

Bill Rea ? Research can be fun sometimes

One thing that came out loud clear during my high school days, and more pointedly when I was in university, was I wasn't very good when it came to doing research.

That's a bit of a pity, because I have since found I rather enjoy it.

More than 30 years ago, I was lined up to do my first celebrity interview. When I arranged the interview with his manager, I was admonished me to make sure I was prepared. I heeded those words, reading every word I could find about the man. I was also motivated by the example of the late Brian Linehan, who was a close family friend and who made his career by surprising his interview subjects with how much he knew about them. It was all pure research. I even drew a Lineman moment when my interview subject, caught somewhat off guard, asked me, "How did you know that?"

I still get the chance, every now and then, to do some of that library-type research.

You might have noticed the Citizen runs an item every week on this page entitled "It happened today." Essentially, It's a couple of paragraphs about something that happened in the past the date that particular issue of the Citizen comes out. I troll the internet, googling the date in question until I find something about which I think I would enjoy writing a couple of paragraphs.

You may recall the offering a couple of Thursdays ago dealt with it being the anniversary of the birth of John T. Scopes.

Some of you might remember him as the man who was the defendant in a sensational trial in Tennessee in 1925 (the year my father was born) regarding the teaching of evolution in public schools.

The trial was the inspiration behind the play *Inherit the Wind*, which I was obliged to study in Grade 10 English class. It was one of those works I thoroughly enjoyed. It was from that work that I started learning the concept that honourable and worthy people can disagree. It's something all adults are supposed to have learned. I am frequently appalled at how few adults actually do.

It was through looking for a couple of paragraphs to write about Scopes that I delved a bit more into the man's story, and into the offence for which he was put on trial. It might also have been prompted by the fact that the movie *Inherit the Wind* had been on TV about a week before. Actually, I am aware of three film versions of the story; one starred Jason Robards and Kirk Douglas as the main antagonists, and there was a more recent version with Jack Lemmon and George C. Scott. But the best was made in 1960, with Spencer Tracy and Fredric March.

I've always known that Scopes was a little reluctant to get involved in something like this. He was encouraged by local residents of the town of Dayton, who hoped the resulting publicity would be good for the local economy. There was also prompting from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which indicated it would finance a test case of the law.

William Jennings Bryan, who had been Democratic nominee for President three times and was a renowned populist, volunteered to join the prosecution team, although he had not argued a case in court in more than 30 years. It also seems that Clarence Darrow, who headed the defence, was not the first choice to be involved in the case. There were concerns that being a celebrate agnostic, he would turn the issue into an attack on religion.

The issue was a violation of what was known as the Butler Act, which made it a crime "to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals."

In the end, Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100.

My research over the years has revealed some interesting facts about the case.

Bryan had used his considerable influence to get the Butler Act passed, but lobbied unsuccessfully to have no penalties assessed for violation. Also, when Scopes was fined, I have read that Bryan offered to put up the \$100. That really didn't matter, because the case was appealed and tossed out on a technicality.

I did a bit of reading about the Butler Act, and found there really wasn't a major problem with the theory of evolution. Indeed, the lessons Scopes taught were from the text book that the State had approved. It was just that human beings were not to be mentioned as part of the equation.

Incidentally, the Butler Act was still in effect in Tennessee until the mid 1960s.

There are more interesting facts about the case, and the play that resulted (along with the accompanying movies) can set the scene rather well.

Watch the movie, but don't make the mistake of looking for heroes or villains. There aren't any.

The real story was about wise and honourable people who disagreed on a certain issue, and conflict was the result. True, one side won and the other lost and the story takes a few creative liberties. For example, the play has the character based on Bryan dropping dead in the courtroom. In fact, he died in his sleep several days later.

But the right to disagree is what is important. The concept is basic, and one with which all adults should be familiar. That, alas, is

not the case, as I have learned the hard way many times. But it's still a perfectly laudable target. It just up to all of us. Do some research, and you might find i'm right.

