism, as well as those whose courageous truth-telling is at the heart of the award. Second, it is about the institutions — the Award itself as an institution reinforcing freedom of the press and informed communities that, in turn, strengthen the broader range of institutions that underpin a healthy democracy.

The Michener Award was established by one of my predecessors in the Office of the Governor General of Canada, The Right Honourable Roland Michener, who served in this role between 1967 and 1974. Over its first half-century, between 1970 and 2020, fifty-seven Michener Awards and 221 honourable mentions and citations of merit have been presented at Rideau Hall. While they have each told very different stories and focused on a wide variety of themes, the common thread that knits them all together is, of course, courage. The courage it takes to shine a light on something that those in power would rather remain in the dark. The courage to question decisions, chase facts and give voice to the voiceless, all with the goal of effecting change,

whether to policies or, more intimately, to individual lives. The great George Orwell famously said “Journalism is printing something that someone does not want printed. Everything else is public relations.” I have no doubt that Roland Michener would have agreed with that statement wholeheartedly. In essence, that is the spirit of the Michener Award, and those are the stories that are told with such care and vibrancy within the pages of this book.

It is worth noting early in your journey through the history of the Michener Award that they are not given to individual journalists. This Award is about more than bylines. Instead, it recognizes the news organization as a whole, the institution above the individual. Unique among journalistic awards, the Michener Award celebrates teamwork. In this way it also recognizes how resource-heavy these types of investigations are for newsrooms: how many people, how many hours and how much money needs to be invested in the name of uncovering truth and bringing about immediate and lasting change. The Michener Award is also special in its determined recognition of small newsrooms and the sacrifices they make to tell the stories that are important to their communities and that will have real impact on the lives of their readers.

Ensuring these Awards continue to be relevant in a dramatically shifting media landscape has required its own form of leadership and, frankly, the same kind of dogged determination its recipients demonstrate through their journalism. Through a volunteer board of directors and independent judging committees made up of experienced journalists, the Michener Award Foundation has worked to preserve the integrity of Roland Michener’s vision and legacy. So, we see in this book a thoughtful exploration of five decades of journalistic evolution and the leaders who created and then stewarded the Michener Awards in celebrating, promoting and solidifying the importance of public service journalism as a key element to a fully functioning democracy. The Michener Award story also serves to illustrate that institutions, and the individuals who care for them, *can* make a difference.

This begins with Roland Michener and is followed by so many others, including this book’s author Kim Kierans, who continue to shepherd the Michener Awards. It is a journey that has had its share of challenges, near misses and threatened extinction. So, gear yourself up to be inspired and delighted by the stories illuminated in the pages that follow. Yes, they are the stories that make up the history of the Michener Award, but just as importantly they also document our country’s flawed past — lies, corruption and

injustice — and the valiant members of Canada’s fifth estate who wielded pen and paper to hold those in power to account.

Now, before *you* begin *your* journey through the history of the Michener Awards, let’s imagine its next fifty years. I, for one, am excited for the future of this award. It has persisted time and time again, despite facing all manner of challenges. It now finds itself supported more widely through its partnership with the Rideau Hall Foundation, to help ensure its broad reach and impact and sustainability into the future.

While the future of the Michener looks bright, it’s easy to become complacent, and in complacency lies disaster, not just for an important institution, but for our democracy as whole. According to Edelman’s Trust Barometer, Canada’s trust in media has eroded from 2022 to 2023, and now stands at 50 per cent overall — with only 21 per cent trust in social media. Edelman’s central theme for 2023 is polarization, with the Battle for Truth highlighted as one of four main contributing factors. What’s more, media organizations and newsrooms across the country continue to face dark and difficult days: declining ad revenues, rising costs of operations and disappearing web views as a result of Meta’s response to Canada’s Online News Act.

As I write this introduction, we mourn the loss of yet another local newspaper and Michener Award finalist from 2021. *Kamloops This Week* published its last paper on October 25, 2023, after thirty-five years in business, leaving its community without a local paper. As Margo Goodhand, current President of the Michener Award Foundation, so eloquently said about the paper’s demise, “Kamloops is losing more than twenty-six local jobs. It’s losing a newsroom with integrity, something that has become increasingly rare in the media landscape. And that’s sad news for people who still believe journalism is a fundamental pillar of democracy.”

While the weight of preserving journalism as a means of serving the public good and safeguarding our democracy cannot rest solely on the shoulders of one relatively small organization, the Michener Awards clearly have a role to play in turning the tide on Canadians’ trust in the media. This will be done by continuing to recognize and celebrate the kind of journalism that is both powerful and transformative, that requires taking risks which often result in few rewards. The kind of journalism that epitomizes the selflessness of its supporters. So, as you flip the pages of this very fine book, join me in saying cheers to the journalists who continue to shine light into dark corners. Cheers to the newsrooms and media organizations who champion and make space

for their work. And, of course, cheers to the Michener Award, for its enduring commitment to lifting up dynamic, independent and important journalism, and in so doing, reminding the rest of us of the peril we would find ourselves in without it.

The Honourable David Johnston
28th Governor General of Canada and Chair of the Rideau Hall Foundation
October 31, 2023

Introduction

The Michener Award for public service journalism honours independent, fearless journalism. Journalism that informs, challenges power imbalances, exposes corruption and empowers those on the margins. Journalism that changes policy and practices to improve the lives of citizens.

These are groundbreaking stories that have impact and bring about results. For example, fair compensation for victims of thalidomide after a *Globe and Mail* series. Twenty million dollars to upgrade logging roads after the *Prince George Citizen* documented a staggering number of road deaths in northern British Columbia. A new mayor and council for Toronto after the *Toronto Star* unmasked the illegal and reckless behaviour of Mayor Rob Ford. Regular testing of Taser stun guns after an in-depth independent analysis by CBC/Radio-Canada and The Canadian Press exposed potentially fatal problems.

These stories come from politics, environment, health and social policy, public affairs and international issues. These stories were honoured with a Michener Award because they achieved impact in the public interest and helped to improve the lives of Canadians.

The Michener Award emerged from a long-held understanding of the role of journalism as a pillar of democracy. Lindsay Crysler, who was the senior editor at the *Ottawa Citizen* in 1970 when the award was founded and would later become the executive editor of the *Montreal Gazette* and founder of the journalism program at Concordia University, said “My idealistic view of journalism in that early era was that it was a public service and we were looking out for the public. This award is exactly for that. This one was specifically for something you improved in the community or showed the community how to improve. And I thought that was terrific and something we should really all be doing.”¹

Back in 1970, while other journalism organizations gave industry awards for categories such as spot news, sports, feature writing and business, no

award specifically recognized the public service aspect of journalism. The Michener, as it's called, has become Canada's most coveted journalism award, like the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in the United States.

"It's the one," said David Walmsley, editor-in-chief of the *Globe and Mail*, sweeping his arm to the right where the framed citation hangs proudly behind his desk. "It's the Michener that goes on this wall: nothing else. The reason for that is that it's because of its unimpeachable excellence and it stands the test of time."²

The Michener Award is the only award in Canada with a singular focus on journalism in the public service. It honours the collective effort of a media organization to produce measurable change through its journalism produced in a calendar year. It stands out because it is open to all media — French and English news organizations, daily and community newspapers, periodicals, online publications, and radio and television stations from every corner of Canada.³ To level the playing field for smaller media organizations, an independent panel of judges considers the resources of each applicant. It is not the quality of writing or layout or visuals that make a Michener; it is the impact of the journalism and the degree of arm's-length public benefit the journalism has generated.

For longtime journalist, author and educator John Fraser, the Michener Award is unique because of its focus on stories that address wrongs in society; they can spark changes in public policy and processes. He explains it this way: "They lead to civic responsibility and civic citizenship. So, you can point to the idealistic, but in fact, what the Micheners sort of underpin is the practical world of journalism that can affect change in society. Rather than seismic changes, it's just regular honest reporting of stuff that's slightly out of kilter. I think of the Micheners as something that helps us be a decent and better society."⁴

No one was more passionate about the Michener Awards than the late John Honderich, a longtime Michener director, editor and publisher of the *Toronto Star* and chair of Torstar, the parent corporation. From his corner office in One Yonge Street in the heart of downtown Toronto, Honderich ran the largest daily circulation newspaper in the greater Toronto area with fierce pride. "An exultant force"⁵ in the industry, he lived and breathed the *Toronto Star*; it was his passion to the exclusion of everything else.

It was no secret that Honderich liked to win. When the *Star* didn't, the chief judge could expect a phone call about two weeks after the awards

ceremony. Honderich, with his big booming voice, would let loose, unsuccessfully probing for some insider information. But once he had blown off steam, he'd concede that the judges had made the right choice and added quickly that the *Star* would be back next year. The attraction of the Michener, Honderich said, is that it has the respect and distinction that do not exist with other journalism awards. "The public service aspect of it, that you hear you've done particular articles to that end, that they have had impact. . . . So it's at the highest level and that's how it's viewed," and not just by the *Toronto Star*.⁶

The following pages highlight fifty years of award-winning journalism through the lens of a volunteer organization that has maintained its focus on journalism that benefits the public. From the media silos of the 1970s to the contemporary world of digital and multi-platform media, the Michener Awards Foundation has kept step and, like the industry, adapted to drastic changes.

Advocates, like Governor General Roland Michener (1967-1974), Bill MacPherson of the Federation of Press Clubs and Paul Deacon of the Michener Awards Foundation, believed in the purpose of the award and fought to keep it relevant. Media organizations funded in-depth journalism, even in tough economic times. Reporters and editors, who through their passion for and commitment to journalism, gave voice to the marginalized, shamed and challenged the powerful, and brought about legislative and policy changes to make our country a better place. Fifty years of award-winning journalism are woven into each chapter of this book.

The Michener Award is a signal to the public that the work of media organizations matters. In 2024, this kind of support is more critical than ever. Fact-based journalism is under attack from a flood of misinformation and disinformation peddled as news on social media and the deep web. Professional journalists face threats and harassment fuelled by those who label journalists as the enemy and dismiss their stories as "alternative news."⁷ Various opinion polls rank journalists fairly low on the trust scale, down with lawyers and bankers.⁸

The journalism recognized by the Michener Awards stands in stark contrast to that dark view of the media. At the 2021 virtual awards ceremony, APTN reporter Cullen Crozier captured the essence of the award when he described Michener stories as those that are "challenging status quo, holding truth to power, forcing conversations and hopefully effecting meaningful and lasting change."⁹ He and fellow reporter Kenneth Jackson received the

2020 Michener Award for the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network's investigation into the failings of child protection agencies following the suicide of three sisters in seven months.

The Michener Award, and the values it represents, remain highly relevant today. In many countries around the world such freedom is at risk. Media outlets face closures and suppression from authorities, big businesses and hostile governments. Viceregal patronage from the highest office in Canada gives lustre to the Michener Award. More importantly, as Kenneth Jackson of APTN said, the award highlights the value the state puts on the essential role of independent journalism as a "guardian of the public interest" in our democratic society.¹⁰

As former Governor General David Johnston explains, "Professional journalism is key to how democracy, the economy and healthy communities function. And so, you use a Governor General's award like the Michener Awards to celebrate the best of the profession and use it as a kind of light to encourage all Canadians to cherish that profession and to attain even higher standards."¹¹

For fifty-plus years the public service values of the Michener Award have propelled publishers, editors, senior producers and reporters at news organizations to "aspire to higher ground."¹² As Edward Greenspon, former editor-in-chief of the *Globe and Mail*, sees it, the "Michener values" naturally align with the mission of news organizations in fulfilling their democratic function.¹³ For media outlets, a Michener nomination is coveted proof that their work is contributing to the health of their geographic or virtual community.

For reporters, editors and producers, the Michener is the holy grail of journalism, but it is more than just the prestige. It is evidence that journalism has an important role to play in helping to improve society. "It demonstrates to those who care what journalism means to the country," said George Hutchinson, a reporter at the *London Free Press* in the 1970s.¹⁴

Data journalist David McKie has won his fair share of journalism awards, but, above all, he treasures the one Michener Award he earned in 2009 for a CBC/Radio Canada and Canadian Press investigation into the use of Tasers by the RCMP. "Because of what it stands for," he said with a big smile. "Your work has led to measurable change. You've actually saved lives in many instances. Your work has resulted in the implementation of important public policy that has made lives better."¹⁵

As Michener chief judge Margo Goodhand said at the opening of the virtual ceremony for the 2020 awards, “Micheners change lives and laws and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.”¹⁶ The stories from the six finalists that year gave a platform to the silenced voices of public health officials, abused hockey players, trafficked children, seniors in long-term care, employees of Rideau Hall and children lost in the child protection maze.

Since its creation in 1970, various journalism organizations (now the Michener Awards Foundation) have administered the award — handling communications, advertising, fundraising and organizing the annual awards ceremony at Rideau Hall hosted by the governor general.

The volunteer directors of the Michener Awards Foundation have always taken great care to ensure the judging panel — made up of a chief judge and four or five other members — is arm’s-length and impartial. The judges bring diverse journalism experience; they’re often retired editors, reporters, publishers or journalism educators with no current ties or obligations to media outlets. Their independence from meddling from outside influences, including the Michener board, the industry and Rideau Hall, has given the award its elite status. It also gives the judges the freedom to break from the pack, as they did in 2013 when the *Toronto Star* won for its exposé of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, even though the same submission did not receive a single nomination from the prestigious National Newspaper Awards.

Since 1971, ten governors general — five with journalism backgrounds — have hosted the Michener Award ceremony.¹⁷ They have opened their residence at Rideau Hall to honour hard-hitting, investigative public service journalism. Journalism that exposes, angers, shames and, in the process, brings about meaningful change in the lives of Canadians. No institution is off limits — not even Rideau Hall and the Office of the Governor General.

If the founders and Roland Michener had been online for the virtual ceremony honouring journalism from 2020, there might have been a moment of discomfort when the president of the Michener Foundation, Pierre-Paul Noreau, read the citation for CBC News — “Inside Rideau Hall.” The coverage exposed Rideau Hall as a “house of horrors” with “a toxic work environment, evidence of questionable spending and a flawed government vetting process.”¹⁸ The CBC stories led to an investigation and the resignation of Governor General Julie Payette and her top bureaucrat. But then the founders probably would have taken a deep breath and nodded. They would have understood that the award was set up to encourage independent journalism

in the service of the public. “It’s about forcing conversations and getting answers the public can’t,” said CBC’s Jamie Strashin, a 2019 award finalist.¹⁹

Between 1970 and 2020, fifty-seven Michener Awards and 221 honourable mentions and citations of merit have been presented at Rideau Hall. The healthy number of entries year upon year, even in a pandemic, is a repudiation of claims that independent journalism is dead and that it has no value in our wired and social world. The award is an affirmation that citizens benefit from accurate, reliable, fact-based information.

Journalism for the Public Good: The Michener Awards at Fifty

This project started during a sabbatical at Massey College at the University of Toronto in 2018-19, where I was a visiting scholar. For almost fifteen years, I had a unique behind-the-scenes view of the Michener Awards Foundation. I served as an awards judge, chief judge, vice president, president and secretary to the board between 2007 and 2022. This project was undertaken independently of the Foundation and is self-funded. I had unfettered access to the internal electronic minutes and documents from the Michener Awards Foundation, including its historic documents — four bankers’ boxes, stored at Carleton University’s School of Journalism and Communications, crammed with meeting minutes, correspondence, emails, annual reports and other gems that go back to 1967.

My research also took me to Library and Archives Canada and the Rideau Hall archives. I am profoundly grateful to former Michener director Tim Kotcheff for access to his archival website, a repository of Michener history. *Journalism for the Public Good: The Michener Award at Fifty* also includes excerpts from interviews, conversations and email exchanges with more than fifty people, including five retired governors general, former presidents of the Michener Award Foundation going back to 1990, board members, judges, members of the Michener family, along with publishers, editors and journalists. Combined, these resources document the story of how an inspired idea to honour media organizations for journalism in the public interest developed into Canada’s premier journalism award.

This story begins in the late 1960s and early 1970s — a time of tremendous growth, prosperity and optimism in Canada. Chapter One explores the pivotal role of Roland Michener in the creation of the award during a time of change in the journalism industry. In its very creation, the Michener Award responded to industry needs and a movement among journalists. The

Micheners honoured media outlets that produced investigative stories with measurable impact and sent a strong message to the industry that journalism in the public interest was the highest form of journalism.

In the early 1970s, investigative journalism was starting to take hold and challenge the boundaries of reporting. Chapter Two examines how the Michener Award administrators worked with little support to position the Michener Award as Canada's Pulitzer Prize for Public Service within the industry.

Chapter Three links the creation of the Michener Awards Foundation/*La Fondation des Prix Michener* in 1983 to the growing reputational success of the awards in the 1980s and a commitment by media companies to invest in public service journalism. Chapter Four focuses on expanding the mission of the new foundation. In addition to honouring investigative journalism, the directors built a culture of journalism in the public interest through the creation of special awards, education opportunities and outreach.

As we see in Chapter Five, by the end of the 1980s, the award earned the respect of the industry for the integrity and independence of its judging and the ongoing patronage of the governor general. It was at this moment that an overture from the Canadian Journalism Foundation in 1989 forced the Michener board to choose its path — a financially stable partnership or independence.

Chapter Six looks at the 1990s, a decade of leadership changes with the loss of its key founders — Roland Michener, Bill MacPherson and Paul Deacon. A series of new leaders addressed the perpetual challenge of attracting entries from French-language and small media outlets outside the golden triangle of Ottawa-Toronto-Montreal. The organization struggled through a fresh round of financial difficulties that emerged from the changing journalism landscape.

A new century brought the rise of the Internet and social media and panic among established media outlets. Chapter Seven documents a vicious newspaper war and the frenzy of consolidation, closures and mergers in the early 2000s that left media organizations heavy with debt and light on journalists. Despite institutional constraints, journalists found ways to pursue public interest stories through collaboration and other methods. A Michener nomination was more than validation of a job well done; it was a way to leverage resources for the next story.

The collapse of the media business model hit regional and smaller broadcasters and newspapers hard. By the 2010s, big media organizations dominated the roster of Michener finalists. Chapter Eight looks at some of the investigative stories that resonated nationally — racial profiling, cancer care and systemic intuitional problems in Canada’s armed forces and policing.

Chapter Nine details how in 2017-18 the Michener Foundation faced and resolved internal governance issues and its ongoing relationship with the Office of the Governor General.

Journalism for the Public Good: The Michener Awards at Fifty concludes with the story of an unexpected opportunity from former governor general David Johnston. In 2019, in an interview for this book, he suggested the Michener Awards Foundation partner with the Rideau Hall Foundation (RHF), an organization formed to “amplify the impact of the Office of the Governor General as a central institution of Canadian democracy.”²⁰ Its focus on democracy fits with the Michener mandate of journalism in public service.

The 2020 union has given the Micheners access to professional resources it lacked as a volunteer organization — communication, marketing and fundraising. This is a renaissance for the Michener Awards Foundation as it takes stock, reimagines and expands to provide impetus for public interest journalism for the next fifty years.

These are difficult times for journalism in Canada. Social media is a marketplace for mis- and disinformation that undermines and threatens fact-based journalism. Media organizations, faced with declining advertising and readership and rising costs, are laying off journalists by the hundreds and shuttering outlets to save their business. To stanch further closures of legacy media and provide help for startups, the federal government introduced tax measures in 2019. This move, along with the Online News Act, Bill C-18, raises questions about government meddling and the independence of media. While news organization sort out their business model, journalists continue to produce stories that uncover wrongs, catalyze policy changes and in the process win the Michener Award, the highest honour in Canadian journalism.