

Morden: A great Canadian town

I had occasion to visit Morden, Manitoba last week.

As lead sentences go, that one couldn't be counted on to bulge eyeballs, cause constrictions of the gullet or cause, say, the Prime Minister to choke on his morning croissant and gasp "Good God, Mila! Wouldja look at this!" Morden is Morden. It is not Mecca or Memphis or Moscow or even Minneapolis. Just a small prairie town stuck in the middle of an ocean of wheat and canola about an hour and a half's drive south and west of Winnipeg. It boasts no waterfalls, no mountain ranges, on trophy muskies and NHL franchise. It's an unhosannahed hard-working burg hard-hit by the R-word that's battering the bejeebers out of most Canadians and that our Finance Minister has such a tough time pronouncing. The people of Morden go about their daily business wondering when real estate will pick up and the

ARTHUR BLACK BASIC BLACK



price of grain will get real. The grouse about the hated GST and wonder if there's any future at all for their kids when they grow up.

Just like the rest of us.

You don't go to Morden to experience gut-wrenching adventure or to sniff the bracing breeze of high-stakes finance finagling. But you can learn a lot about your country in Morden.

A stopover in Morden is especially instructive for a columnist who spends more time than is good for the soul in Toronto. Working in Hogtown, it's easy to forget about the other 3,851,700 square miles of this country, much of it made up of towns like Morden.

"Canada? That's what you see

from the top of the CN Tower on a clear day" a slightly bitter Morden lawyer told me. Two other townsfolk repeated the same bromide. What's interesting about the perception is that it shows what people who don't live in Toronto think of people who do. Torontonians never actually come out and say that their city is the centre of the universe. They just take it for granted. Which is to say they seldom give a passing thought to towns like Morden.

I admit it-- I'd have been embarrassed if someone had asked me what I knew about Morden before I went there. My answer would have been "Not much". I

could have placed it in Manitoba, but I wouldn't have known if it was bigger than Nanaimo or more industrial than Saskatoon or prettier than Fredericton. The truth is it's been a town almost as long as Canada's been a country. Sieur de La Verendrye passed through there. So did the explorer Alexander Henry. It once was called Fort Pinancewaywinning and came within a hair of being known to the world as Dead Horse Creek.

Go back far enough and you would have found Morden under water--water teeming with giant tortoises, aquatic dinosaurs and fish the size of city buses. Centuries later, after the sea dried up the Indians came and lived and died and left huge mounds for us to ponder over.

I came to Morden to make a speech in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the town's library service. In the process I met councilors and farmers and artists and scientists and librarians--the human glue that makes a place

like Morden live.

Morden has an exciting and spectacular story to tell, but you'll never hear about it on The Journal or read about in The Globe and Mail, Canada's "National" newspaper.

It's a pity that our national newsmakers find the Morden of Canada so unnewsworthy, preferring to fill our eyes and ears with junk food snippets about feuding film stars, the flatulent maunderings of politicians and the score of the latest Jersey Devils-Buffalo Sabres game.

I never was a fan of Mao's China, but one idea the Chairman had was brilliant. Each fall he ordered the Chinese intelligentsia out in the fields to assist with the harvest. Wouldn't it be wonderful if every fall Toronto's news editors and TV producers were parachuted into Morden to help bring in the crops?

Maybe not. Probably take too long to train them.