

A Canadian misunderstanding

Just history

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A magazine's Scunthorpe problem

Still Pictures



No, it's not a pussy

CANADIANS have long been proud of the industrious beaver, an animal capable of cutting down 216 trees a year with its teeth and of surviving the long winter in a purpose-built lodge made of mud, twigs and bark. The largest rodent in North America is a national emblem. The first Canadian postage stamp, the 1851 Three-Penny Beaver, carried its image. And one of Canada's oldest magazines carries its name.

But soon it will not. From April *The Beaver* will be renamed. A journal of popular history founded in 1920 by the Hudson Bay Company to celebrate its 250th anniversary, it is now owned by others. Its evocation of the fur that had made the trading company's fortunes no longer struck the right note—especially since the word has become slang for female pubic hair.

The editors had known for some time that a name change was needed. Market research indicated that many women and people under the age of 45 said they would not subscribe solely because of the name. But it was the internet that struck the fatal blow.

The *Beaver* website was attracting (albeit briefly) readers who had little interest in Samuel de Champlain's astrolabe or what prairie settlers ate for breakfast. They lasted about eight seconds before moving on. E-mails to potential subscribers were blocked by internet obscenity filters. This is known online as the Scunthorpe problem, after the town in Britain whose residents were initially unable to register with AOL because its name contained an obscenity.

The Beaver Club, a classy dining room in Montreal, and the *SS Beaver*, a replica of an 1835 steamship operating in British Columbia, remain unperturbed by any ambiguity. As for *The Beaver*, it hopes to expand its 50,000

circulation as *Canada's History*. Dull, yes, but at least it will do what it says on the tin.

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