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Eastern Townships Life & Culture: Past, Present, Future

Vol. 52 - No.6 - March 2025

**Artificial Intelligence,
its promise & peril**

**Cryptocurrency,
by Dian Cohen**

**Social or Anti-
Social Media?**

Digital Literacy

Working Remotely



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The *Townships Sun* is a magazine created by and for the community of the Eastern Townships of Quebec, Canada. Our office is located on the traditional territory of the Abenaki people (the people of the rising sun). We acknowledge their stewardship and appreciate that we are all guests on Abenaki Territory.

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Grant power to no one (2025). by Marie-Ève Lavasseur. This image is from the generative video, *Ecosystems of radical otherness (generative relationships)*, created at the AI Project of Sporobole, in Sherbrooke. (Courtesy of the artist.)



TOWNSHIPS SUN

Vol. 52 - No. 6
March 2025

SOCIAL CURRENCY

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
The Fast Food of Social Interactions
by Almut Ellinghaus, p. 9

TOWNSHIPS MOON
Anti-Social Media
by John Mackley, p. 10

FROM BARLEY TO BITCOIN
Cryptocurrency
by Dian Cohen, p. 11

ABOUT US

WHO'S WHO
Masthead, p. 2

EDITORS NOTE
Brain Rot & The American Dream
by R.A. Garber, p.5

COME ON BOARD!
The Townships Sun Subscription Drive 2025
by Angela Leuck,
Townships Sun Publisher, p. 7

TOWNSHIPS YOUNG VOICES
Awards Gala
by Xania Keane, p. 8

Subscribe
by Xania Keane, p. 24

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI AND THE ARTS
It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)*
by Marie Moliner, p. 12

AI IN EVERYDAY LIFE
How Technology Is Changing Our World
by Rebecca Welton, p. 15

AI IN THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS
Promise and Peril in a Black Box
by Willy Kotiuga, p. 16

POETRY

Revelation
by Heather Davis, p. 12

COMMUNITY FORUM

REPRISE — "IF YOU DO GET PREGNANT"
Can Christian Organizations Be Pro-Choice?
by Marie Moliner, p. 6

COVER ART

Let it Grow (2025), by Marcella Driver-Moliner. Digitally rendered in the software Blender and composited in Photoshop (2250 px x 4000 px).



Marcella Driver-Moliner is a Townshipper, now based in Toronto. They create 3D experimental animations and fabricated projects to re-interpret inanimate objects and nature into personified emotions, using a wide range of software (Blender, Adobe Suite, 3D printing, laser cutting, UV printing) and other fabrication methods to achieve the desired surrealistic aesthetic.

GROUND CONTROL

MEMOIR
The Ins & Outs of Working Remotely
by Myrthe Langeveld, p. 17

DIGITAL LITERACY
Navigating the New Digital Landscape
by Alanna Catrina Fernandes, p. 19

Townships History Quiz
by Jazmine Aldrich, p. 21

BOOK REVIEW
The Eastern Townships Adventure, Vol. 1, by Bernard Epps
Review by Jack Garneau, p. 22

BOOK REVIEW
The Eastern Townships Adventure, Vol. 2, by Bernard Epps
Review by Wendy Patrick, p. 23

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Brain Rot & The American Dream

by R.A. Garber

I confess to feeling desperate about the enormities of the world we humans have crafted. Whether you look through the lens of climate, conflicts, economy, extinctions, health, politics, pollution, or population, the whole picture is unnerving. (Notice my list is in alphabetical order; I see no way to prioritize these diverse disasters.)

Gone are the days when our feet were on the ground, when we attended foremost to our daily interactions with families and friends, homes and jobs, nature and personal passions. The morning newspaper or the evening newscast was our window onto the public world, one that we could, more or less, open and close at will. (Less so during wars, depressions, and disasters.)

The Digital Door

In contrast, the digital door never shuts. As I work at my computer, pop-up ads intrude, uninvited. Everybody-and-his-brother's AI is eager to spoon-feed me a blended mush of who-knows-what. Doom and gloom enter our inbox and fill our screens. We hang a little plastic "do not disturb" sign on our doorknob, but the toxic world we have collectively created is already inside. (Even as tiny bits of plastic, microplastics, have invaded our bodies. Just google it, starting with Harvard Medicine. I find it shocking.)

What is this doing to us?

Brain Rot

Oxford University Press to the rescue, to pinpoint our malady. It's brain rot.

Based on worldwide discussion, analysis, and 37,000 votes, the creators of the esteemed Oxford Dictionary named "brain rot" the 2024 Word of the Year. They say the term was used 230 per cent more often in 2024 than in the previous year, as a term "to capture concerns about the impact of consuming excessive amounts of low-quality online content, especially on social media."

We have Gen Z and Gen Alpha — our youngest living generations — to thank for the surge in the term's usage. "These communities have amplified the expression through social media channels, the very place said to cause 'brain rot,'" observed Casper Grathwohl, president of Oxford Languages. "It demonstrates a somewhat cheeky self-awareness in the younger generations about the harmful impact of social media that they've inherited."

Quiet Desperation

Brain rot did not start here; it's intergenerational.

Henry David Thoreau first used it in *Walden* (1854), his account of leading a simple lifestyle in the woods. Sitting in his little cabin constructed at minimal cost, he denounced society's tendency to scorn complex ideas that have multiple interpretations.

"While England endeavours to cure the potato-rot," he wrote, "will not any endeavour to cure the brain-rot — which prevails so much more widely and fatally?"

Thoreau's independent mind both prompted his time in nature, and flourished as a result of it. He used the time to reflect on the complexities of the society around him.

"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. ... A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusement of mankind," he wrote in *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays* (1866).

Underlying this desperation? Brain rot.

Independence of Mind?

So brain rot is not new. In a society where instant results and nonstop speed are the norm, we have no time to taste life or question our values. Most of us haven't, for a few generations now or more. Many are the warnings that this lifestyle has affected our health, our mental health, and our capacity for independent thought. The online universe has multiplied this effect.

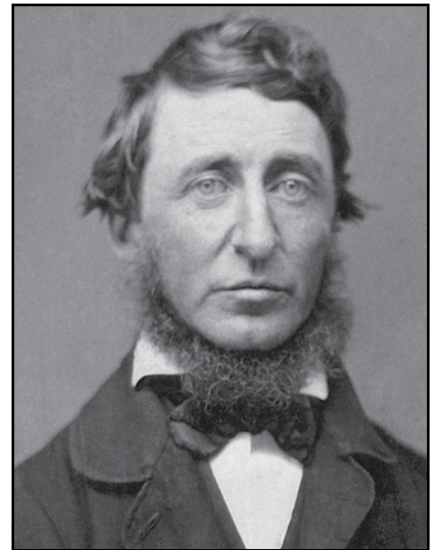
Brain rot. Is this the American Dream come true? And what of the Canadian dream? And the Townships dream? Do we have the stamina to resist being subsumed by the American tyrant and his threats? Trade wars can lead to devastating economic consequences.

We look with pride at our Townships history of resisting invaders from the south. But in fact, perhaps we have not been so successful as we would like to imagine. There's military invasion. There's also economic, cultural, and other invasions of various stripes that we have already succumbed to. The digital door is wide open, exacerbating these encroachments. We are only now beginning to notice.

Where Does One Begin?

Thence comes my sense of desperation. All our small acts of resistance — will they suffice to withstand the enormities of the world we have crafted? Where does one begin?

To Grathwohl goes the last word. "'Brain rot' speaks to one of the perceived dangers of virtual life, and how we are using our free time. It feels like a rightful next chapter in the cultural conversation about humanity and technology."



Henry David Thoreau. (Public Domain)

Can Christian Organizations Be Pro-Choice?

by Marie Moliner

Feedback on my recent article, “If You Do Get Pregnant” (Townships Sun, December 2024/January 2025) made me question whether I had done the Townships community a disservice, prompting me to revisit the role of Options Pregnancy as a resource for pregnant women.

I spoke again with Hannah Hornibrook, the Executive Director of Options Pregnancy. After a 90-minute conversation, I was impressed with her commitment to navigating the tensions around faith-based pregnancy support. In the following week, we exchanged emails to explore these questions:

1. Can a Christian organization offer neutral advice to women facing pregnancy decisions, while being anti-abortion?

Many churches struggle with the issue of contraception and abortion. The Catholic Church has always maintained that “it is intrinsically wrong to use contraception” and opposes abortion. In contrast, the United Church has several policies reaffirming a woman’s right to choose, and urging the government to provide education and access to abortion services. Tami Spires, a United Church minister, explained that while abortion may conflict with one’s personal beliefs, “respect for a person’s right to choose stands above all else.” She also said, “If a person came to me and asked me to walk with them to access an abortion, I would.”

My exchange with Hornibrook revealed nuanced disagreements. Given the March issue’s focus on AI, I turned to ChatGPT. I asked about the tension between the often coercive “pro-life” stance of many Christian organizations and the need for women to receive neutral advice in order to make informed, pressure-free choices.

ChatGPT’s response and Hornibrook’s response were similar, stating that the issue is complex. Hornibrook explicitly distanced herself from American anti-choice organizations which actively dissuade women from abortion. She emphasized that decisions about pregnancy should be made without external pressure, including whether to carry the pregnancy to term or to terminate it.

2. Is Options Pregnancy “pro-choice”?

Hornibrook referred me to the FAQ section on the Options Pregnancy website:

A: We understand that the pro-life movement fights for the rights of the unborn, while the pro-choice movement fights for the rights of pregnant women. We value the life of both. ... We do not engage in political debates, allowing us to offer a safe, pressure-free space where women can make informed choices without judgment.

3. Would Options accompany a client who chooses abortion?

Hornibrook emphasized that Options aims to ensure decisions are made in a supportive, non-coercive environment. So, I asked a third question: “If a client decides to have an abortion, would staff offer to accompany her?”

Hoping for a resounding “Yes,” I was surprised when I learned that Options would not accompany a woman seeking an abortion. Hornibrook’s considered response was:

Options helps clients who are uncertain about their pregnancy choices. We provide information, decision-making tools, and a safe space for women to explore their options. If a client chooses abortion, we offer next-step information and support after the procedure. Women who are certain about their decision to have an abortion generally do not seek our services. We make it clear that we do not arrange or assist in abortions. This is due to our faith-based beliefs, which guide our services. We believe that if we were part of the abortion process, it might compromise our ability to provide a safe space for healing afterward.

I noted that faith can be interpreted in many ways and asked why faith specifically prevents Options from accompanying a client. I pointed out that some faith traditions are okay with abortion, while others prioritize showing love and support regardless of personal beliefs.

I asked why accompanying a woman would make one “part of the abortion process,” suggesting that providing support could make Options a safe space for healing and that refusing to accompany her might signal disapproval, undermining trust.

After our exchange, I concluded that Options Pregnancy occupies a unique space. It offers information, and social and emotional support for women facing difficult pregnancy decisions. In Hornibrook’s words, the centre does not try to impede access to abortion and is working on strengthening relationships with publicly funded women’s health-care organizations.

Hornibrook was candid about the centre’s limitations. Staff are not trained healthcare professionals or counselors, and focus on supporting women, much as a close friend or clergy might.

As I revisit my original article, I can say that if I were pregnant, and knew I wanted an abortion, I would likely turn to a non-profit women’s health organization unaffiliated with any faith.

And if I visited Options Pregnancy for information on my decision to have an abortion, I am hoping that they would quickly guide me toward services such as SOS Grosseville or the CUISSSE-CHUS Family Planning Centre (Clinique de planning, santé sexuelle et planification familiale).

COME ON BOARD!

The *Townships Sun* Subscription Drive 2025

by Angela Leuck, *Townships Sun* Publisher

The publisher of a magazine usually tends to remain in the background. The publishing side of things is concerned with making sure the magazine is managed in a cost-effective way, and focuses on behind-the-scenes stuff like subscriptions and advertising.

Today I'm making an exception, because I want to personally invite you to come on board the *Townships Sun* Subscription Drive 2025.

If you're already a subscriber, you may well ask, "What has the subscription drive got to do with me – I've already done my part, haven't I?"

It's simple. If each of us were to find one — just one — new subscriber, we could reach our goal in a flash.

To all our 500 or so subscribers, I would very much like to express my sincere appreciation. The *Townships Sun* could not exist without you. It is people like you who have kept the *Sun* shining for the past 50 years.

But as we are entering our second 50 years and looking ahead, there is so much our new and ever-younger team of volunteers hopes to accomplish. To do so, we need more subscribers and are embarking on the ambitious goal of doubling our number of subscribers to 1000!

Sounds daunting, doesn't it? But thinking over the challenges the *Townships Sun* has faced over the years, I've concluded there's nothing the *Sun* can't achieve when we work together.

That brings me to what you, as one of our current subscribers, can do to help us reach our goal. It's simple. If each of us were to find one — just one — new subscriber, we could reach our goal in a flash. Could I ask you to take a minute to think who among your extended family, friends, acquaintances, or colleagues, would enjoy a *Sun* subscription? I'm sure you can think of many possible people, but just pick one.

Now, dash off an email or give them a call. Tell them about the well-written, pertinent articles contained in each issue of the *Townships Sun*, geared to the concerns

of English-speaking Townshippers. Let them know that nine whole issues are available for the incredibly low price of \$35 per year (or an online subscription for only \$20.)

You might even want to lend them a back issue so they can see for themselves. If they are parents, you could let them know about the *Sun's* Townships Young Voices Awards, offering prizes in nonfiction, fiction, poetry, art, and photography to Townships youth aged 12 to 30. Invite them to the upcoming Awards Gala on Sunday, April 6, so they can see for themselves that the *Townships Sun* is a really worthy community magazine — with benefits!

Why is finding 500 new subscribers so important? Will reaching our goal make a real difference? Here are some numbers to help make things more concrete.

A Colour Centrefold in Each Issue

Let's start small. If we get just 40 new subscribers, we could include two more colour-pages in each of our nine issues. A colour centrefold would make the *Townships Sun* more appealing to readers and potential subscribers, and do justice to our great photos and art.

Four More Pages in Each Issue

If we get an additional 45 new subscribers, we could add four more pages in each issue. Yes, is all it would take for us to be able to offer readers four more pages of content dealing with issues of importance to all of us: health, economic development, environment, culture, and more.

One More Full Issue per Year

An extra 140 subscribers is all it would take to add one more full issue per year for the same subscription price. This would mean 10 full issues of the *Townships Sun* delivered to your door each year. More articles, more value, more community.

In-Depth Reporting of Things that Matter to You

Engaging an investigative reporter would be a dream come true, but with your help, it could happen. If you find just one new subscriber, we could provide important, in-depth reporting that would respond to your concerns and address issues important to the English-language Townships community. That will benefit us all.

Together, we can do this!



Angela Leuck owns Shoreline Press, and is publisher of the *Townships Sun*. She lives in Coaticook, a hop, skip and jump from the Ice Cream Factory and the town's spectacular gorge.



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The Fast Food of Social Interactions

by Almut Ellinghaus

What a tricky business social media has become!

Just a click away, with hopes of seeing what neighbours are up to in my little adoptive village of over 22 years, my thumb navigates to the blue “f” button, so very enticing, so very accessible, so full of possibility. And so out of control.

“There is a coyote in my yard that doesn’t look healthy” – “You should feed the poor thing” – “Shoot it” – “Get used to it, you city slicker” – and we are off to the races with misunderstandings, personal grievances and unrealistic beliefs – that hopefully do not translate into real-life consequences of broken friendships or neighbours looking at each other sideways!

In a world where we meet in person less and less often, Facebook has become one of the most important tools for people to connect with one another. Local events and businesses inform us of their services. Friends share snapshots of their lives – happy moments of doggy jumping through the snow. And not so happy moments – the passing of a parent, a partner, or a friend.

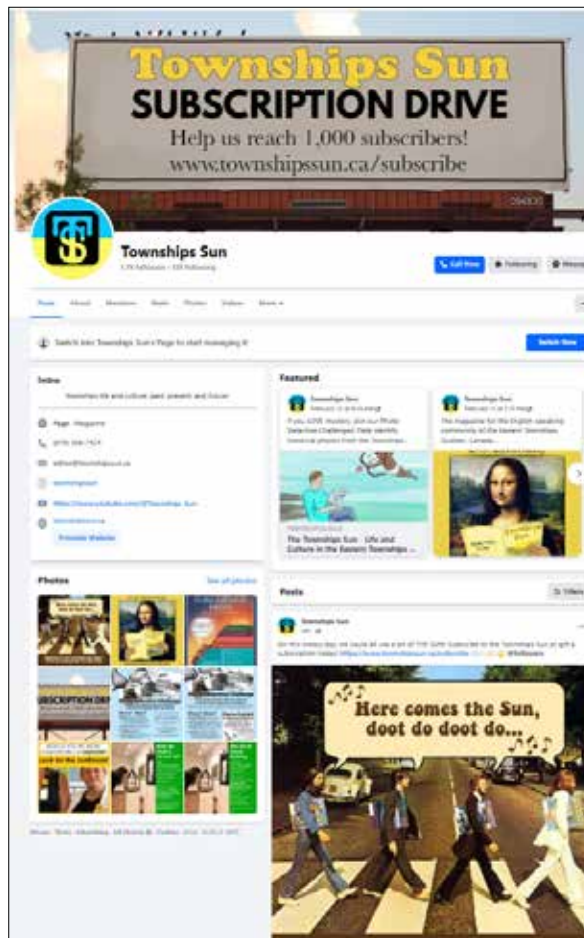
All of them allow me to make those little noises of “Oh!” “Really?” “That’s funny!” or “Me too!” Instantly I feel that I am part of a gathering, a community, a family. “Heart!” “Smile” “Sigh!”

But then, in an instant, the family party gets out of hand. (Too much virtual booze?) Someone makes a snide comment, others react, more foolish comments follow ... and all of a sudden I feel like a teenager who realizes she is at a party where she doesn’t know half the people, and many of them are quite drunk. Or worse, could they be dangerous?

Virtual friends are a gamble. Is “Amy” really the old friend whom I have not seen for years? Or is she a “bot” who uses Amy’s face? As a former puppeteer and mask maker, I know that body language can reveal far more than facial expression. But like an invisible god, “Amy” writes to me in shorthand, leaving my own brain to fill in the gaps with what I remember from the school friend of so long ago. I click on her profile, I try to make an educated guess: Does this picture look like someone I know? Are her posts, in general, sane? Well, she has more than four posts on her feed, and they don’t

all show lots of cleavage, and her boyfriend is not a “successful manager of an oil rig in who-knows-where.” She even has a dog and a kid. Do I dare to “accept” to find out more?

But what if “Amy” is a Russian computer program, aimed at luring me into believing that insanely rich men who use racial hatred and sexual violence to destroy our democracy actually have my personal well-being at heart?



After all, because of little thumbs like mine, our democracy is now at stake. Democracy – the only tool we, the people, have to keep the wealthiest men, or women for that matter, from throwing the majority of the population back into the voiceless, rightless, abject poverty of feudal times. Democracy – that brought us free public healthcare, old age pensions, and for a time, affordable education and public housing. Democracy – that protects us from the whims and abuse-of-power of the angry, greedy, evil minds of a few bullies.

I should be ashamed of myself! Click, click, scroll...

My brain stuffs itself with random tidbits of information, all preceded by ominous messages like “Never drink cold water if you have arthritis,” or “Drink warm water and a miracle will happen.” I realize it is in survival mode: Dare I share this post? What else does this “person” post? Am I really just sharing a cute kitten picture or am I inadvertently giving a platform to a right-wing fascist? An hour disappears into

the black hole of virtuality. Click, click, scroll. Like a well-trained dog, I keep waiting for my reward, and feel lonelier and less satisfied than ever. Will I get lonely enough to WANT to believe that I ever knew an Amy?

But then appears a light in the darkness of the social media jungle: The *Townships Sun* has news of real happenings and real people. “Heart!” “Smile” “Sigh!”



Almut Ellinghaus creates clay sculpture by day, gardens in the afternoon, and sings at night. Yes, it’s a blessed life! President of the Tour des Arts and board member of Festival Sutton Jazz and Sunshine House Mansonville, Almut collaborates with her husband Stanley Lake at his pottery, and sings with the Almut Ellinghaus Jazz Ensemble and the Honeysuckle Sisters.



TOWNSHIPS MOON

Anti-Social Media

by John Mackley

The Townships Moon began in 1977 as a place to rant about the sorry state of the Townships universe. Caught up in the current international turmoil, I thought I might instead point out what I perceive as a silver lining to the bleak alternate universe of the Internet and its invasion of the Eastern Townships.

I did not coin the phrase “Anti-Social Media.” Siva Vaidhyanathan, a media studies professor at the University of Virginia, wrote a book entitled *Anti-Social Media: How Facebook Has Disconnected Citizens and Undermined Democracy* (2018). “If you wanted to build a machine that would distribute propaganda to millions of people, distract them from important issues, energize hatred and bigotry, erode social trust, undermine respectable journalism, foster doubts about science, and engage in massive surveillance all at once,” he wrote, “you would make something a lot like Facebook.”

With the recent removal of “fact-checking” and the loosening of hate-speech restrictions from Facebook, the future of Social Media may appear bleak, but I would, instead, step back and look at the initial intention behind Facebook.

A few of the many Townships organizations with websites and Facebook pages.



Mark Zuckerberg and four lesser known classmates created a functional social networking website in 2004. Subscribers could set up accounts, create their own moderated pages, and share text, images, and links with friends and acquaintances.

Facebook revolutionized the ability to essentially broadcast whatever content you wish to the entire Facebook community, or to target specific individuals, family, and friends. Users can share posts to yet more people. Anyone can comment along the way. Voila! “Social Media” was created. This is the basic structure for “going viral.”

Fast forward to 2025. Much of today’s internet-savvy population has moved away from Facebook, considering it no longer “cool” or “hip.” (Does anyone use those terms anymore? Not sure... Hey John! Your age is showing!) Many younger people have abandoned Facebook to their parents and grandparents, along with email and phone-text messaging.

Even so, the social-networking aspect of Facebook has quietly enabled local, “real-world” communities right here in the Eastern Townships to easily set up pages.

Municipalities, libraries, community groups, non-profit organizations, historical societies, community newspapers, farms, and other local businesses and associations can easily have their own online presence.

Emergency situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic or wildfires have highlighted Facebook’s rapid posting ability as an effective way to disseminate important information to the community at large when it’s most needed.

Effective Facebook posts can be created by virtually anyone with very basic training and few technical skills. Recent advances in cell service and smart phone technology have made receiving vital information accessible to nearly anyone, anywhere, anytime. This is a big advantage over standard websites that take time, money, and expertise to update.

Chances are, your town, local community group, or organization already has a Facebook page where they announce upcoming events and activities.

Facebook also offers a feature for users to create “Groups.” These differ from standard “pages” in that they can be public or private, depending on the group’s purpose. People can join, or be invited to join, then converse with the entire group on topics of mutual interest. With this feature, members can collaborate and plan future activities, reducing the number of in-person meetings.

This is the Townships Moon, though. I can’t resist awarding a really big Moon to the self-same Facebook whose virtues I have just been extolling.

For more than a year, Facebook has enforced an ongoing blockade of journalistic news pages and content within Canada, as a pressure tactic to coerce the Canadian Government to repeal Bill C-18 “The Online News Act.” Bill C-18 requires cyber companies to pay royalties to news outlets for the use of their journalistic content.

This action not only stifles freedom of the press, but potentially stems the flow of important, at times vital, life-saving information. As a result, perhaps, scam websites have been posting fake “news” articles masquerading as legitimate news organizations such as the CBC. This sort of deliberate disinformation brings a whole host of potential hazards to the internet community, as well as the real-life social fabric of the Townships.

/rant.*



John Mackley lives, loves, laughs, and writes in the Eastern Townships.

* “/” is html code for “end.”

Cryptocurrency

by Dian Cohen

Cryptocurrency debuted as the world's first 100 per cent electronic/digital currency 17 years ago. Although eight out of 10 of us now do our banking online, for most of us "crypto" is still as mystifying as anything else whose name origin is from the crypt.

The evolution of money parallels human development. It makes the world go round and it didn't just pop up out of nowhere. Before money, it was "my chickens for your barley." By the middle of the seventh century, in what is now Turkey, people were tired of schlepping all those birds and sacks of grain. So they invented the first physical currency — gold, silver and bronze coins that could be exchanged for goods and services. This revolution — the ability to trade without having to find someone who had what you wanted and also wanted what you had — transformed the world. Having a medium of exchange greatly enhanced everyone's chance to become richer and to live a life that was no longer so "hard knock."

Transforming the world is a time-consuming slog. Europeans adopted paper currency a mere ten decades after it first emerged in China. We may be slow, but we're super-inventive. Wars help. In 1940, a high-speed, digital computer capable of solving a full range of problems was born. The electronic age was upon us: personal computers, the internet, iPads, and mobile phones followed relatively quickly. By 2000, trips to the bank were passé. With a simple click, we could pay bills, exchange currencies, and save ourselves money, time, and energy.

Finally, in 2009, e-money emerged — cryptocurrencies called Bitcoin, Ethereum, Tether, Binance — in fact there are about 20,000 different cryptos. No one knows if one or a few of them will be the next iteration of the many mediums of exchange we already use. Cryptos are very different. Unlike the currency we use today, they aren't issued by governments. They aren't legal tender in Canada; no uniform international laws regulate them. The Bank of Canada has studied and abandoned that possibility for Canada.

Cryptocurrencies exist only on a network in a lot of computers. They have no legislated or intrinsic value; they are simply worth what people are willing to pay for them in the market. This is true of our paper currency too. The difference is governments, particularly in developed economies, stand behind their currencies. Even though the value of a currency may decline because of inflation, billions of people accept most countries' physical money as a store of value and a medium of exchange. Cryptocurrencies are accepted as money by far fewer people.



Reproduction of Canada's first playing-card money (1714), used when coins were not available. (National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum)

That may change. Cryptocurrency is still new and not widely adopted, but its use is growing. For many of us, it's still a murky concept — the word cryptocurrency was added to the dictionary only in 2018. As of today, cryptos don't qualify as an investment for registered plans such as RRSPs, RRIFs and TFSAs. As bizarre as it seems, you can buy a basket of them that does qualify. The basket is called a crypto-exchange-traded fund (ETF). Today, Canadian investors have access to nearly three dozen crypto-themed ETFs, valued in late 2024 at nearly \$6 billion Canadian.

Just because you can, doesn't mean you should. Crypto-ETFs share the core characteristic of cryptocurrencies themselves — nauseatingly volatile and unpredictable price movements. Experts double underline the need for investors to fine-tune their exposure, be prepared to suffer significant losses and avoid making big bets in pursuit of overnight riches.

While money is increasingly intangible and the way we use it has changed, the basic concept remains the same: it's a tool that can help us live life to the fullest.



Dian Cohen, economic and business commentator since 1962, combines an entrepreneurial spirit with public service, advising numerous corporations, governments, and not-for-profits. Recognized by the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba, she is the founding director of several public institutions, including the Massawippi Valley Health Centre and Massawippi Valley Health Foundation. Cohendian560@gmail.com

Revelation

by Heather Davis

Late night
and I can't sleep
thinking time
writing truths
imagining a different life
some parts the same
one big part different
wondering what I want

finding joy
Love

One love is over
and instead of a cold ache,
I bloom into
spring.
All the long
hibernation,
I stored
this spark
for life.



Heather Davis lives in Sherbrooke and teaches writing and children's literature at the two local universities.

She loves walking in the forest, singing Georgian songs, and seeing what her kid is up to at art school in Vancouver.



(Photo: R. Donachie)

AI AND THE ARTS

It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)*

by Marie Moliner

Sarah Mackenzie is not a robot. Vanessa Rigaux can be a clown. And Eric Desmarais is a cultural connector. Wide ranging interviews with these three artists — half my age — yielded thoughtful insights into AI and the risks we all face, often without even realizing it.

“AI has infiltrated so many pillars of the arts — music, film, theatre — reshaping how art is created, consumed, and interpreted. Platforms like Spotify and Netflix use algorithms to recommend music and shows based on our preferences,” explained Mackenzie, creative producer at [MUTEK](#), Montreal's internationally renowned electronic music festival.

Indeed, AI has transformed everyday life. It's impossible to escape AI's influence unless you've completely abstained from technology in the past two decades — avoided digital banking or online shopping, and refrained from new gadgets, appliances, cars, smartphones, televisions, and computers.

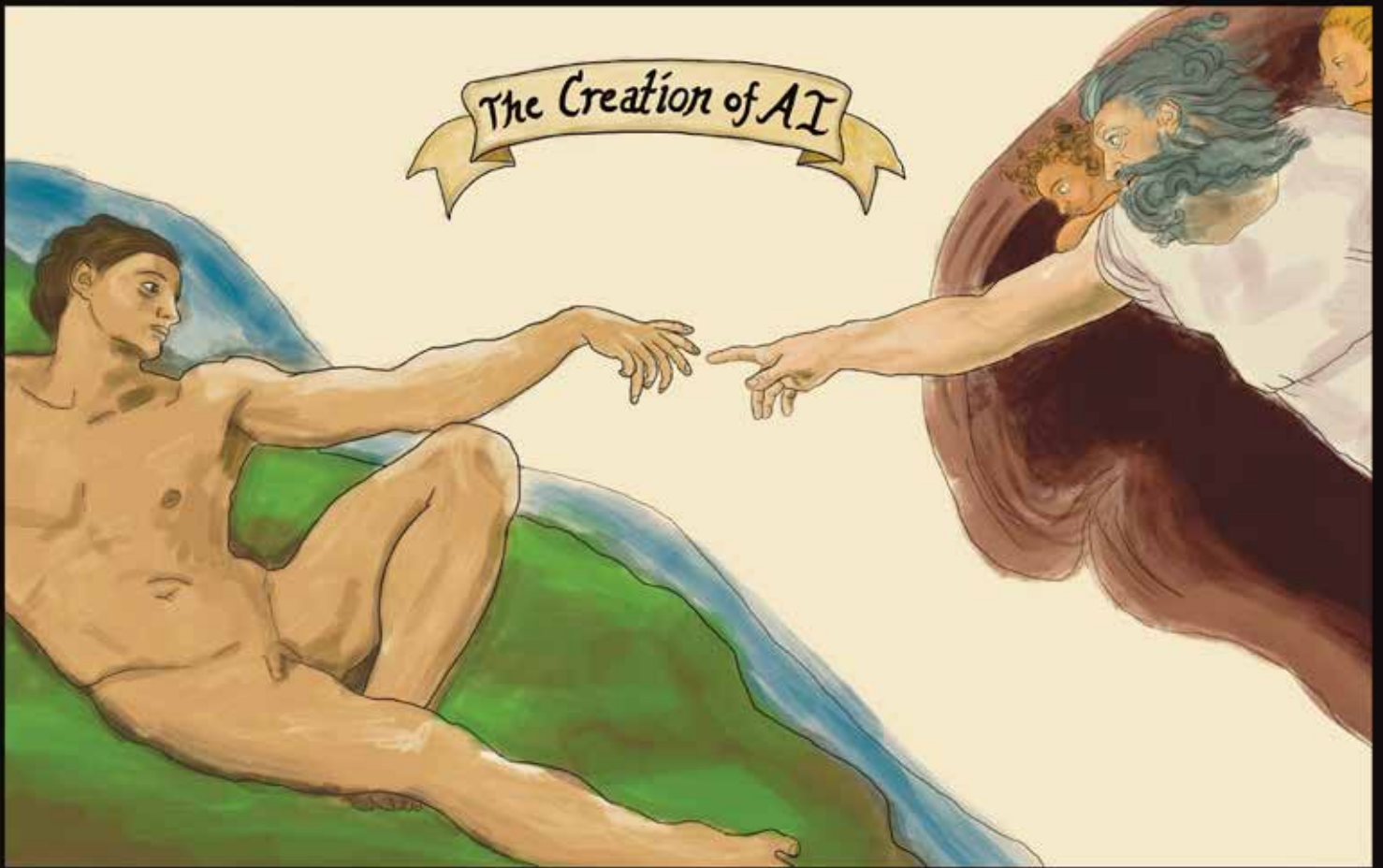
It's not that AI is inherently bad. MRI machines use it to generate images that identify health risks. Agricultural software helps farmers prevent pest and disease outbreaks. Pilots can optimize flight routes, thereby reducing greenhouse-gas emissions. Scientists track polar bears by analyzing DNA from snow prints. Banks detect fraud in real time, and bluetooth hearing aids stream music directly into my ears.

Yet, one can't help but feel a sense of foreboding as AI's infinite reach is increasingly undisclosed. As the 1971 Poppy Family song reminds us, “Evil grows in the dark, where the sun it never shines, evil grows in cracks and holes and lives in people's minds.”

Freelance reporter Isaac Peltz, writing for [The Rover](#), recently revealed that the Centre de services scolaire des Mille-Îles school board near Montreal is implementing a multimillion-dollar [Ministry of Education AI project](#). The system will collect extensive personal data — gender, age, disabilities, language, parental education, and absences — to analyse risks to students and reduce high school dropout rates. All this, without requiring parental consent.

I return to the artists Mackenzie, Rigaux, and Desmarais for insight and reassurance. Rewind three years to Covid curfews. Craving connection and culture, I was glued to my screen as artists and musicians around the world collaborated and streamed ballet, opera, and live music from their living rooms. Surely, then and now, artists can offer beauty and creative responses to crises.

Not so fast. In a recent interview, Mackenzie reminds me that resistance to using AI in the arts is not new. “Drum machines, invented nearly 100 years ago, were once scorned by percussionists,” she said. Her visits to



Mansonville and Knowlton, hotbeds of creativity and where her parents live, confirm that rural life can feel disconnected from the digital world she navigates daily. Yet, drum machines are now tools of the trade and her father makes art using a 3-D printer.

Cautionary tales prevail. Canadian physicist Geoffrey Hinton won a 2024 Nobel Prize for his pioneering research into methods that laid the foundation for machine learning. In many interviews, including a wide ranging one in 2023 with Robyn Bresnahan on CBC's *The Sunday Magazine*, Hinton has forecasted that machines may become more intelligent than humans in 5 to 20 years, warning that they are faster than biological intelligence, capable of learning, and can share their knowledge without moral or ethical constraints.

Despite his very dire forecast, Hinton also offers hope, suggesting that humanity has faced major threats before — nuclear weapons, for example — and survived by taking them seriously and working to control them (*The Sunday Magazine*, [cbc.ca](https://www.cbc.ca)).

Enter Yuval Harari, author of *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI*. He relentlessly urges humans to explore the risks of what he calls Alien Intelligence. Warning that we are past the point where humans can pull the plug on what we have created, he offers a hint of hope. At a [recent talk at the Cité des Sciences in Paris](#), he observed, "If we make the right decision in the next few years, we can still keep this under control."

Then dashing my hopes, he concedes, "Nobody knows how much time we have."

In response to these threats, last year UNESCO established a [Global AI Ethics and Governance Observatory](#).

So why should we care?

If you're an artist, you may fret that your work will be fed into ChatGPT and used without acknowledgement, consent, or remuneration. Worse, you may fear being replaced by AI. In October 2023, [CBC reported](#) that genre writers — mystery, fantasy, horror, and science fiction — are most at risk. I wonder if Louise Penny is worried?

Then there's AI's environmental impact. Generative AI consumes enormous amounts of energy. "The models that are able to write a poem for you, or draft an email, those are very large," said Jesse Dodge, a research scientist at the Allen Institute for AI in Seattle, as quoted in [an article by David Berreby for Yale Environment 360](#). Regulators are just beginning to demand accountability for the billions of gallons of water and massive energy consumption used for computation and data storage.

Ethical concerns, cybersecurity nightmares, and bias in AI remain real concerns. "AI struggles with cultural nuances and underrepresents marginalized communities," Mackenzie notes. "At some point, we might lose the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is AI-generated. This could fundamentally challenge how we value human creativity and authenticity in art."

As we wrap up our interview, Mackenzie remains optimistic: "It requires a human to have a vision to connect the dots."

When I began this article, the sun was shining. I take heart as the European Union implements [The EU Artificial Intelligence Act](#), the first-ever legal framework on AI to address risks.

I laugh aloud as I read that stand-up comedians are experimenting with AI. Last year, Canadian comedian Anesti Danelis asked ChatGPT to write his show, which he performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. He called it [Artificially Intelligent!](#)

I revel as artists, like Grimes, overturn archaic copyright laws by [donating their AI-generated voices for royalty-sharing collaborations](#). However, even Grimes, who has three children with Elon Musk, worries aloud. In 2020, she [told the New York Times](#), "Creatively, I think AI can replace humans. And so I think at some point, we will want to, as a species, have a discussion about how involved AI will be in art."

Perhaps AI's most exciting potential in the arts, and beyond, is not that it will replace creativity but that it will unlock new possibilities. As I wrap up my interview with MUTEK's Mackenzie, she says, "We are already seeing new mediums and genres emerge. That's exciting — as long as we communicate and educate ourselves on ethics."

I also spoke with Desmarais, the Director General at [Sporobole](#), an arts centre in Sherbrooke which helps

artists face issues raised by digital technologies. He is very direct. "If our governments have even the slightest courage to curb ultra-liberalism, it will be by providing resources to initiatives that prioritize the common good." Referring to cultural, economic, and digital sovereignty, he concluded, "AI could prove to be a powerful tool in reducing disparities between the forces at play" (free translation from French).

If he means AI can eliminate poverty, then I am really starting to feel fine.

Rigaux gets the last word. Once a student of Clown and Bouffon at École Philippe Gaulier in Paris, and now the Community Development Manager at Montreal's [CDAH Community Digital Arts Hub](#), she offers reassurance:

"Artists remain resilient and will lead the way, not the other way around."

To that, I say: Amen — but also, eyes wide open! Because it is the end of the world as we know it.

**Song by American rock band REM from their 1987 album, Document.*



Marie Moliner returned to the Eastern Townships after four decades in Toronto to care for the love of her life, Kevin Whitaker, who recently died. She observes that researching AI stirred the same sense of panic and fear she felt while navigating Kevin's neurocognitive diseases. An eternal pragmatist, she chooses hope, believing that AI ultimately challenges us all to rise to the responsibility of being better humans.



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How Technology Is Changing Our World

by Rebecca Welton

Since 2023, we have seen huge advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its capabilities. If we see even a tenth of the advancements predicted in the next few years, we will see significant changes in our lives, our communities, and society.

It can be scary, but if we want a say in how these changes affect us, it's important to learn about AI and its current uses. Where might these changes take us in the future?

What is AI? In short, it is computer programs that learn, analyze data, and make decisions in ways that mimic human thinking. Unlike traditional computers that only follow pre-programmed instructions, AI systems can improve over time, recognize patterns, and even predict outcomes.

Companies, big and small, have been integrating AI into their products and processes for some time. Even if you don't consider yourself tech-savvy, there's a good chance you're already using AI in some form. For example, Amazon's Alexa, autocorrect, voice-to-text, facial recognition on your phone, or when Google Maps suggests a faster route due to traffic.

People are now going one step further and are using AI apps to make their work and lives easier. In the workplace, AI is automating repetitive tasks like data entry, scheduling, and email organization. It also supports creative problem-solving by analyzing data, generating reports, or even drafting content. This allows professionals to focus on more meaningful, higher-level tasks, making AI a valuable tool for productivity. In public services, AI is being used to make our communities safer and more efficient, from managing traffic flow to assisting in disaster response planning.

So, what can you use AI for? AI can summarize long documents, videos, or podcasts in minutes and answer follow-up questions like, "What were the main tips for beginners?" It can also suggest dinner ideas based on a photo of your fridge, or brainstorm creative solutions for projects such as home remodelling.

For those with disabilities, AI is helping make technology more accessible. From apps that can provide real-time speech-to-text transcription, translate languages, or even help visually impaired individuals navigate their surroundings using audio cues, these tools are breaking down barriers and making the world more inclusive for everyone.

AI is revolutionizing healthcare by aiding doctors with early disease detection, analyzing medical scans, and simplifying diagnoses. Apps can remind users to take medication, monitor health metrics, and even alert emergency services in case of falls. AI-powered chatbots and virtual consultations are also streamlining access to care. I recently uploaded a medical report, and within seconds, the AI explained the terms, results, implications, and even suggested questions to ask my doctor.

Want to get fit? AI can create personalized step-by-step training plans for fitness, or hobbies like pickleball, adjusting advice based on your goals and feedback. In education, AI-powered tutors adapt to the student's knowledge level, filling gaps, reinforcing concepts, answering questions, and providing practice exercises.

Curious about AI, but want to use it safely? Here are some tips.

Stay informed; read about AI developments and how they affect daily life. Read newsletters such as The Rundown AI and Mindstream, and podcasts like The AI Podcast and Discover Daily by Perplexity.

Verify information. AI-generated content, including news and social media posts, can sometimes spread misinformation. Always double-check sources before believing or sharing information.

Have fun! Play with the chatbots; they are built to be friendly and even funny. If you aren't sure about what the AI can and can't do, just ask it!

Want to know more? Try these AI for free: ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or Google NotebookLM

As AI becomes more integrated into our lives, it's critical to address ethical concerns. Issues like data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential for misuse of AI-generated content are major challenges, and AI models can unintentionally reinforce societal biases if not carefully designed. By advocating for transparency, fairness, and accountability in AI development, we can ensure that these tools are used responsibly and inclusively.

Environmental impact is another important consideration. Training large AI models requires substantial computing power, consuming significant energy and contributing to carbon emissions. Companies and researchers are exploring ways to make AI development more sustainable, such as using renewable energy sources and improving model efficiency.

AI applications are becoming an everyday tool that can make life easier, safer, and more connected. Whether helping with daily tasks, supporting students, or improving healthcare, AI is already shaping the world around us in ways both big and small. The key for all of us to navigate this changing world is to approach AI with curiosity, a bit of caution, and an open mind.



Rebecca Welton is an author living in the Eastern Townships. She runs creative writing workshops for Write Here, Write Now, a community organization offering free zoom classes. She writes paranormal romance under a pen name and has published several books, novellas and audiobooks.

Promise and Peril in a Black Box

by Willy Kotiuga

I learned to code over 50 years ago. Each time I ran a program, I had to use punch cards—there were no interactive terminals in those days. The process was slow and tedious, but I liked one thing: if the data did not change, the answers were always the same. It was scientific; the results were repeatable.

What I don't like about Artificial Intelligence (AI) is that it operates like a black box. If you ask the same question multiple times, you get a different answer each time. Change a word in your prompt, and you get a slightly different response. While usually similar, the results are unpredictable. For someone who values precision and repeatability, this is unsettling. AI does things I cannot control, and that makes me uneasy.

But whether I like it or not, AI is here to stay. It is transforming how we work, learn, and connect with the world. Though often linked to cities, AI is shaping rural life, too. In the Eastern Townships, the arrival of AI brings both opportunities and challenges.

For some, AI might feel like another urban-driven phenomenon—yet another innovation that prioritizes city life while neglecting rural realities. For others, AI holds great promise, offering ways to overcome geographical isolation, boost local businesses, and improve access to essential services.

AI in the Eastern Townships: Varied Roles

AI-driven weather forecasting helps farmers prepare for frost and drought, while automated irrigation and AI-powered milking systems optimize efficiency. AI may replace some jobs, but it also fills labour shortages.

Local businesses rely on AI for bookkeeping, marketing, and customer service, though many still prefer personal interactions. AI-assisted telemedicine may reduce the need for long trips to Sherbrooke or Montreal, while some seniors appreciate AI-driven voice assistants that simplify tasks. However, concerns over digital privacy remain.

Libraries, schools, and local media cautiously explore AI, but human oversight is vital. AI may help preserve oral histories, but lived experience is irreplaceable.

AI's impact depends on engagement. Strong policies and digital literacy ensure rural voices aren't left behind. AI should enhance, not replace, local traditions, businesses, and community ties, ensuring technology serves people rather than the other way around.

How I Use AI

After two years of experimenting with AI, we are best friends. Even though I don't fully trust it, I use AI as a tutor, a reference book, an editor, a therapist, and a brainstorming partner. My favourite prompts begin with who, what, where, when, and how. AI critiques my writing as an editor: How can I improve my text? Using AI as a therapist, I ask, What questions should I ask

myself? For brainstorming, it provides valuable clues to these questions: What have I missed in my analysis? What are some alternative solutions?

AI seems to know everything — or at least much more than I do. But what it lacks is discernment, the kind that comes only from experience, from living one day at a time. AI does not know me. It has not lived my life; no one has.

AI presents both an opportunity and a challenge. It can assist with farming, business, healthcare, education, and even preserving our heritage, but it is not a replacement for human wisdom, creativity, and community ties. AI is a powerful tool, but it can't replace who we are or what we contribute to life.

The real question for those living in rural Quebec is not whether AI will change our lives — it already does — but rather how we choose to engage with it. Will we embrace it cautiously, use it wisely, and ensure it serves us rather than the other way around? The future of AI is not set in stone. We still have a say in how it shapes our world. For the moment.

For an in-depth report on AI, see the [McKinsey & Company report on Superagency in the Workplace – Empowering people to unlock AI's full potential, January 2025.](#)



Willy Kotiuga, past president of the Cedar Lodge Association camp near Magog, combines a background in engineering and the arts. He holds a PhD in Electrical Engineering and an MFA in Creative Nonfiction Writing. In writing this article, he used AI as both a research assistant and an editorial sounding board, demonstrating its potential as a tool rather than a replacement for human insight.



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The Ins & Outs of Working Remotely

by Myrthe Langeveld



Working from home. (Photo: R. Donachie)

When I started working as a nurse in 1993, I never thought for a minute that I would be working remotely one day; the nursing profession is one where you work hands-on with patients.

Nonetheless, my career evolved and I started teaching nursing and then eventually became a manager in the healthcare system. Even though being a manager is more of an administrative role, I still went to the different nursing units and met with the head nurses, the employees, and some patients on a regular basis.

One thing I enjoyed when working in person was my drive to and from work. As I drove into the parking lot every morning, I was so proud to see the establishment for which I worked looming before my eyes. I had a strong sense of belonging. Also, the travelling time gave me the opportunity to prioritize the tasks that had to be done that day, or helped me to simply relax before getting back home.

Along came Covid-19 in March of 2020, and that was the start of remote work for me.

What a difference that made in my life! It was not all good. Of course, some of the challenges were due to my workload as a manager in the healthcare system during the Covid outbreak, and everything that came along with it.

Remote work brought on a whole new learning experience. We had to learn to work with new and more diverse computer programs, less paper, and more collaborative online documents (TEAMS, SharePoint, OneDrive, etc.), and it brought about new IT challenges due to the number of people who had to work remotely.

It also brought us some laughs – every time “Teams” would “freeze” during the first year, people would take pictures of their colleagues with their funny “frozen” faces and share them. It was good fun. For our online

My Tips for Rewarding Remote Work

- Have a dedicated room as office space so that you can close the door and keep your mind off your household duties.
- Have a routine of dressing professionally for work in the mornings.
- Ask for weekly meetings with your supervisor or any colleagues.
- Suggest/organize team-building activities: have a zoom lunch every week with your colleagues, suggest to work “in person” once a week, every two weeks or once a month, combined with a pot-luck lunch, and so on.
- If you still feel isolated or lonely, make sure to talk to your supervisor about it.

Christmas party, a colleague even made a power-point presentation with a collage of these funny faces, and we had much-needed good laughs.

Another funny thing in these online meetings was that everyone seemed to be the same shape and height. During one rare in-person meeting we had two years ago, I met this new colleague of mine and we both burst out laughing: I was so tall (6 feet 3 inches) and she was so short (5 feet), that we were just awe-struck – we hadn't seen that coming!

Remote working can also be a contradiction. It allowed me to do so much more work in the same amount of time because, mostly, I no longer had to travel between hospitals to get to different meetings.

On the other hand, the time I saved traveling was filled with work. I didn't have a minute to myself anymore – it was difficult even just to go to the bathroom between meetings! Nor did I get as much personal contact as I craved – I became a nurse because I needed the person-to-person contact, after all.

Gradually, working remotely – all by myself with just my laptop – contributed to a heavy feeling of isolation. I just logged into a meeting when it started, and logged out when it finished. No more camaraderie before and after meetings like we used to have in hallways or the elevator. No more 5 à 7 get-togethers after work, because everyone was in a different city. No more taking breaks together.

The only person-to-person contact I had was once or twice a week when I went to different hospitals to meet the head nurses and sometimes employees of one of the 11 nursing units that I managed. But even so, I did remote work from there, locked up in an office all by myself most of the day.

This situation remained the same since 2020. The organization even stipulated that everyone having an office job without direct supervision of services, sectors, or nursing units, had to give up their office due to lack of space for clinical activities, or downsizing in order to reduce the overall financial stress.

As of April 2024, I have a new position, a job for which I work almost entirely from home. This new reality has been hard to adapt to. I no longer need to go to any hospital except on the rare occasion. I really no longer have any reason to see people in the flesh. I gradually noticed that the more I worked from home, the less I wanted to go out. To decrease this isolation and feeling of loneliness, I have been making myself go to the office once every week or two, just to see people in the flesh.

Sadly, my colleagues from my own team do not go to the office at all. So when I do go, I socialize with colleagues from another branch of the direction I work for. Thank God for them!

Also, not arriving at work every day and seeing the establishment I work for has somewhat lowered my sense of "belonging" and "pride" towards my employer. I have been working hard on changing my outlook in this matter, but it is slow-coming.

Luckily, I don't have difficulty separating my work hours from my house duties, which others find difficult. I have a dedicated work space and am very organized – when I go into my office, I close my door, and I don't come out until it's break-time. In order to keep a professional mindset, I even make myself get dressed professionally everyday as if I was really going to the office.

Remote work has its challenges. In order to remain sane, I am dedicated to listening to my needs, and being creative in how I answer them.

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Navigating the New Digital Landscape

by Alanna Catrina Fernandes

It's no secret that we are moving beyond the information age and into an era of immersive digital reality. Managing personal finances, working remotely, making essential (and not-so-essential) purchases, keeping in touch with family and friends, or even learning any given thing at the click of a button – the digital world brings us beyond information, and into practicality and dependency.

More and more, we need these tools to get by in the world and accomplish basic things. More and more, we need to know how to use these tools in order to remain functional and relevant.

Thankfully, Literacy in Action (LIA), a Townships-based organization, offers various workshops and activities in English for free throughout the Estrie region. These foster skills development that touches on core literacy skills, and are open to persons aged 16 or older.

Traditional definitions of literacy have focused on skills relating to reading, writing, numeracy, listening, speaking, and critical thinking. Digital literacy – navigating online tools, services, and information – also helps build those competencies. The end goal is to develop active thinkers and learners who are able to engage in society in effective and meaningful ways.

Whether your goal is to keep in touch with family across the continent, to develop or maintain professional skills, to know how to look something up, or even detect fraud, Literacy in Action offers two ongoing services that can help.

Online Learning Lounge

In partnership with the Atwater Library based in Montreal, the Online Learning Lounge is a “lunch and learn” hour to pick up practical digital skills. It takes place online, sporadically throughout the year.

The workshops have specific themes, such as learning to use Excel or learning how to file things digitally. The focus is on improving employability skills. Each workshop features a brief presentation; then participants are invited to break out into one-on-one online tutoring sessions in order to practice the skill at hand and ask questions. The workshops are open to all, but they are hosted during lunch in order to reach working people who want to update their skills.

Tech Hub

Tech Hub is a volunteer-run, one-on-one, in-person tutoring program. Learners are invited to bring their own devices, and questions they have about them. Each learner is paired with a volunteer tutor for one hour at a time; the tutoring is based on the learner's needs.

Learners have brought a variety of problems to Tech Hub. For example, *How do I use my phone? Or, I need help finding where things have downloaded to on my laptop. Can you relate to this one? – I just upgraded my phone and I no longer know how to find the applications I used to use. A last example: How can I send pictures to my grandchildren? Anything goes!*



Tutoring. (photo: Courtesy LIA)

When learners sign up, LIA personnel ask what they are hoping to learn, in order to better pair the learner and tutor, based on availability and skills.

“We really try to focus on being able to ensure that what we've worked on has been practiced during the session,” Serena Selby, the coordinator told me. It is a hands-on learning experience, which gives learners “a chance to learn and try.” The goal is to help ensure the learner has the confidence to continue using their devices independently.

Typically, sessions are one hour on Friday afternoons at the LIA office in Lennoxville, with three learner-tutor pairs working together.

This program is in high demand. LIA is actively looking for volunteer tutors and learners.

Navigating the digital landscape is becoming more and more important. LIA aims to foster a culture of lifelong learning, and wants Townshippers to know they have a place to grow their skills.

Persons interested in becoming a tutor, learning digital literacy, or receiving LIA's newsletter by email can contact Serena at serena@lia-estrie.org or 819-346-7009.



Alanna Catrina Fernandes is a homeschooling mom, doula, caregiver, and freelance translator, editor, and artist. A lover of many things, she especially cherishes her family and the beautiful Townships. At Literacy in Action, she also directs an English-conversation program for healthcare workers.

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ETRC Townships History Quiz

by Jazmine Aldrich

(P998 ETRC Graphic Material collection)



- By 1996, the internet café craze was sweeping the Townships. Which of these local establishments was opened by three CEGEP de Sherbrooke students?
 - Café Electronique
 - La Sorbonne
 - Presse Boutique
 - Café Bistro Internet
- Which Townships elementary school was the first to be connected to the “information highway” in 1995?
 - Butler Elementary School, Bedford
 - Sunnyside Elementary School, Stanstead
 - Pope Memorial Elementary School, Bury
 - Princess Elizabeth Elementary School, Magog
- Where was the website of the Canadian Dairy Research Network born?
 - Cowansville
 - Lennoxville
 - East Angus
 - Stanbridge East



Jazmine Aldrich is head archivist at the Eastern Townships Resource Centre. She has also worked with archival organizations in Quebec and Ontario.

ANSWERS: Page 22

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***The Eastern Townships Adventure, Vol. 1*, by Bernard Epps**

Review by Jack Garneau

If your roots are in the Townships, you should enjoy reading *The Eastern Townships Adventure, Volume 1: A History to 1837* by Bernard Epps. If your roots are NOT in the Townships, now is the time to discover why this place, with its fascinating and rich heritage, has been, over the years, such a source of inspiration for so many.

My own roots in Quebec go back to the first peoples, as I am of Huron and Algonquin ancestry, along with many strains of European peoples. My forebears have lived in Eastern Canada and the New England colonies since these areas were settled back in the 1600s.

The author, Bernard Epps, came from England to the United States and then to Canada, settling in Gould Station, where, coincidentally, he lived in a house that had belonged to one of my relatives. We, too, lived in Gould Station, across the road from my MacLean grandmother's home, and where we were related to most of the population of this small village. Mr. Epps soon realized that this area had a rich history, and he commenced writing a number of books related to this history.

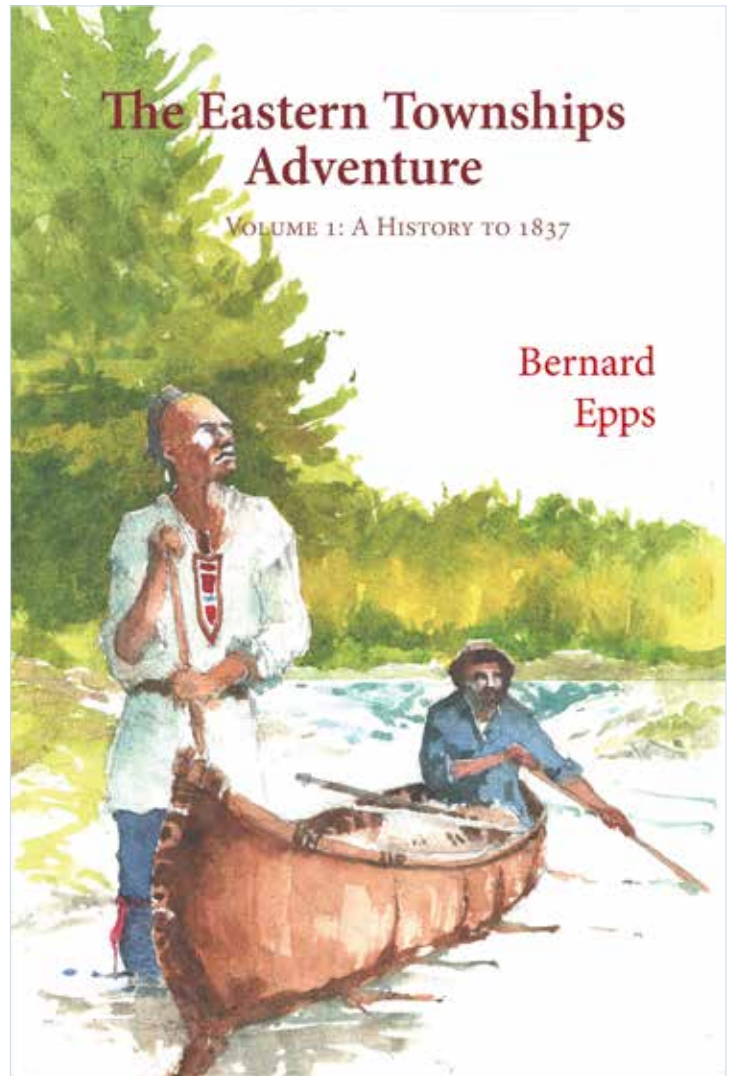
This book of five chapters deals with (1) the early settlement of Quebec by the French, (2) the American Revolution, (3) The Peace of Versailles, (4) the French Revolution, and (5) the Border War, and the aftermath of these events in the Townships. This volume focuses on how these events influenced the lives of the local people who inhabited this area that we call the Eastern Townships and our French-speaking neighbours call Estrie.

I think Epps has taken each of the topics of his five chapters and developed them in a most satisfactory and meaningful way; the reader emerges with a better understanding of what it means to be a "Townshipper." For example, he has broached the topic of the United Empire Loyalists and the question as to whether the first settlers were Loyalists or simply individuals seeking to relocate in a peaceful and profitable location. He has included actual written communications that took place between the individuals, and a very extensive bibliography that allows more serious readers to examine the correspondence that took place.

The author explained the manner in which the Townships were settled: leaders and associates were granted large tracts of land and, much later, the British American Land Company sold land to settlers. He gave no mention to a third group — the squatters. These were settlers who had no legal claim to any land and often settled on land that legally belonged to someone else.

An appendix on the Abenaki Connection, along with endnotes on each chapter, shows the indigenous involvement. There is also an extensive index allowing specific events to be easily located. These new features, along with illustrations, were not in the previous edition of this volume published by Pigwidgeon Press in 1992.

Personally, I think Epps could have included another topic—the influence that rivers played in the location



of settlements. Many of the settlements were located near rivers. Dams and ponds were constructed and the power generated was used to run mills and factories. This subject could have been developed, showing the gradual change from water power using water wheels to steam, and later electricity.

Epps's style of writing enables one to feel involved in the day-to-day activities of these courageous settlers and this aspect gives his writing a sense of reality and meaning.



Jack Garneau is a retired administrator who worked at Alexander Galt in Lennoxville from 1969-1991. Over the years he has been active in many volunteer activities. He was municipal council member for the Municipalities of Sawyerville, Canton de Eaton, and Cookshire Eaton. He has served on the boards of the Journal régional Le Haut-Saint-François, the CLSC de Fleurs de Lys, the Johnville Bog, and the Dixville Foundation. He also served as Honorary Colonel of the Sherbrooke Hussars. His present passion is doing genealogical research.

History Quiz	3: B
Answers:	2: A
	1: D

The Eastern Townships Adventure, Vol. 2, by Bernard Epps

Review by Wendy Patrick

As much as a born and raised Townshipper — such as myself — believes they know the history of our beloved area, when you sit down to read of Bernard Epps's *The Eastern Townships Adventure, Volume 2: 1837-1900*, you realize how little you actually know. I recommend keeping your tablet or laptop close at hand to research place names, personages, and industries which no longer exist.

This recently found and published manuscript of the late Bernard Epps is written in a series of subtitled short stories spanning three chapters. As indicated in the title, they are the adventures of our forebears — the builders of the Eastern Townships.

The book is extremely well-researched and detailed, containing much more historical information than is covered in your general Canadian or Quebec history course. This work focuses on the English-speaking population made up of Scottish, Irish and English immigrants. Epps describes their successes in building a viable, profitable economy through industries, mining and to a lesser degree, farming. He also recounts the

The Eastern Townships Adventure, Volume 1: A History to 1837
Softcover, 300 pages

The Eastern Townships Adventure, Volume 2: 1837 to 1900
Softcover, 242 pages

Both volumes by Bernard Epps (2024)
Shoreline Press, ETRC, *Townships Sun*

\$50/set of two volumes. (TownshipsSun/SHOP)

difficulties they faced from our southern neighbours — tariffs, annexation (sound familiar?), Fenian Raids, and domestic unrest stemming from the Papineau uprising and the hanging of Louis Riel.

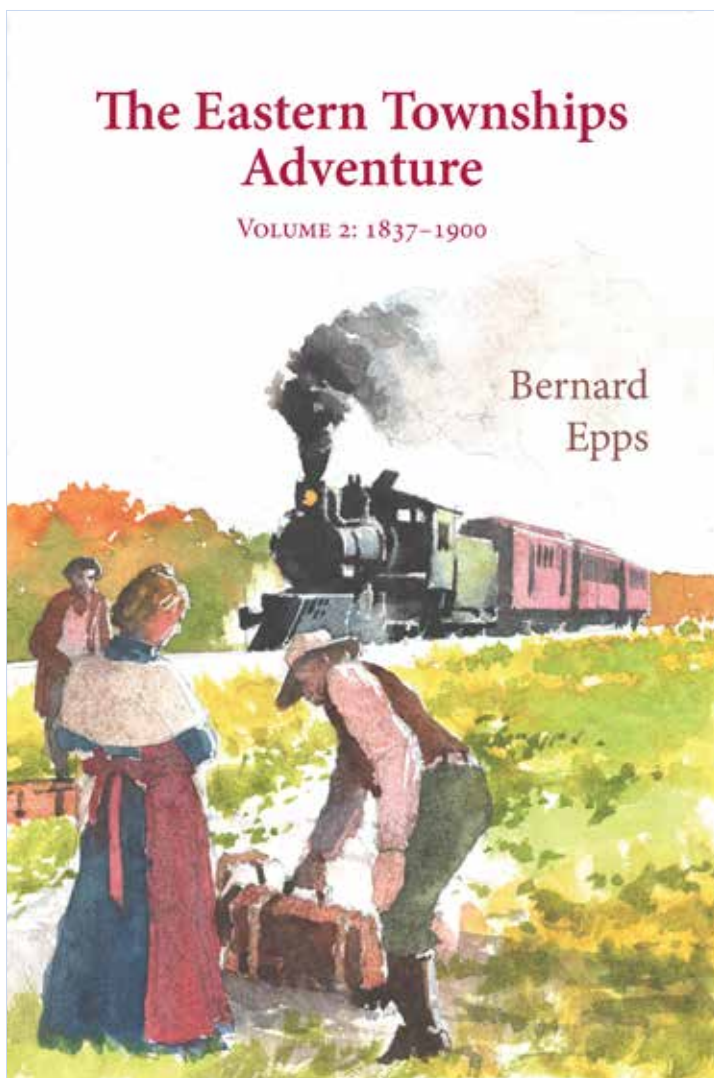
We also experienced our own potato famine, which deprived the population not only of an important food source, but whiskey, which appears to have been at least as essential to a Townshipper's daily life — much to the dismay of the Temperance Union.

Epps delves into the importance of the construction of the railroad in developing Sherbrooke into a major hub in the Townships. Running east, west, north, and south, it allowed for easier transport of goods between towns and villages as well as between the United States and Quebec. It also served to bring tourists and artists to the area to explore the Lake Memphremagog terrain, and stay at splendid inns to fish, hike, or paint the landscape.

The Eastern Townships was an important part of the political scene at that time — Epps describes visits from British lords and politicians who were greeted by crowds of people. Balls were organized in their honour with stunning pageantry, and they were invited to stay at magnificent private homes. The names of the owners of these homes, the industrialists, are still familiar to us and are in use to this day: Paton, Colby, Dufferin, and Foster, for example.

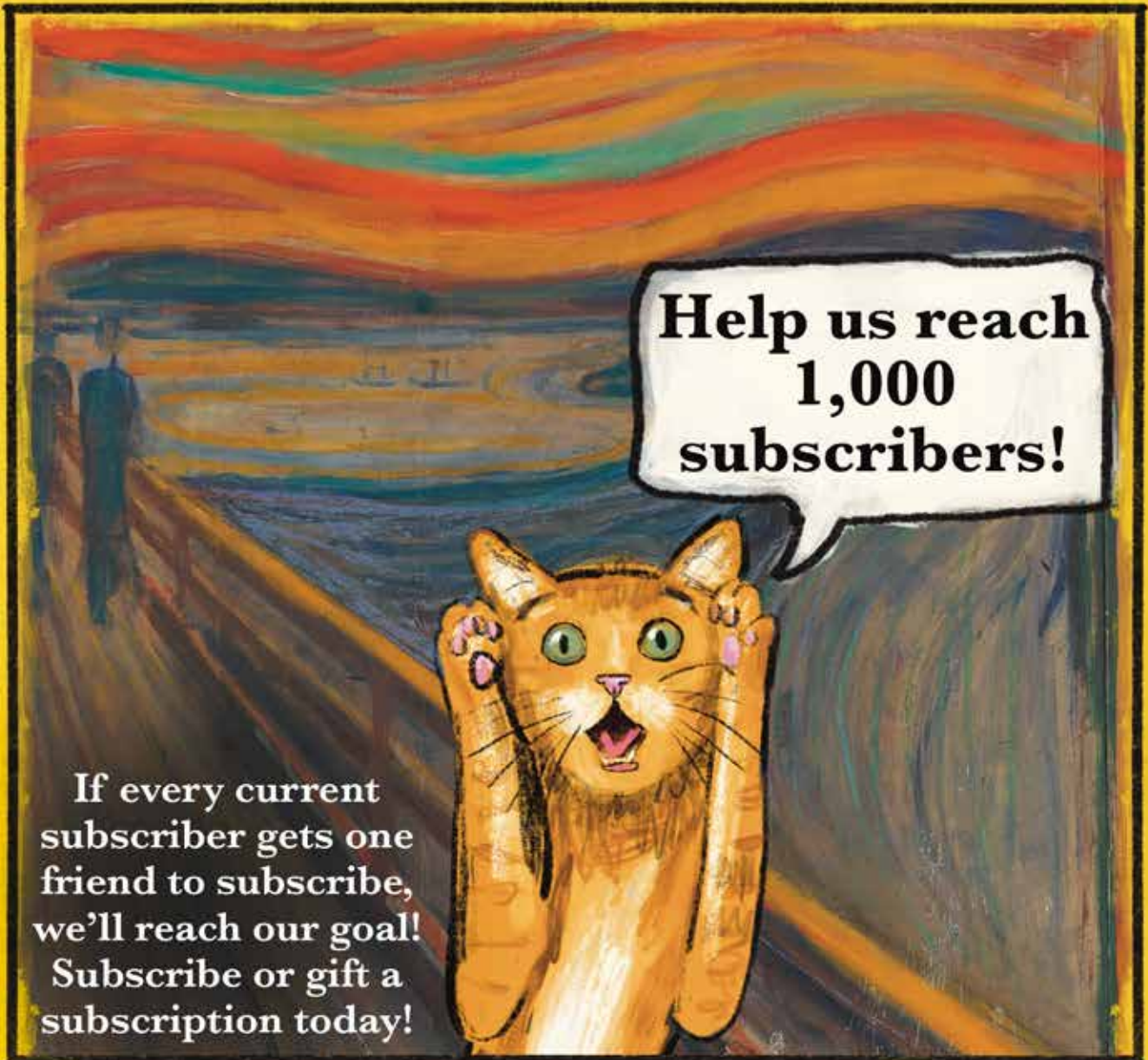
Underlying the above, the author paints a bleak forecast for the English-speaking population of the Townships. Epps discusses the efforts of Alexander T. Galt to protect the English minority rights as the Catholic Church became more powerful, and French Canadians were persuaded to settle in the Townships even as the English population was drawn westward with the promise of a better future.

Epps closes on a rather gloomy note, with a quote from Robert Sellar, then-editor of the *Huntingdon Gleaner*, in which Sellar describes the overgrown and neglected burial plots of our English ancestors. The hefty appendix offers varied responses to this ending by contemporary writers Royal Orr, Marc T. Boucher, Marie Moliner, Scott Verity Stevenson, Joanne Pocock, and William Floch.



Wendy Patrick is a native Townshipper, born and raised in the Richmond area. She did her post-secondary education at Bishop's University and worked for 30 years for Champlain Regional College. She is currently retired and lives in the Lennoxville area.

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