

This letter is written by William W. Ward, lovingly known as Bill. He writes to his best friend after being sent from Toronto to Winnipeg to set up the first industrial hygiene public health laboratory in Manitoba. This transcript, done by his daughter, Evelyn Ward, is presented as actually written with all strike outs and spelling errors and punctuation mistakes. Transcript writer's additions are included in square brackets. In 1982 he was honoured by having the new laboratory named after him, W. M. Ward Technical Services Laboratory.

Y.M.C.A. ¹
Winnipeg ²
June 10/42³

Dear Pete⁴,

I reckon this is long overdue so here goes. I left Toronto with a somewhat heavy heart but I guess that will wear off. The trip around

¹ Young Men's Christian Association was an organization founded in London, England in 1844 with the mission of building healthy spirits, minds and bodies of workers flocking to the city for jobs. They provided facilities for men such as pools and gyms and were the first to promote physical activity as being just as worthwhile as work. They also provided hotel-like rooms called residences or dormitories. These rooms became a significant part of North American culture, know as an inexpensive and safe place for a visitor to stay in an unfamiliar city. In 1940 there were 100,000 rooms at YMCAs, more than any hotel chain. A companion organization for women was the Y.W.C.A.

² Winnipeg, capital of the province of Manitoba, Canada. The Federal government chose three places to set up industrial public health laboratories. Bill was summoned to Ottawa immediately after his stint at Harvard and was called upon with two others. Winnipeg was the short straw. I believe Montreal and Maritimes were the other locations.

³ Bill was 25 years old. 1942 was the middle of World War II. Upon graduating from University of Toronto, and doing course work at Harvard University in Boston, Bill Ward was offered a government job to set up the first public health laboratory in Manitoba.

⁴ William Arthur Evelyn (Pete) McBryde, his best friend all through University days in Toronto. He died in 2004 at the age of 87 after an illustrious university teaching career. He was the same age as Bill.

Lake Superior was good. Spent much time on observation platform⁵ taking in the sights. Rugged hills, rock, quaint towns, tunnels, army camps, etc.⁶

Arrive Winnipeg and put up at Clarendon Hotel - cheap but O.K. Tramped⁷ all over town Sat. & Sun - mostly bored stiff. There's nothing to see in this place by the way of parks etc.⁸ I guess since I was on foot my itinerary was limited. It's hot here, windy all the time. The streets are wide and the place is clean as cities go. Its overrun with R.C.A.F.⁹ and army. A band and 2 trucks spend all the time marching up and down Portage Ave.¹⁰ recruiting for the reserve. Prospective soldiers climb into the trucks and when they get a quorum they go into Eatons Annex¹¹ to be sworn in etc.¹² These guys standing up in the trucks as they slowly lumber along remind me of the tumbrels.¹³ Ho hum.

Monday I put on a clean shirt and made for the Parl.t Bldgs¹⁴ to contact the Dep.[uty] Minister. When I got there a lackey¹⁵ informs me its the King's birthday¹⁶ and nobody's home. So I took in a show¹⁷

⁵ train viewing car with a dome glass roof

⁶ The Transcontinental Canadian National Railway (CNR). This would have been Bill's first trip west of Toronto.

⁷ walked

⁸ Perhaps he considered Winnipeg barren compared to his days at the beautiful U of T campus

⁹ Royal Canadian Air Force

¹⁰ the main street in downtown Winnipeg

¹¹ Eatons Annex was a building to the south of the Eatons department store. It housed offices and a parking garage for executives. Eatons was the the leading chain store of it's type in Canada at the time other than the Hudson's Bay Company,

¹² He would not be allowed to sign up for the war because of his bad eyesight and the fact that chemists were more valuable at home than on the front.

¹³ Alternate spelling for tumbrels; a two wheel covered cart for hauling tools, ammunition, such a cart was used during the French Revolution to take the condemned to the guillotine.

¹⁴ Provincial legislature with the Golden Boy statue

¹⁵ lackey; today's equivalent to a security guard.

¹⁶ King George VI, aka Prince Albert who reigned during WWII died in 1952.

¹⁷ cinema

and then moved over to the “Y”¹⁸ where I now am. I was just thinking that this place is somewhat like the old Trinity House,¹⁹ i.e. the halls & elevator, telephones, etc. But it has the added advantage of barber shop, tailor, tuck shop²⁰, laundry, games, magazines, & swimming²¹ and things I haven’t yet discovered. I’m on the fifth floor (513). The view from the window is good. On the roof is a sun-bathing pavilion all fixed up with sloping platforms to lie on and a shower. We work from 830 to 430 so I can come back and have a 1/2 hr’s sun bathing before supper. This is nice.

Maybe in time I’ll get to know some fellows here and things won’t be too bad. I figure this is good for my purpose even if it’s a little more expensive than a boarding house. After I have been here a while the rate goes down.²² The “Y” is 9 min walk from where I work.²³ Oh yes. On Tuesday I finally contacted the Dep. Min. (Dr Jackson - good egg). We talked things over and then he spread his hands out over the desk and said “Now I think the best thing is for you to take full charge of the whole affair. [”]²⁴ I think I’m the only chemist in the whole Health Dept.²⁵ They treat me like some rare jewel. There are whole bunch of guys (none of them college men except one) here who test milk and water etc. but they all go around with an uncanny

¹⁸ abbreviation for YMCA.

¹⁹ Trinity House, the residence of Trinity College, University of Toronto.

²⁰ tuck shop, a place to buy small goods, such as necessities and candy.

²¹ Swimming was done in the nude because debris from cotton suits jammed the water filtration system. The swimming pool would no doubt have reminded Bill of the male only pool at Hart House, at U of T.

²² The YMCA becomes his home for five years.

²³ 320 Sherbrook, the northwest corner of Sherbrook and Portage Ave, the old Deaf and Dumb institute was the Dept of Public Health building. They always joked that they were in the right place. It was right across the street from Harman’s Drugstore. There were times when in identifying certain substances it was easier to just walk over and ask the druggist! Harman’s had the best pie in town.

²⁴ In other words, he was given carte blanche to set up the first Public Health Laboratory in the province.

²⁵ He decided on chemistry as he entered U of T because his best buddy and canoeing partner, Pete (to whom the letter is addressed) had chosen it. Pete was a highly respected pioneer in chemistry, retiring as the Dean of the Chemistry Dept. of University of Waterloo.

reverence for a chemist. I felt on the spot and dammed scared cause my chemistry isn't the best. Well there I was so I plunged into it hook l. & s.²⁶ This fellow Bauldry (MD & Engr) who is at Harvard now is going to be in charge.²⁷ I think I stay here indefinitely from the way they talk. Don't know what to think about that.

Well there is a small lab room in the Public Health Bldg. equipped with a sink some cupboards & shelves and nothing else. (They have a sling psychrometer²⁸ for testing the air in schools). My job is to equip the lab fully to handle anything that might turn up. Wow. I've got a list a mile long and lots of special equipt in mind that they have the money for but I doubt if we can get it - a/c was priorities etc. All I can do is go ahead & order the stuff and sit back & wait for it. They talk a lot about water testing up here. Thats new to me but I might tackle that too. Why not.²⁹ There is another young fellow - recent grad. in Civil Eng-g (Manitoba) who just joined the dept - he's not a bad sort. All the rest are old foggies (One's name is Mr Foggie) who have been there for years. About all they do is go out in the morning and collect the daily samples of milk. One of them inspects plumbing. The advent of this lab. is really something in the life of the Health Dept. I'm going to buy everything I can get my hands on 'cause the money is a war appropriation so they might as well get the stuff now or they never will. Incidentally I might be writing you officially for advice on such things as balances³⁰, colorimeters³¹ and other special equipment I've got about \$FDXXX xx³² of the best to

²⁶ hook, line and sinker

²⁷ He himself attended Harvard in 1937 for a certification course in Industrial Hygiene.

²⁸ psychrometer; an instrument for measuring humidity, having two thermometers, the bulb of one being kept moist.

²⁹ As it turns out he spent a goodly portion of his career in water quality, both drinking and recreational, and edited both the Canadian Drinking Water Qualities Handbook and the Canadian Recreational Water Qualities handbook for the federal government in the 1970s. He served as a consultant on the International Joint Commission for many years.

³⁰ an analytical weighing apparatus

³¹ an instrument for determining the intensity of colours, as of dyes, by comparison with a standard.

³² The money came as a grant to province from the Federal government, quite rare.

play with! * [he adds the asterix at the bottom of the page = inside dope]. A lot of the stuff eg. microscopes, polarizing attachments³³, dust counting equipt will be hard as the deuce to get and I suppose even glassware will take time.³⁴ Anyway all this will keep me busy and keep my mind off other things. I wish I knew what the deuce³⁵ the future will be but for the present this will do. I was just reading a London Letter in McLeans³⁶. (Maybe you dont read it any more) B. Baxter is writing about the English Civil Service. He remarks about the play safe by doing nothing attitude they have. Gosh it's the same over here and is always a source of irritation to me. Enough for now.

Well hows the old Shift Schlemeal³⁷. Still beatin' them out 8 to the day³⁸? I figure I'll buy a radio for my room. I was looking at a Victor³⁹ in Eatons today that's a little bigger than I had in mind but looks like a good job and can has a phono attachment. Have you seen the new Victor pick up and motor with a diamond point (instead of needle)?⁴⁰ [He inserts a hand drawn diagram of same.] Tell me what you think of it. I was playing Milt Herth's "Jersey Bounce"⁴¹ at

³³ electrolysis

³⁴ test tubes and beakers which were open-mouthed, cylindrical vessels with a projecting lip used in a laboratory. He learned glass blowing in order to make pipettes and tubes because of the shortage during the war.

³⁵ This is his way of swearing. I never knew him to ever use an expletive.

³⁶ McLeans news magazine.

³⁷ Shlemiel: yiddish word for clumsy bungler, an inept person, butter-fingered; dopey person.

³⁸ a reference to a line from Andrew Sisters song Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy, beating them out 8 to the bar.

³⁹ Victor, a brand name of Eatons

⁴⁰ for hooking up a vinyl record (phonograph) player. Pete and Bill were the disc jockeys at the Hart House dances at U of T, ca. 1937-39. They co-owned a 78RPM record collection and split it in half when they graduated.

⁴¹ "Jersey Bounce" was the #1 hit in 1942 recorded by Benny Goodman & Orch. It was recorded by The Milt Hearth Trio as well. Obviously Bill thought the recording didn't do the song justice but was a corny type organ sound. The Milt Hearth Trio recorded the music of Spike Jones too.

noon today. Corny as all twee.⁴² I'd give anything to see a hill - even an ant hill.

More about the "Y".

As I said its 9 min walk to work also right in middle of town like so

[inserts a hand-drawn map of downtown Winnipeg from Parliament Buildings (Assiniboine River) on south, CNR station (Main St) on east, Portage Ave on north, to Sherbrook on west, little dashed line showing 9 min walk from Y to Public Health Building. He highlights Camilla's ('a good joint to eat in'), Post Office, Hudson's Bay Company, Eatons. Bank, stores, shows, Fort Gary Hotel, and, of course, the YMCA.]

This shows its central position which is good since I go most places on foot. I haven't been in a street car yet.⁴³ There are more freckle-faced women in this town than you ever saw. Rumours about extreme friendliness of other places (esp. East) are mere propaganda.

Well I think I'll go and wash some socks. Remember I'm at the YMCA not Y.W. ⁴⁴

[illegible greeting scrawl]

Bill

[On reverse side of his stationary:]

- from the 5th floor notice board.

⁴² baby-talk alteration of sweet ca 1905, chiefly British : affectedly or excessively dainty, delicate, cute, or quaint, such a theme might sound twee or corny.

⁴³ public transportation on rails propelled electrically

⁴⁴ YWCA, Young Women's Christian Association building was directly across the street. No doubt his was a small job at not having a women around to do these things for him.

[he drew a box around this] MAY WE SUGGEST - the co-operation of all guests in a desire to eliminate noise which might disturb those who find sleep an essential need.