



The Brief

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More than a century ago, rural queers were invisible. Thankfully, this same-sex couple had a camera

By MEREDITH J. BATT and DUSTY GREEN



Cub and Len in a hammock at the family home of Len Keith. Photo from Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

While LGBTQ2S+ history goes back millenia, our records of it tend to focus on urban experiences, leading us to believe that rural queers didn't exist. They did. But without the critical mass to create institutions like bars, associations and clubs—or the freedom granted by the anonymity of city living—they tended to be discreet about their lives, making it harder for us to see them across time.

We would probably never know about Len and Cub, a queer couple living in rural New Brunswick in the early 20th century, if it wasn't for the self-timing camera. Self-timers started to become more widely available in Canada around 1917, just in time for Leonard “Len” Olive Keith to use it to document the halcyon days of his relationship with Joseph Austin “Cub” Coates.

Born Dec. 14, 1891, Len was eight years older than Cub—their families were neighbours in a rural area about 50 kilometres west of Moncton, a 40-minute drive nowadays. Len's family owned a match factory and grist mill, and their prosperity is probably why the family could afford a camera with a self-timer in the first place. In 1911, Len's father became the first person in his village to own a car. Then seen as a “rich man's plaything,” the vehicle provided Len with more mobility and freedom than his peers; he'd take Cub out for rides.

In their new book *Len & Cub: A Queer History*, Meredith J. Batt and Dusty Green use Len's photos as a window onto the lives of the two men and what it would have been like for them in the context of their time. Batt and Green are co-founders of the Queer Heritage Initiative of New Brunswick, which is dedicated to collecting and preserving the records of LGBTQ2S+ history in the province, including conducting oral history interviews. In this excerpt, they write about who the men were and how they might have thought about themselves.

Leonard Olive Keith and Joseph Austin “Cub” Coates were both born in the rural community of Butternut Ridge (known today as Havelock), New Brunswick, at the end of the 19th century.

Len was an amateur photographer and automobile enthusiast who went on to own a local garage and pool hall after serving in the First World War. Cub was the son of a farmer, a veteran of the First and Second World Wars, a butcher, a contractor and a lover of horses. The two were neighbours and developed a close and intimate relationship with each other. Len and Cub's time together is documented by the many photos taken by Len showing that the two shared a mutual love of the outdoors, animals, alcohol and adventure. As many amateur photographers do, Len photographed what was important to him, and Cub's prevalence among the hundreds of photos is striking and impossible to ignore. The photos

taken in the 1910s and 1920s show the development of their relationship as Len and Cub explore the wilderness of Havelock and spend time alone together. Unfortunately, these adventures would cease when Len was outed as a homosexual by community members in the early 1930s and forced to leave Havelock.

Cub, however, remained seemingly untainted by scandal and stayed in Havelock until 1940, when he married Rita Cameron, a nurse born in Chatham, and relocated to Moncton after the Second World War. He would go on to become a prominent figure in New Brunswick's harness racing circles before his death in 1965. Len never returned to Havelock, residing near Montreal before succumbing to cancer in 1950. Len's photos were donated to the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick decades after his death by Havelock resident and local historian, John Corey, who had purchased the albums at the Keith family's estate sale in 1984. Growing up, John heard stories of Len and Cub from his father, Roy Manford Corey, who had been a classmate of Len's. When John donated the albums [to the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick] in 2011, he described the pair as “boyfriends” — a term noted by the archivist in the collection's finding aid. The archivist also noted, after a conversation with John, that Len had been “driven out of town for being a homosexual” by a group of Havelock men. This anecdote is written on an envelope containing a photo of one of the men responsible for Len's outing.

Even with the remaining records of Len and Cub's lives, loose ends and ambiguities abound. As time passes, anecdotes fade, records crumble and living contacts pass away, a certain amount of reading between the lines of history is necessary. Still, it is remarkable that these photos exist at all. To end up housed at the Provincial Archives, they first had to have been taken by Len, sent for developing and preserved by Len throughout his life, then held on to by his sister Lucy, acquired by John Corey at the Keith family estate sale and finally donated to the archives. During this time, photos have no doubt been lost or destroyed, as Len, Lucy or even John may have been concerned with the legal or social repercussions of owning records that depicted a same-sex relationship too transparently. As far as we know, there are no love letters between Len and Cub and no photos of them being more intimate than those in this book.

As we explore what Len and Cub's relationship might have been, it is important to remember that the remaining records are a product of their time, when a homophobic undercurrent prevented same-sex couples from living and loving openly. Queer records from the early 1900s are rare, and as such, scholarship on queer rural Canadian

New Brunswick farmers decry damage from prospecting as province set to give more rights to mining companies

By DALLAS McQUARRIE

Opposition to Bill 75 is gaining steam, as more people step forward with personal accounts of misconduct by mining companies. The controversial legislation would give mining prospectors the right to be on any private land in New Brunswick, rural or urban, without the owner's permission.

Bill 75 was about to be passed into law when a Green Party of New Brunswick motion successfully sent the bill to the Standing Committee on Law Amendments for further study. Among those who have written to Premier Higgs voicing opposition to Bill 75 are woodlot and farmland owner Mike Pugh and Order of Canada recipient Auréa Cormier, a member of the Religieuses Notre-Dame-Sacré-Coeur.

Pugh's farm and woodlot is near Salem in Albert County. He's worried that governments are too willing to tolerate mining industry “crimes against nature” and that “one way or another, all mining focuses on using a lot of water.”

“It boggles the mind,” he said. “You can't eat gold.”

Pugh is also upset that Bill 75 gives mining prospectors a right that no other citizen has, namely, the right to go on a person's land without that person's permission.

Pugh's letter to Premier Higgs says Bill 75 “would reduce the working landowners of NB to serfs in a feudalistic regime.” Pugh writes to the Premier, that in the early 1980s he “received a call at work from my neighbour to tell me that my wife was blocking a bulldozer from clearing a way through our land.”

Rushing home, Pugh found Chevron Oil employees claiming they had “government permission” for what they were doing. In his letter, Pugh describes Chevron subsequently bringing “a large tank-like vehicle that would lower a portion of its body to ground level at each seismographic testing point. It then violently shook the earth in order to record seismographic readings.”

Pugh is convinced that Chevron's shaking of the earth damaged his home. “Several years later an NB Power heat programmer found an abundance of mortar failure in the concrete block portion of our basement,” he wrote. “That mortared block section was laid by professionals, but we could only surmise what caused the leaks” that required expensive repair work.

Pugh also tells the Premier that his neighbour “has intercepted numerous people over the years; some carrying equipment into [Pugh's] fields” and that “we've also had at least two surprise helicopter landings of unknown origin. Both quickly left after being sighted.”

Pugh's farm and woodlot is near several well sites that were among the first to be fracked in New Brunswick. “We can watch the late night ‘excess gas flaring show’ from our deck, and wonder where the next batch of contaminated underground waste water is going to eventually travel.”

Pugh also complains to Premier Higgs that the government is “keeping us in the dark” and adds that “I don't know what other powers Bill 75 could give them unless they want to gag and bind us before they work.” He describes Bill 75 as “another boot on the neck giving more power to the big biz-government coalitions that continue to run this province and this country.”



Mike Pugh by his vehicle showing the depression on his land after the seismic tests that he believes damaged his house. Photo by Joanne Pugh.

More than a century ago, rural queers were invisible

experiences from this period is scanty. It is clear Len was smitten with Cub, and vice versa. John Corey, who donated Len’s collection to the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, grew up in Havelock hearing about Len and Cub. He understood the significance of these records, making a point of remarking to the archivist during the donation process that the pair were “boyfriends” and that Len was driven out of town for being a homosexual. Many of the photos support this narrative and show the means by which their relationship was allowed to blossom in that time and place and the lengths they would have gone to conceal the true nature of their affection.

During Len and Cub’s formative years, the terms homosexual and heterosexual were not part of the vernacular of the villagers of Havelock. Such definitions of sexual orientation were largely reserved for use by early sexologists working to develop new models of decoding human sexuality. Still, an absence of language or classifications to define oneself did not mean that same-sex love was accepted. “Unnatural” sex (i.e., non-procreative sex) was stigmatized by religion, queer sex was prohibited by law, and to live and love openly was virtually impossible for same-sex couples. So how might the boys have understood and interpreted their same-sex attraction? Would they have been bothered at all by any notions of stigma around queer sex and love?

While the queer subculture of New York’s nightlife would have no impact on the lives of two young rural New Brunswick men, a lack of queer visibility or alternative representations of gender and sexuality in Havelock allowed Len and Cub to fly under the radar, or pass as straight. The fact that Len and Cub were young men who worked and dressed in conformity with their masculine gender status would have been enough to avoid public suspicion from their fellow villagers for some time. Yet this view of same-sex attraction may have contributed to Len being driven out of town, though not Cub. Len was older than Cub, a seemingly confirmed bachelor who never dated or spent much time with women; he may have been perceived as truly queer in the derogatory sense, an oddball, someone suspect, who just didn’t fit in and was therefore worthy of being ostracized.

This gender-centric understanding of sex and sex-object attraction is important to keep in mind as we explore Len and Cub’s relationship between 1916 and 1930, as it exposes some of the social and sexual undercurrents operating during their youth. The vast majority of scholarship around same-sex desire during this era draws on urban rather than rural experiences like Len and Cub’s. However, as Emily Skidmore writes in *True Sex: The Lives of Trans Men at the Turn of the 20th Century*, queer historians have been working since the early 2000s to counter this urban-centric view of queer experience by exploring traces of same-sex relationships in rural areas. It should be noted that queer people who act on their desires, no matter where they live, test invisible yet very real and pronounced social boundaries of sex and gender in order to pursue their affections. By the early 1930s, North American society had become increasingly concerned with policing the boundaries of gender and sexuality as a direct response to the perceived decadence and debauchery of the Roaring Twenties. By mid-century this policing had led to an extremely rigid divide between heterosexuals and homosexuals, firmly entrenching heterosexual men as the pious, patriotic, masculine standard and homosexual men as their immoral, feminine, perverse opposite.

With this in mind, it makes sense that Len would be outed in the 1930s as the stigma around queer people was on an upswing, and society’s moral policing of gender roles more actively sought to suppress deviation from the norm. Ironically, the fact that men and women operated in distinctly segregated social spheres inadvertently provided space for same-sex romantic friendships to

develop without intense scrutiny as to why two men or women might be spending so much time together. Queer historians tackling this early period, such as George Chauncey, John D’Emilio and Colin Spencer, provide ample evidence that the half-century before the Second World War is filled with examples of men having sex with men without reflecting on how their sex lives might shape their “identity” or “state of being.” Be it German military recruits in 1910 who weren’t concerned with “talk of homosexuality, they just did it,” discreet middle-class gay New Yorkers posing as “normal” men or queer boys from the American South who “did not sit around and have intellectual conversations about being gay... [y]ou just did it, and didn’t do too much speculating.”

Len and Cub lived in a complex era, but in some ways their love may have been less complicated than our preliminary stage-setting suggests. It is possible that Len and Cub’s relationship developed without much worry over the personal implications of their same-sex desire for their sense of identity. Where you did it mattered, and who knew about it, but the boys no doubt took precautions to hide the true nature of their affections. Yet, same-sex desire was in no way endorsed, and so their romantic entanglement could never have been acknowledged publicly.

Excerpts were originally published in Len & Cub: A Queer History, 2022 by Meredith J. Batt and Dusty Green. Reprinted by permission of Goose Lane Editions.

The following text originally appeared in Xtra Magazine on March 30, 2022.

Day of Mourning honours 14 workers in New Brunswick

By SUSAN O'DONNELL

For the labour movement in many countries, April 28 is a solemn day to honour workers who died on the job. The 14 workers who died in New Brunswick in 2021 were honoured in Edmundston, Bathurst, Miramichi, Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton.

At the Fredericton ceremony on the waterfront at the Fredericton Fallen Firefighters’ Monument, Leica Gahan from the support group Threads of Life spoke about the events leading to the death of her 21-year old son at a construction site in Alberta more than five years ago.

“I thought he was safe,” she said. Her son’s employer had a safety committee and seemed to be following safety protocols but it was only window dressing, she explained. Gahan urged parents to ensure that their children and grandchildren work in safe environments. She said vigilance is particularly important when young people enter their first job and their excitement may cause them to let their guard down.

The Fredericton ceremony was organized by George Nickerson, New Brunswick Federation of Labour vice president responsible for workplace health and safety and officiated by Tyler McCreedy of the Fredericton Fire Fighters Association, IAFF Local 1053.

Attendees placed 14 red roses at the Fallen Firefighters’ Monument and observed a minute of silence.

May 9 this year marks the 30th anniversary of the Westray disaster, when 26 miners were killed in an explosion underground in Pictou County, Nova Scotia caused by a buildup of methane gas. After a long advocacy campaign, changes were made to the Criminal Code of Canada, known as the Westray law. However criminal charges are still hardly ever pursued, say experts.

“Despite the fact that too many workers are killed at work every year, police and prosecutors are not using the Westray amendments and are not investigating workplace fatalities through the lens of criminal accountability,” said George Nickerson. “This needs to change. Governments at all levels must make sure that existing health and safety laws and regulations are being enforced.”

Susan O'Donnell writes on labour and the environment for the NB Media Co-op.



Day of Mourning event at the Fredericton Firefighters’ Monument on April 28, 2022. Photo by Susan O’Donnell.

New Brunswick farmers

“The issue goes beyond whether one is for or against mining,” Pugh said. “Very few indeed like the idea of someone being able to come on their land at will without needing to ask their permission.”

Mining companies have long ignored what’s good for landowners, as Cormier’s letter asking Premier Higgs to abandon Bill 75 demonstrates. She writes that she still has “a very sad memory” of what happened to her family’s farm after a company drilled without permission.

“My father had a beautiful, large farm in Westmorland County,” Cormier writes. “We were fortunate to have an artesian well that gave us access to pure, underground water.”

The Cormiers’ well “flowed continuously into a deep metal tank, and when the water reached near the top, a pipe poured it into a trough in the farmyard where the animals came to drink.” Then, “one day, without warning, prospectors came to do exploratory work some hundred meters from the farm.”

That unauthorized drilling “hit an underground water vein, which immediately and completely stopped the operation of our artesian well,” Cormier tells the Premier. “The repercussions of this drilling were painful for my entire family: loss of a means to cool food in the cold water tank and the necessity to carry by hand many buckets of water to the farm animals.”

“No one came to offer my father compensation for the great loss my family had suffered because of this drilling.”

As well as seeing personally the damage mining company exploration can cause to farms, Cormier tangled with a Canadian resource company in 2001, while she attended an international social forum in Brazil. She attended the forum on behalf of Development and Peace, a Canadian charitable organization with a history of combating mining company abuse. While there, she was approached by people from Peru who asked for help dealing with a Canadian resource company dumping toxic waste into Peruvian streams north of Lima.

Cormier wrote the Vancouver-based company to demand that it clean up its act in Peru, but further details are unavailable because her files on the subject were lost when her computer later was stolen.

The Development and Peace website reports widespread “human rights abuses by Canadian corporations or their contractors and suppliers.” As well as “rapes and murders against people opposing mining projects,” it also reports the use of “forced labour; child labour; unpaid wages; threats; the contamination of water and land; forced evictions; and abuses of Indigenous rights.”

Whether the Higgs government will listen to Cormier, Pugh and other property owners who are demanding that Bill 75 be dropped remains to be seen. To date, the Conservatives have refused to hold any public consultations on the legislation giving prospectors the right to trespass on private land.

Bill 75 is now before a standing committee of the legislature. It will be the Conservatives, who have a majority on the committee, who decide whether to allow public consultations.

Dallas McQuarrie is a NB Media Co-op writer who lives on unceded Mi’kmaq territory in Kent County.

NB MEDIA CO-OP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & KEYNOTE

Wednesday, September 21.
By Zoom.



5:00pm - Annual General Meeting
7:00pm - Keynote with **Emilie Nicolas**, a journalist, media commentator and anthropologist. Nicolas will discuss media coverage of Black people and what needs to change.

For more information, contact **info@nbmediacoop.org**.

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NB Media Co-op

180 St. John St., Fredericton, NB E3B 4A9

Email: info@nbmediacoop.org, Website: nbmediacoop.org

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@nbmediacoop