



## Allan Fotheringham

### How Washington fell to the women of Canada

Americans won't admit it, of course, but in 1814 British troops stormed Washington and burned down the White House. It's a bit of history not drummed into the minds of American schoolchildren.

Last week, Washington was invaded again from above the border, this time by 120 women known as Broads Canada. The moniker (which no man would touch) is the invention of the ineluctable Pamela Wallin, of TV fame. In real life it was the Businesswomen's Team Canada Trade Mission, mounted by Trade Minister Sergio Marchi for a four-day assault on American markets.

You want assault? Here is the winsome Marianne Bertrand of Toronto, proprietor of Muttluks Inc., who makes and sells fleece-and-leather boots for tender dogs who apparently can't stand Canadian ice and snow. She thinks she already has \$800,000 in annual sales—and just wait until those rich matrons on Fifth Avenue find this neat Christmas gift for the poodle.

Assault? Here is the lady from Medicine Hat, Alta., who owns Ciders by Shamrock, a company that makes juice concentrates. At an Asian businessmen's conference in Vancouver, she left a sample of apple cider concentrate and a cup of water at each desk. They all drank the concentrate.

Such are the droll stories from Broads Canada, which of course is about serious stuff, since one-third of the small businesses in Canada are owned or led by women. The Royal Bank, not a charitable organization the last time we looked, sponsored the invasion and Charlie Coffey, a Royal executive VP who tried to ride shotgun on the troupe, confessed that "We're here for the money."

Nice to hear such honesty from a banker. With 120 women here, it is a lot of disposable income looking for a bank account. The Royal had its advertising tableau prominent in the lobby of Arthur Erickson's magnificent Canadian Embassy, within a martini toss of Capitol Hill, the only embassy in Washington that is on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Here is Sabine Schleese, managing director of a firm in Stouffville, Ont., that makes designer saddles and "equine accessories." They make a plaster cast, she explains, of a rider's "nether regions."

The rider sits, wearing tight-fitting Lycra pink pants, in plaster for 20 minutes while it hardens. And, she has told her husband, "If Tom Selleck comes in, I'll do the fitting."

It is a Week from Hell at the Westin Hotel. Some 250 Canadian women who applied for Broads Canada were turned down. Some genius had booked 100 rooms for 120 delegates. The Westin, in a brilliant performance of public relations, blamed it all on a computer—the bad nanny of all mistakes—and tried to stiff one customer (name supplied on request) with a \$270 tariff for a postage-stamp room instead of the trade mission's \$139 rate.

Such is life in the fast lane. All problems were eased by the sunshine demeanor of the wonderful Connie Connor, who had her 15 minutes of fame a while back when bopped by Sondra Gottlieb, wife of Canada's then-ambassador. Connor is still at the embassy as business development officer.

There is a real touch of class from the elegant Bianca Battistini, vice-president of Can-Am Group Inc. of Magog in Quebec, which specializes in training exporters to find American partners. Women, she explained in one session, are the fastest-growing segment of small businesses in Canada. As such, they can network across Canada, reaching out from Quebec and into Quebec, and thus provide a glue that can keep Canada together. A moving moment.

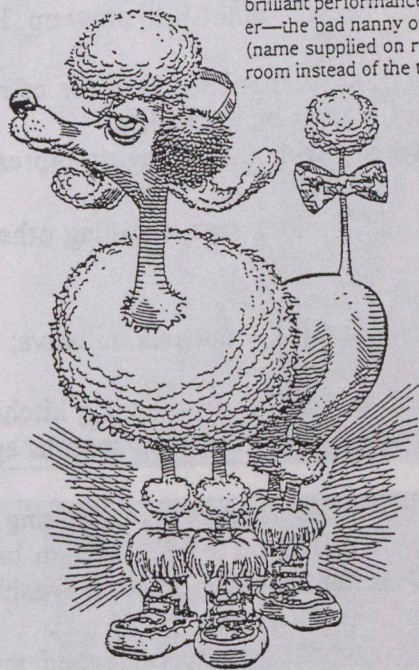
There is the lady from Vancouver who was marketing fridge magnets with "a wow factor." She wore a necklace from which dangled a lock from Louis Vuitton luggage. She explained that she was going to keep it around her

neck until she finally made enough money to buy the actual luggage. Washington in the autumn is sublime. John F. Kennedy once described it as a city that combined "northern charm and southern efficiency." Because of its distance from the frost of the tundra, its foliage is still yellow and orange. White House scandal marches the land and no one cares.

At the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the founder is the archetypal blue blood, Wilhelmina Cole Holladay, wonderfully mannered and dressed as impeccably as one would imagine from her name. She explains the building was the former national headquarters of the Masonic Order and has been totally restored with \$5 million raised privately. The lady from Vancouver with the fridge magnets opens her purse and waves the three-dimensional geegaws in the doyenne's face, like a barker at the midway.

At the closing black-tie banquet at the embassy, the white dome of Capitol Hill bathed in spotlights just out the window, *The Guinness Book of Records* for cleavage is won hands down, naturally, by a delegate from Quebec. *The Guinness Book of Records* for a long speech is captured easily by an earnest lady from the Royal Bank.

Beware, Americans. Your puppies will no longer suffer from chilblains and your husbands will have their nether regions immortalized in plaster.



ROY PETERSON