

The bush camp

educator

Summer and sweat

By JON BROADBERRY

The camp college. A school with no set books, no set curriculum, no set class times and instructors who fly by the seat of their pants.

That's 68-year-old Frontier College, an organization which has been dedicated, since its inception, to bettering the lot of Canadian bush workers.

The college, whose head offices are in Toronto, sends 80-100 university students from across the country to labor camps from Newfoundland to the Yukon.

It is a school with an all-encompassing campus and mottos to go with it:

"I would not have the laborer sacrificed to the result. Let there be worse cotton and better men."

The college is no hideaway for the soft and flabby. The teachers work side by side with the laborers in jobs that break the backs of many.

THE TOUGH CROWD

It is the first time many college students have seen the other side—a society based on toughness, fortitude and endurance.

For many, it is also the first time they have seen the near total lack

"Sign up with Frontier College," Bradwin used to say, "and I promise you all the hard work, low pay and black flies you can stomach—plus a chance to help your fellowman."

With a prospectus like that, how does Frontier College keep a faculty? The college regularly has four times as many applicants as positions. It has laborer-teacher who come back for more.

The job has challenge. The laborer-teacher lays his competence, his self-respect, on the line publicly. And he enjoys it.

Most say they got more than they gave.

The initiates arrive in Toronto sometime in May for a three-year briefing session, in which they are told of a number of possible situations they will find in the bush. These are covered from educational, recreational, social and personal standpoints.

And then the adjustment starts. It begins when they arrive at the railway gang, the mine, the lumber camp, or a huge, long-range construction project. They must find their way in their job. They must get used to it, so that after a fortnight or so they can do a decent day's work.

This is the first essential—if they cannot do this, they will never gain the respect and confidence of the men.

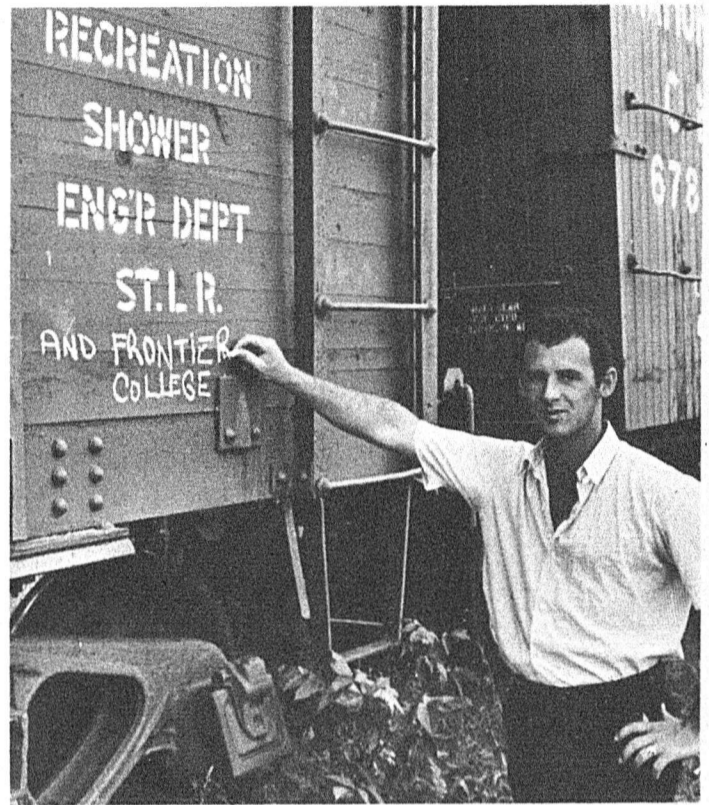
And without respect they might as well pack it in.

They must learn the major need of the workers. It may be that the majority are new Canadians who must learn the English language. This is still the major function of most Frontier College instructors, but it is not the only one nor, in many cases, the most important one.

There may be men of exceptional ability, like the Ph.D. from Belgrade, who informed an instructor on a railway gang that "I wish to better my syntax, which is unfortunately not yet impeccable," or Hungarians who left during the 1956 revolution, and who have advanced technical training.

It is a summer of long hours and heavy demands on the laborer-teacher's ingenuity. To do the work the teacher needs support, and he gets it from the head office. But as Eric W. Robinson, principal since the death of Dr. Bradwin tells them: "We're behind you, but remember we're 1,000 miles behind you."

The job is never finished. Some men never respond to the offered friendship of the laborer-teacher. But friendship grows, it is based on personal respect, and this friendship is the summer's reward aside from their job salary and a small honorarium.



background

This article's author is third-year arts student Jon Broadberry, who spent last summer on a railway gang in Ontario with Frontier College. Broadberry is a stocky history student with an English-type accent—somewhat different from the average steel-driving man to say the least. But he says he came home with something more than a narrower waistline. Frontier College recruits students for the bush camp educational projects every year on Canadian campuses. This year they will be at the National Employment Service's campus office March 2.

of what they thought were universal human traits.

The first two men to tackle these problems were the college's founders, Alfred Fitzpatrick and Edmund Bradwin.

Fitzpatrick was a graduate in theology from Queen's University who went where he left he was most needed—the northern Ontario bush. At that time there were 3,000 camps with 150,000 men. The uniformity of barrenness which he saw is still there. And the concern which he felt for other men is still the main motivation behind Frontier College.

Ed Bradwin is perhaps the best illustration of what many teachers become in a summer's work.

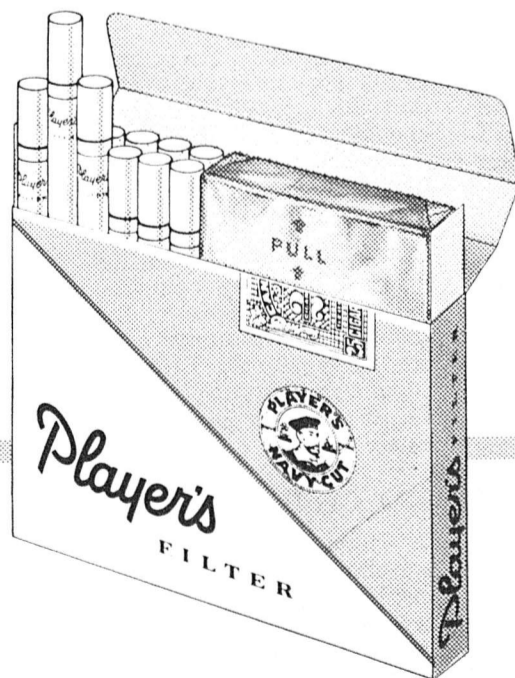
LEGENDARY

Bradwin became more widely known than Fitzpatrick over the years. He is a legendary figure in the Ontario northland, who, 40 years later, is still remembered by the older workers.

He would walk 20 miles with a box of books and magazines, pick up an axe and get a job. He earned a name which is still spoken with respect.

Although he was denied entrance to the University of Toronto, he later earned an honorary L.L.D. from that institution and a Ph.D. from Columbia.

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