

The Review turns 90

THIS YEAR MARKS OUR MAGAZINE'S 90TH anniversary. Some readers may be surprised to see a new look and masthead, *The Review*, on our cover. The magazine has been formally called the *Imperial Oil Review* for the better part of its 90 years. However, those who read it and know it well have always referred to it simply as *The Review*. So in that spirit, we decided it was time to drop the formality.

The Review holds the distinction of being one of the oldest continuously published magazines in Canada. This issue commemorates that honour and the man who had the foresight to create the magazine.

The Review began as an employee publication, the brainchild of Victor Ross, a man who began his career as a cub reporter on the crime beat for the *Toronto Daily Star* but he eventually rose to the ranks of senior vice-president of Imperial Oil.

For the first 20 years, *The Review* mostly featured oil stories, but there were later to be a few glimmers of Canadiana. To mark the company's 50th anniversary in 1930, Stephen Leacock was commissioned to write a satiric essay on oil's coming of age, entitled "In Praise of Petroleum." Why would one of Canada's greatest humorists write for an employee publication? The essay furthered a controversial theme in Ross's 1927 best-seller, *Petroleum in Canada*, linking mankind's need for oil with war, but went further to foresee a day humanity would rely wholly on fossil fuels. Leacock's essay received critical praise and is still considered a seminal piece by oil historians.



(Above) Victor Ross

(Below) First issue; 50th anniversary issue



That early success helped shape *The Review* into what it is today. In each of its 455 issues since 1917, *The Review* has told the story of Imperial Oil Limited, reporting on the petroleum industry and Imperial's place in it. But, perhaps thanks to that first experiment with the Leacock essay, its scope of interests broadened. Along with the oil

industry pieces, readers came to expect an eclectic mix of Canadiana in both artwork and writing. Its readership also changed. In 1954, the magazine became available to the public. Today, it is read by shareholders, politicians, journalists, teachers, as well as a host of individuals who receive it at home, access it on-line or read it at their local public libraries.

Recent articles have focused on the environment and community engagement – subject areas that are profoundly important to the company and the country. Each issue also includes a story on what the company's charitable arm, the Imperial Oil Foundation, is doing to help improve community life.

And, finally, *The Review* reflects the fact that Imperial is a Canadian company. Light-hearted and unconventional Canadian pieces, such as the current issue's story on Canadian icon Anne Shirley, continue to be a mainstay.

It has been said that everything that has ever appeared on the pages of *The Review* reflects the character of Imperial Oil. An editorial written by James Knight some 40 years ago says it best: "If the piece is amusing, it's because Imperial has a sense of humour; if it's historical, it shows Imperial respects tradition; if it's cultural, it shows our commitment to the aesthetic spirit; if it's businesslike, it shows we know the value of a buck."

If this is your first read of *The Review*, welcome. We hope you enjoy it. To our long-time readers and friends, thanks for coming back. – Catherine Teasdale

Victor Ross: A pioneer of labour relations

A fellow reporter described Victor Ross, founder of *The Review*, as "one of the best-known and one of the best liked men in the Toronto newspaper world." Ross was certainly influential. He started out his career as a crime reporter but, perhaps surprising to the career choice, he had a "wide circle of acquaintances." What made him stand out was his ability to influence others. After his death, one journalist said: "Police-men and detectives would hurry to him with information, their sufficient reward being a smile and a 'Thanks, old man.'"

When he died in 1934, it was reported that 13,000 hockey enthusiasts stood silent at Maple

Leaf Gardens on a Saturday night (he was a noted hockey patron), Imperial Oil offices across Canada closed for the day, and flags on 100 ships at sea were held at half-mast.

In mid-career, as the financial editor of the *Toronto Globe*, he commanded the respect of many in Canadian business, including Walter Teagle, then president of Imperial Oil. Ross started *The Imperial Oil Review* in 1917, but preferring life as a newspaperman, he refused to become an Imperial employee. A year later, Teagle, who was assuming the presidency of Standard Oil in New York, convinced Ross to come with him, in part to found *the Lamp*, a magazine that continues to be published today by ExxonMobil. Ross returned to

Toronto in 1919 and was later named Imperial's first senior vice-president. He accomplished all this and more despite a daily fight with chronic pain in his right leg after becoming disabled in a car accident in 1912 at the age of 34. The accident eventually led to an early death at 56.

While working at Imperial, Ross did his greatest work to improve labour conditions in Canada. His career contributions were monumental in the development of pensions, sickness and death benefits, industrial representation, and cooperative investment and trust funds. To a similar end, his vision for *the Lamp* and *The Review* pioneered a new path for employee-employer communication. ■