

A History of Haiku in Canada

-by Terry Ann Carter

(excerpts from this essay have previously appeared in Frogpond and in Haiku Review Canada)

Vancouver was the heart of Japanese Canada. In the pre-war years the city was home to nearly 40% of the Japanese-Canadian population, of which the great majority was concentrated in the small area along Powell Street, forming an ethnic enclave known as Nihon-machi (Japantown), or “Little Tokyo.” Political, economic, educational, and religious institutions thrived here. Smaller communities were also formed throughout the province: Steveston and other fishing villages, sawmill towns along the Pacific coast and on Vancouver Island, and agricultural communities in the Fraser and Okanagan valleys.

Immediately after the Pearl Harbour attack on December 7, 1941, all persons of Japanese descent, even Canadian citizens, were identified as “enemy aliens.” Within hours, the entire fleet of 1,200 fishing vessels was impounded. Automobiles, radios, cameras were confiscated and a night-time curfew was imposed. All Japanese Canadians were required to register with the newly formed British Columbia Security Commission; relocation camps were established in the interior of British Columbia and elsewhere. Nearly 5,000 Issei (first-generation Japanese Canadians) and Nisei (second-generation) were sent to the Slocan Valley Internment Camp.

Stone Voices: Wartime Writings of Japanese Canadian Issei by Keibo Oiwa, published by Véhicule Press, Montréal in 1991, records the diaries, letters and poems of some of these “prisoners.” Haiku circles were formed to help normalize the conditions of extremity. In the chapter “Slocan Diary,” Kaoru Ikeda portrays a life of cooking, gathering food, being surrounded by nature, and looking after family health. This diary shows a way of collective living where friends and family members, young and old, gathered to exchange their knowledge, console one another, and put their feelings into traditional Japanese poetic forms. These haiku from Kaoru’s diary are perhaps some of the first examples of haiku (translated into English) to be found in Canada.

picking berries
I happen on a bear print
in the Slocan mountains

mountain life
gathering fallen wood
the right job for an old one

In her diary marked “March 5, 1941,” Kaoru writes: “Clear and sunny. Today is the day of *sekku*, Girls’ Day. A while ago I decided to make dolls for my grandchildren, to celebrate *sekku*. I used rags and anything else I could find. Here is my haiku I attached to a doll.”

Hatsu-sekku
a beaming newborn
peach blossom

On her 68th birthday, Kaoru wrote of her accumulating years: “I’m grateful that I’m not sick and therefore a burden on everybody.”

arranging chrysanthemums
silently
I celebrate this day

Slocan Valley was also the internment camp of Canadian iconic educator, environmental activist, and

author, David Suzuki, and his family.

In French Canada, Simone Routier was the author of a first poetry collection containing fourteen haiku. Published in 1928, *L'immortel adolescent* won Quebec's Athanase-David prize.

mon coeur qui t'attend/ toujours le silence/ et l'immense effeuillement

my heart awaiting you/ silence still/ and the vast falling of leaves...

In the late 1950's / early 60's, Leonard Cohen published what is likely the first haiku by a leading Canadian poet. The haiku-like poem was titled and dedicated to Frank and Maria Scott. It appeared in his collection *The Spice-Box of Earth* (McClelland & Stewart, 1961).

Summer Haiku

Silence

and a deeper silence

when the crickets

hesitate

In English Canada, Claire Pratt, daughter of eminent poet and educator E.J. Pratt, published *Haiku* in 1965, the first author of English haiku. Claire contracted poliomyelitis when she was four years old, and suffered with this disease her entire life. She had to give up her prominent position as editor-in-chief at McClelland & Stewart, Canada's premier publishing house, to work freelance. Her articles and poems were published in several literary reviews, and her woodcuts were exhibited in various galleries. An artist of many talents, it was her interest in Japanese prints that brought her to haiku. She illustrated many of her own poems which also made her a haiga enthusiast. Two of her haiku sequences from *The Music of Oberon* (1975) inspired Canadian composer Euphrosyne Keefer to compose two works from these poems: first for soprano and flute, and eight years later for soprano and piano. Claire Pratt published a final small collection of haiku *Black Heather* in 1980. She died in 1995.

The following examples were reprinted from her landmark collection *Haiku* by the Haiku Society of Canada, later to be known as Haiku Canada.

the fog has settled

around us. A faint redness

where the maple was

green is the wet night

and fingers at my casement

linger crookedly

In 1969, Rod Wilmot published Canada's second all-haiku collection also titled *Haiku*. As an undergraduate literature and music student, Rod's devotion to haiku and the haiku community would allow his friends and followers to see a developing talent. Later he would publish *The Ribs of Dragonfly* (1984) and *Sayings for the Invisible* (1988).

dawn

suddenly nude

the lake shivers

now the spade

sinks by itself

the fireflies turning the dark

endless scales
on the neighbour's flute
my mother's ironing Dorothy Howard

in every puddle
the after-storm-sky reflecting...
all the quiet Betty Drevniok

shaded by the crisscross
of expressway overpasses
the sun tanned billboard girl LeRoy Gorman

November nightfall
the shadow of the headstone
longer than the grave Nick Avis

the newly widowed woman
watering her lawn
in the rain Marco Fraticelli

By this time, the Haiku Canada weekends had moved to an old monastery in Aylmer, Quebec, with provisions directed by Dorothy Howard and later Ruby Spriggs. Prominent poets from the monastery years also included Grant Savage, Hans Jongman, Marshall Hryciuk, and Marianne Bluger. Marianne was instrumental in bringing a constitution to Haiku Canada and labored for many years on the project; she worked closely with Muriel Ford (Toronto) on the writing and advocacy of this important documentation. With Betty Drevniok, Margaret Saunders, Muriel Ford, Dorothy Howard, anne mckay, and Sandra Fuhringer, Marianne was an important female voice in the development of English-language haiku in Canada, and by the 90's was a strong influence on newer female poets. Karen Sohne added her brilliant voice to the Canadian chorus when she made a permanent move to Canada from the United States.

Other French-Canadian haiku voices include Jocelyne Villeneuve (1941-1998) who is honoured by Haiku Canada with the Jocelyne Villeneuve Prix for French-speaking haiku poets. Micheline Beaudry and Janick Belleau also publish in French with translations into English.

Haiku Canada is a well-run organization with a constitution, a list of officers, a publishing branch that first produced the *Haiku Canada Newsletter* and now the *Haiku Canada Review* edited by LeRoy Gorman which is produced twice a year (a winter/spring issue and a summer/fall issue). Since 2007, the *Haiku Canada Review* dedicates some of its pages to French haiku; this section is coordinated by Micheline Beaudry. The *Haiku Canada Members' Anthology*, introduced at each Haiku Canada Weekend, has guest editors who usually serve for three years.

Perhaps the most influential figure in the formative years of the haiku movement in Canada was Toronto medical doctor/poet Eric Amann. He founded the magazine *Haiku* and was its editor for three years. Under Amann's editorship *Haiku* rapidly became one of the most influential North American periodicals, publishing experimental as well as classical work. After a hiatus of seven years, during which he engaged in other kinds of writing, Amann returned to haiku with a new magazine *Cicada* which immediately achieved a similar status. In 1982, Amann curtailed his haiku activities once again. During this year, Toronto poets Keith Southward and Marshall Hryciuk inaugurated *Inkstone* which appeared over the next ten years. The periodical became known for its hard-hitting but well-reasoned reviews. Although *Inkstone* ceased publication in the early 90's, Dorothy Howard's *RAW NerVZ HAIKU* continued to provide a place for Canadian and international poets to publish their edgier poems. The graphic influences of both Dorothy and Ruby Spriggs enhanced early publications and

newsletters. Ruby was well-known for her line drawings and small doodles; she also created large canvasses with acrylics to enhance her haiku. Both Marianne Bluger and Ruby Spriggs died of breast cancer, within two years of each other. It was a great sorrow for those in the Haiku Canada community.

George Swede is another significant pioneer in the early days of haiku development in Canada. Born in Riga, Latvia, George came to Canada with his mother and stepfather after the Second World War. After earning degrees in psychology from UBC and Dalhousie, George settled in Toronto for an academic career at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, now Ryerson University. It is the numbers around George's contribution to the development of haiku in Canada (and the world) that always astonish. He has published over 2,000 poems in over 7,000 places. His poems have been translated into 21 languages; he edited three anthologies: *The Canadian Haiku Anthology* (Three Trees Press, 1979); *Cicada Voices, the Selected Haiku of Eric Amann* (High/Coo Press, 1983); and with co-editor Randy Brooks, *Global Haiku 25 Poets Worldwide* (Iron Press, 2000). George was consulting editor for eight anthologies; he has written 94 articles on poetry and 17 on psychology; he has written 13 children's books and two psychology texts; he has had five gallery shows for his haiga; and was the editor (with Anita Kruminis, assistant editor) of *Frogpond: The Journal of the Haiku Society of America*. The following examples give a glimpse into his humour and precise eye.

Paris pond
a frog Picassos
my face

again, the bald barber
cuts my hair
too short

thick fog lifts
unfortunately, I am where
I thought I was

Betty Drevniok, also a major contributor to the early development of haiku in Canada, was born in the United States, and relocated to Toronto as a nurse shortly after World War II. She discovered haiku in the late 60's through her work with sumi-e brush painting. In 1976, under her haiku name Makato, she published *Inland – Three Rivers from an Ocean*. In 1980, she organized the first International Haiku Society of Canada meeting in Toronto. Several Festivals of the Falling Leaves followed in Combermere where she lived. Betty was the secretary of the society for the first two years, and president for the next three. In 1993, she published a final individual collection *Thoughts of Spring* (Hexagram Series, King's Road Press, Montreal). Since 2002 (five years after her death), Haiku Canada honours her memory through the Betty Drevniok Annual Haiku Award.

brilliant sunshine through autumn maples a glimpse of the lake

harvest moon:
cutting the pie
into six pieces

Another early luminary, poet and musician, Marco Fraticelli, travelled from Montreal to join the like-minded poets at Combermere. Writing haiku for over thirty years, Marco has published poems in many anthologies and publications. In 1988, he founded the Hexagram Series and published outstanding haiku poets in North America. Marco was instrumental in the holographic (written by hand, as in holographic will) anthologies to commemorate anniversaries for Haiku Canada. The first *Holographic Anthology* appeared in 1987 (for the 10th anniversary), then 1992, 1997, 2004 (with Philomene Kocher), and 2007 (with Philomene Kocher). In 2012, for the 35th anniversary, he edited the sixth

Holographic Anthology with Marshall Hryciuk. In 2008, he was English co-editor (with Terry Ann Carter) and Francine Chicoine (French editor) of *Carpe Diem: Anthologie canadienne du haïku / Canadian Anthology of Haiku*, a collaborative publication of Borealis Press and Les Éditions David. In 2013 he published *Drifting* (a haibun memoir of the journals [1910 – 1916] of Celesta Oakley), with Catkin Press, Ontario.

Dorothy Howard, illustrator, calligrapher, editor, translator, educator, book maker, and former co-president (1985-1988) and president (1988-1990) of Haiku Canada, was an active contributor to early Haiku Canada events and publications. She organized Haiku Canada Weekends at the monastery in Aylmer, and co-edited with André Duhaime, *Anthologie canadienne HAIKU Canadian Anthology* (Éditions Asticou). From 1994-2007 she edited *RAW NerVZ HAIKU*, and *casse-pieds* since 2006. In November 2006, she published Amann's *The Wordless Poem* translated into French by Daniel Py. Dorothy is the memory of Haiku Canada as she remains its archivist to this day. Volumes of books, pamphlets, newsletters, broadsheets, art works, line the walls of her home in Aylmer, Quebec. Her collection *the photographer's shadow* was published in the Hexagram Series (King's Road Press, 1999).

transferring the rent
electronically
raking real leaves

divorce papers
i put a new battery
in my clock

Making his mark as an outstanding editor of national as well as international fame, LeRoy Gorman contributed to the growth and interest of haiku in Canada with his own haiku moving into the aesthetics of the experimental, the concrete, the visual poem. His minimalist poems have been appearing in print for over thirty years. LeRoy has published poetry with Guernica Press, Éditions Asticou, Nietzsche's Brolly, Proof Press, King's Road Press, and Timberline. Over the years he has assumed or written under at least 50 pseudonyms. Since 1996 he has been editor of the Haiku Canada publications: Haiku Canada newsletter 1996-2006, the *Haiku Canada Review* beginning in 2007, as well as annual broadsheets for Haiku Canada members. In 1998 he began to publish poetry leaflets and postcards under his pawEprint imprint.

first haircut of the year
the barber and I have snow shoveled
before it falls

appointment calendar
a coffee ring joins
one day to the other

could sell you anything
his coffin has a shine
not even snow sticks to

For twenty years, Toronto poet and book marketer, Marshall Hryciuk, has been writing haiku and winning international awards. At the Haiku International Association symposium in Tokyo (2009) he presented his collection *Arizona to Crete* (Imago Press, 2008). The poems were translated into Japanese and posted on the HIA website. Other publications, among many, include *Singed Leaves: A Book of Haiku Poetry* (Dundurn Press, 1990) and *Persimmon Moons* (Imago Press, 1998). His partner Karen Sohne operates Red Iron Press which publishes haiku in small handmade, folded broadsheets. Together

they organize the annual “Late Night Renku Parties” at all Haiku Canada weekends, with Marshall serving as renku master.

in moon light
a brown pine needle
spinning above the ferns

(first place in the Third Annual Croatian International Contest)

Haiku in Canada began to grow regionally in the late 1990’s, and by early 2000 poetry chapters were springing up across the country. On the Pacific coast, a chapter of Haiku Canada was formed called pacifi-kana founded by Alice Frampton. Many pacifi-kana members, including Alice, Winona Baker, Helen Baker, Allan Brown, elehna de sousa, Melissa Dixon, Ana Vakar, Melissa Dixon, Ava Kar, Carole MacRury, Naomi Beth Wakan, Vicki McCullough, and Edward Zuk continue to meet under the facilitation of the Vancouver Haiku Group, organized by Angela Naccarato. The VHG holds a monthly kukai and occasionally meets at the Sun Yat Sen Gardens for ginkgo walks and discussions. Members include Jessica Tremblay, Jacqueline Pearce, Lynne Jambor, James Moran, and others. For the past 10 years, Naomi Beth Wakan (who lives on Gabriola Island with her sculptor husband, Eli) has hosted an annual haiku retreat at her home. Over the years, participants have read and work-shopped countless poems, given numerous readings and presentations, and enjoyed the annual ginkgo (haiku walk) to nearby Drumbeg Provincial Park. Poet Laureate of Redmond, Washington, and founder of Haiku North America, Michael Dylan Welch, joins the pacifi-kana haiku events whenever he can.

Haiku in western Canada also includes two newer groups: Haiku Arbutus recently formed in Victoria, facilitated by Terry Ann Carter, and Haiku North of Sixty, formed by Kathy Munro with poets meeting seasonally in Whitehorse, Yukon Territories. Examples of haiku from the Pacific Northwest include:

we part the moon follows us both Ana Vakar

wild pears –
yellow jackets push
under the skin Carole MacRury

a length of rope
knotted with seaweed –
pull of the tide Susan Constable

the heron
striking its own reflection
shallow water Naomi Beth Wakan

in the fog
a dog noses maple leaves
winter election Vicki McCullough

first snow...
the children’s hangers
clatter in the closet Michael Dylan Welch

spring memorial
the dampness
in a handful of soil Alice Frampton

moss-hung trees

a deer moves into the hunter's silence	Winona Baker
dawn stars still twinkling ... the whiteness of daisies	elehna de sousa
northern lights just beyond the reach of my walking stick	jkmunro
late for work – cherry petals in her hair	Jessica Tremblay
sparrows shelter under the 7 – 11 sign October wind	Jacqueline Pearce
music through the hollow reed – oil of myrrh	Angela Naccarato

The mid-western branch of Haiku Canada, a group calling themselves the Magpie Poets, meets regularly in Calgary, Alberta, to share and promote haiku. Their collection *A Piece of Eggshell* (2004) includes poets Patricia Benedict, DeVar Dahl, Jean Jorgensen, Joanne Morcom, and Tim Sampson. Here is a sampling from this collection:

prairie wind snow fills the mouth of the badger hole	DeVar Dahl
after rain two magpies take turns preening themselves	Patricia Benedict
they seem to drift out of waning moonlight snow clouds	Jean Jorgensen

In the metropolis of Toronto, the birthplace of Haiku Canada, it is no surprise to find an elite group of poets gathering for monthly meetings to discuss, share, and promote haiku. The group was called Haiku Deer Park; their first meeting was February, 28, 1998. Poets met until its last workshop September 27, 2008. They met 96 times at the Deer Park branch of the Toronto Public Library. The group never exceeded fifty, and sometimes only three or four would show up for a January meeting. Besides five annual broadsheets of members' haiku, the group composed six renku in various lengths and published two newsletters. Although Deer Park has disbanded, Toronto (and vicinity) poets include George Swede, Anita Krumins, Marshall Hryciuk, Karen Sohne, Hans Jongman, Ann Goldring, Nancy Prasad, Frances Mary Bishop, Dina E. Cox, Arch Haslett, Sonja Dunn, Terra Martin, Vivian Wong, Marilyn Potter, and Muriel Ford among others.

Canada's capital city of Ottawa was the birthplace of Ottawa KaDo founded by Marianne Bluger and Terry Ann Carter in 2001. Marianne, involved with Haiku Canada for many years, wanted to revive

haiku meetings in the area and invited Terry Ann to join her in setting up a small gathering of like-minded poets. Poets from the “golden years” included Grant Savage, Dorothy Howard, who joined in from across the river, and Guy Simser, who had been writing and studying haiku during his years in Japan. Other haiku poets included Claudia Coutu Radmore, Philomene Kocher, Margot Gallant, Heather A. MacDonald, Sheila M Ross, Melanie Noll, Pearl Pirie, Luminita Suse, and Mike Montreuil (currently vice president of Haiku Canada) who brought his French translations to the primarily English group. Sandra Stephenson (writing under the name Czandra Mostly) often joins the KaDo group from Quebec. KaDo Ottawa meets seasonally and each spring launches a broadsheet at the Embassy of Japan. In 2011, the poets were invited to prepare an evening of poetry for the Embassy’s cultural program. Three small chapbooks were created for that occasion: *Leaf Shadows* (haiku of the seasons), *Me and You* (haiku of love and loss), and *Smell of Coffee* (urban haiku). The books were edited by Terry Ann Carter, Guy Simser, and Heather McDonald. Here are some poems that were read that evening:

from reed to reed
a blackbird follows
its song

Grant Savage

each lilac showing me
what I do not know
about lilacs

Claudia Coutu Radmore

breakfast
in bed
your raisin cinnamon kiss

Terry Ann Carter

using the mirror
my mother gave me
the other side magnified

Philomene Kocher

midnight
another ping
from the empty pop can

Mike Montreuil

a hazy face
in the sleet mirror
granite tombstone

Guy Simser

widow for a year
now his hat missing
from the hook

Pearl Pirie

In 2012, Terry Ann moved to Victoria, and KaDo was governed by Claudia Coutu Radmore. In May of 2015, leadership was turned over to Pearl Pirie.

In Montreal, two haiku groups coexist: a collective of Haiku Canada poets including Marco Fraticelli, Angela Leuck, Maxianne Berger, Ellen Cooper, Pamela Cooper, and others; and a French-speaking collective, founded by Micheline Beaudry in May 2005, which includes Haiku Canada members Jeanne Painchaud, Janick Belleau, Huguette Ducharme, Diane Descôteaux, Liette Janelle, Luce Pelletier, and others. When Angela Leuck and Maxianne Berger edited *Sun Through the Blinds: Montreal Haiku Today* in 2003, they encouraged Rod Wilmot and André Duhaime to join the anthology. Here is a sampling:

at the antique store
deep in the empty dresser
the sun's rays

Micheline Beaudry (translated by Maxianne Berger)

your beard
soft against my neck
sun through the blinds

Maxianne Berger

spring
melting
us

Marco Fraticelli

drifting over
the waterfall
sound of a gong

Angela Leuck

trottoir verglacé
à petits pas
sur d'autres pas

icy sidewalk
step by step
in another's footsteps

André Duhaime

André has completed four books of haiku for children published by Winnipeg's Les Éditions des Plaines.

Present on the international scene, Montrealer Janick Belleau has presented papers at Haiku Canada, Haiku North America, and at conferences in Japan and France. She has won international awards for her writing. In 2006, Janick and Micheline Beaudry edited the first erotic haiku collection in French, *L'Érotique poème court / haïku*; half of the poets (many Haiku Canada members) originated in Canada; others were from Francophone countries, mainly France. Janick's historical research into the lives and poetry of female haiku poets in Canada is renowned.

cold winter day
she phones her mother who says:
"who are you? "

Founded by Abigail Friedman in 2005, Quebec City hosts HaikuQuébec, a group that meets on the second Tuesday of every month at the Morrin Centre or the Library and History Society. Poets write in French and English, however, most of the discussion is in French. Occasionally the group invites guest speakers for talks and workshops, but French is a must. (Translators are available.) Members include organizers Jeanne Grégoire and Jeannine St-Amand plus poets Geneviève Rey, Jean Deronzier, Hélène Leclerc, André Vézina and Donna MacEwen.

In eastern Canada, lawyer (QC) Nick Avis, in St. John's, Newfoundland, is prominent on the haiku scene. Nick was present at some of the early meetings in Combermere, Ontario, and the monastery in Quebec, and served as President of Haiku Canada for six years. His poetry has been published nationally and internationally for thirty years; his chapbook *footprints* from the *Hexagram Series* (King's Road Press, 1993) won a Haiku Society of America award.

blooming on both sides
of the rusted railway line

new dandelions
separating yolks we talk of men and women
drifting
in and out of sleep
snow turns to rain

Haiku Canada continues to be the forum for haiku poetry in Canada. With over 240 members, conferences are held annually, on the Victoria Day long weekend, with lectures, panels, performances, book launches, readings and renku parties. In 2015, the annual Haiku Canada conference will be held in Victoria, British Columbia, co-hosted by Terry Ann Carter and Carole MacRury, with assistance from Haiku Arbutus. A highlight of the conference will showcase a chapbook of haiku honouring Dr. Inazo Nitobe, titled *A Hundred Umbrellas*, published by Leaf Press. Internationally recognized Celtic Buddhist and haiku poet, Gabriel Rosenstock, will present the keynote address on “The Art of Emptiness.” More information can be gathered at the [Haiku Canada website](#).

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Permission has been granted by Véhicule Press for the use of haiku from *Stone Voices: Wartime Writings of Japanese Canadian Issei*. Keibo Oiwa, Editor.

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