Finally Canadians agree. The relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians must change. There are different views on what changes are needed, but no one doubts the need for change.

For Canada to become a “Treaty Nation”, as suggested by Poelzer and Coates in their recent book From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation, much needs to be done. But changing the ways of our Federal and Provincial governments, while essential, is not nearly enough. Most importantly change needs to take place in our communities, communities like Temagami.

Poelzer and Coates’ book is by far the best book that I have read on indigenous relationships and history in Canada. I have a problem with the title of the book, my only criticism. “Treaty People” and Treaty Nation” are concepts that are not easy to grasp. Indeed for many, particularly recent generations of immigrants to Canada, the relevance of historic treaties may seem remote. I prefer to think in terms of fairness, keeping our promises and Canadian values of inclusiveness, values that have themselves been influenced by indigenous perspectives.¹

In this review I will suggest other books that could be read to provide further insights², and a few novels as well³, that could round out a summer reading list.⁴

As Canadians we do not know much about our history, particularly the history of our relationships with indigenous Canadians. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 sets out the British “Crown’s” views on the obligations of those making treaties with indigenous groups as “settlers” expanded their reach across North America. The Royal Proclamation aspired to goals of respectful relationships and shared prosperity. Were subsequent treaties negotiated in good faith? Were they understood? Were the rights of aboriginal peoples respected?

It is sometimes said in Canada that we are all treaty peoples, as implied by the title of Poelzer and Coates’ book. The idea that we are all treaty peoples, while interesting, is not strictly true. Yes there are treaties, but not everywhere in Canada,

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¹ Poelzer and Coates would like the idea of Temagami as a “Treaty Community”. I prefer John Ralston Saul’s simpler idea of “fairness” and Canada as a fair country.
² Two recent short books are excellent companions to Poelzer and Cairns. Thomas King’s The Inconvenient Indian; a curious account of native people in North America (2012), and John Ralston Saul’s The Comeback – How aboriginals are reclaiming Power and Influence (2014).
³ Joseph Boyden’s fiction has received wide acclaim. My favourite is Three Day Road published in 2005. Thomas King’s recent novel The Back of the Turtle is also good.
⁴ Shall we start a summer book club in Temagami?
particularly in what is now British Columbia. And in some situations there is controversy about whether specific groups were signatories to a treaty. The Temagami case is an example of this. At the Supreme Court of Canada the Teme Augama Anishnabai were “adhered” to the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 because certain treaty benefits were paid to and, for a time, accepted by them. The subtle but important distinction between “signatories to” and “adhered to” remains controversial to this day. The Supreme Court went on to conclude that Canadian governments had not lived up to their Treaty obligations. Indeed the Court found that the Teme Augama Anishnabai had been promised 122 square miles of land rather than the one square mile of reserve land presently occupied on Bear Island. Settlement negotiations have yet to result in resolution of this historic injustice.

Canadians like to believe that we live up to our commitments but, in the case of our treaties, have we? Or where treaties do not exist have we lived up to the promise of the Royal Proclamation?

No. And not in Temagami, according to our Supreme Court.

The evidence is all around us. Ignorance, or willful blindness, is inexcusable. Indigenous Canadians have not been fairly treated. As a country we have failed to imagine the possibilities of living together in respectful ways, learning from each other, celebrating our achievements and helping each other in times of need.

In the 1990’s The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported to Canadians. Unfortunately little was done at the time to publicize the findings of the Commission. In spite of this the report has gradually influenced understandings of indigenous relationships not only in Canada but globally. The Report still is good reading. More recently the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has reported on the history of Indian Residential schools in Canada. The Commission provided an opportunity for students at these schools to tell their stories, often painful, and to talk about the legacy of that era and the long shadows evident today in many native communities. Several years ago the “Idle no More” movement gave expression to the impatience felt by many indigenous Canadians. And over the past several decades in a series of cases the Supreme Court of Canada has clarified indigenous rights in Canada, including recently with the unanimous Tsihlqot’in decision. Canadian public opinion, however, lags our evolving jurisprudence.

“Reconciliation”. The recently released Truth and Reconciliation Commission report on the history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada is a two-part report. The truth part seeks to provide witness to the experience of many who attended residential schools. The reconciliation part lays out a challenge to all Canadians to acknowledge this history and to create a future that respects the promise of the Royal Proclamation.

At a national level the reconciliation project is underway. Former Prime Minister Harper issued a formal “apology” to indigenous Canadians, rejecting as wrong the
“assimilationist” assumptions that formed the rationale for the creation of residential schools. Our current Prime Minister has appointed Jody Wilson-Raybold, formerly the Western Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, as our new Minister of Justice. This appointment decisively suggests a commitment to changing the status quo. She holds the most difficult job in Cabinet and her influence and actions will be critical to any Canadian reconciliation project.

Reconciliation is an evolving work in progress. One thing is certain. The days of paternalism are over. As Canadians I hope that we will be able to think about indigenous Canadians in new ways. Native Canadians do not represent a series of problems to be fixed; we have much to learn from each other and we need to find collaborative pathways into the future.

Before I talk about reconciliation possibilities in Temagami let me describe Poelzer and Coates’ recent book. The book summarizes, in terms respectful to the different viewpoints, the wide range of native and non-native perspectives. For reconciliation to take root the essential starting point is a willingness to listen to each other.

The authors do not gloss over the challenges. The Preface: Towards Equality of Opportunity describes the reaction to a series of articles the authors wrote in the Globe and Mail in 2012. In the Globe article they outlined two camps of public opinion. The first camp argues that Ottawa and the Federal government should take responsibility for fixing the mess created by the Indian Act of 1876. The second camp argues that Aboriginal people need to clean up their own house, corrupt political leaders, uneconomical reserves, no “special status” for Indians, etc. The online comments about the article reflected a range of opinion from constructive to deeply prejudicial.

Poelzer and Coates do not shy away from the difficult issues. How is “membership” determined and by whom? How can native communities participate in the modern Canadian economy? Collective land stewardship principles conflict with the private ownership principles common in our economy. Taxation issues have a long history that creates complexity and often acrimony. The location, size and insularity of many reserves pose challenges.

Nevertheless, Poelzer and Coates believe that Canadians have a history of finding solutions to deep polarities, hence the optimistic tone of the book. And they describe numerous examples where positive change is happening.

Many non-native Canadians have little, if any, contact with aboriginal peoples. So it is appropriate that the first three chapters of the book summarize aboriginal perspectives. The chapter titles – The Traditionalists, The Treaty Federalists, and Bridging the Solitudes - give an indication not only of the wide range of aboriginal thinking but also of perspectives based on a lived experience.
The Traditionalists. This group of writers includes Taiaiake Alfred (Peace, Power and Righteousness – 1999), Glen Coulthard (Subjects of Empire – 2007), Joyce Green, Patricia Monture-Angus (Journeying Forward – 1999) and Keira Ladner. All of these writers to varying degrees advocate a return to traditional perspectives and governing practices. Alfred expresses this perspective most forcefully. “European states and their colonial offspring still embody the same destructive and disrespectful impulses that they did 500 years ago”. Strong views. Alfred contrasts European and colonial systems committed to individual rights, property ownership and materialistic possessive individualism with indigenous commitments to egalitarian values, decision making by consensus, respect for others and spiritual and ecological balance. In essence, the traditionalists are challenging the prevailing liberal democratic, or even social democratic, world-views.5

The Treaty Federalists. The leaders of the major aboriginal groups in Canada, leaders of the Assembly of First Nations such as Ovide Mercredi and Phil Fontaine for example, have generally promoted ideas consistent with the “two-row wampum” notion of two vessels travelling down the river in parallel, mutually respectful ways. (Ovide Mercredi and Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, In the Rapids – 1993). A “nation to nation” approach could, with effort, empower First Nations within evolving federalist structures. James Youngblood Henderson argues for meaningful political participation within a Canadian Federal system that explicitly recognizes aboriginal, federal and provincial sovereignties. The goal would be to move beyond the incremental delegation of responsibility, which is a characteristic of a number of agreements – the James Bay Cree and Sechelt models – to a negotiated federalism based on the full recognition of aboriginal rights, similar in most respects to the Nisga’a treaty. Dan Russell, an aboriginal lawyer (A People’s dream – 2000), supports the idea of treaty federalism and greater aboriginal self-government but is clear that self-government itself is no panacea for the many issues facing many native communities.

Bridging the Solitudes. The third group of aboriginal writers includes John Borrows (Canada’s Indigenous Constitution – University of Toronto Press, 2010), Emma LaRocque (Defeathering the Indian, 1975), Calvin Helin (Dances with Dependency, 2006), Bonita Beatty and Dale Turner (This is not a Peace Pipe, 2006). These authors share a general belief that that the urgent need is to create greater mutual understanding between native and non-native Canadians. With a focus on learning from each other we would all benefit from the cross fertilization of models and approaches. Among this group of authors there are some similarities with the treaty

5 A legal traditionalist not referred to by Poelzer and Coates in this chapter, because he is not native, is Bruce Clark (Justice in Paradise – Queen’s–McGill University Press, 2004). Clark was the lawyer in the 1980s for the Teme Augama Anishnabai (TAA) in their land claims case taken to the Supreme Court of Canada. The case, the Court’s decision and Clark’s handling of the case remain controversial on Bear Island and in legal circles.
federalists but more attention is paid to respectful understandings than to institutional structures.

John Borrows believes that we should be able to incorporate the best of all our traditions, not just the civil and common law traditions but also aboriginal legal traditions, in our fundamental constitutional documents. This is an inspiring and expansive idea. His book, Canada’s Indigenous Constitution describes aboriginal traditions of stewardship that could benefit all Canadians.6

LaRocque’s work emphasizes the importance of education in bridging the gulf between cultures and societies. Beatty’s work draws attention to the wide variety of community governance practices and the effects, either positive or negative, on community outcomes. And Helin shares his strong views on the importance of economic development for native communities. Successful communities will be those that are self-reliant and not dependent on Canadian governments. He is deeply critical of the “welfare dependency” of most native communities. The “way out of the storm” is robust economic development, relevant education, attention to needs of urban aboriginals and improvement of relationships with other Canadians. There are examples of strong economic development – most frequently mentioned is the Osoyoos First Nation in British Columbia led by Chief Clarence Louie. These views are controversial in part because many remote reserves hold few if any economic prospects in today’s economy.

Finally Dale Turner’s book - This is not a Peace Pipe. Dale Turner is a member of the Temagami First Nation and a political philosopher teaching at Dartmouth College. He argues that our dominant western liberal political theory offers some but ultimately insufficient space for aboriginal viewpoints. He believes that aboriginal rights present a special case and should not be considered a subset of minority rights, a common approach among non-native political philosophers.

In summary this group of writers argue for engagement from a position of strength, based on inherent aboriginal rights and the optimistic belief that all Canadians can learn from indigenous perspectives.7

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6 The Temagami First Nation has incorporated into the terms of reference of its Audit Committee one of the Anishnabai stewardship principles discussed by Borrows – gway a ko chi gewin – a financial stewardship principle that I understand to mean strong accountability. Application of this principle in our corporate world might be a good idea.

7 Canadian governments, and Canadian public opinion, have to date shown little enthusiasm for “bridging the solitudes”. David McNab’s book No Place for Fairness (Queen’s McGill University Press, 2009) is a chilling insider account (mainly about Temagami) of the Ontario government’s approach to aboriginal issues – do as little as possible and avoid political problems.
Non-aboriginal academics and commentators have also written extensively about aboriginal legal and moral rights and the many possible political and institutional arrangements. Opinions vary widely, some quite extreme. Poelzer and Coates however consider the debate healthy, treating all opinions respectfully even though some, in simplistic forms, fuel negative and divisive currents in Canadian public opinion.

Some of the more challenging writers include Tom Flanagan (First Nations, Second thoughts, 2000) criticizing what he calls the aboriginal orthodoxy, and Francis Widdowson (Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry, 2008, with Albert Howard) whose Marxist materialist analysis, while rigorous and insightful in many ways, manages to offend almost everyone. On the legal side opinions vary from those who advocate a restrictive view of aboriginal rights (Mel Smith, Our Home or Native Land? - 1996) to Bruce Clark's expansive view of aboriginal rights. And then there are the more pragmatic commentators such as Alan Cairns (Citizens Plus, 2000).

Our Canadian political philosophers, notably Charles Taylor, James Tully and Will Kimlicka, approach these issues from a moral rights perspective. Charles Taylor’s experience in the Québec language and cultural debates acknowledges the need for acceptance of certain collective rights. He extends these arguments to aboriginal rights accepting for example that membership codes based on ancestry are morally defensible, a position similar to that taken by Taiaiake Alfred. Debates about individual versus collective rights will continue to be an important Canadian conversation.

And some like Menno Boldt (Surviving as Indians, 1993) challenge conventional wisdom with harsh criticism of both aboriginal and Canadian governments. He believes that the Indian Act is designed to serve the state rather than aboriginal people. He also believes that most present day aboriginal governments do not reflect traditional indigenous forms of governance, instead creating an aboriginal elite often disconnected from their communities. He is a strong advocate for indigenous Canadians and believes in policies that support all indigenous people wherever they are located, on reserve and off. For indigenous culture to thrive in Canada he believes that indigenous languages must be preserved. Economic self-sufficiency, including the obligation to pay taxes, he believes is also essential. In some ways these perspectives are similar to those of Tom Flanagan, but Boldt sees economic development and integration not as a form of assimilation but rather as a way to support and enhance indigenous culture.

In summary, there is a wide range of opinion, native and non-native, on the way forward. At this stage though no one would doubt, in the words of Poelzer and Coates, that "major declarations of positive intent and openness to meaningful partnerships are essential if Aboriginal people are to escape the difficult conditions that history, racism, injustice and political lethargy have imposed on them".
In the second half of the book the authors set out a their positive vision for reconciliation. The problems – mostly on isolated reserves and in urban centers – tend to dominate public attitudes because they get reported in the media. The success stories and signs of healthy cultural renewal tend to go unreported. Indigenous language and spirituality are being revived. Many more aboriginal students are achieving high levels of academic success. Some aboriginal businesses and joint ventures are thriving. There are many examples of outstanding indigenous leadership. Aboriginal media in Canada is strong and getting stronger. Many aboriginal organizations are improving the capacity to manage the increasing responsibilities that go with self-government and greater local control. Some communities are thinking about prosperity in a more comprehensive community well-being sense. And the Nisga’a Treaty is a good example of a third order indigenous government. All positive largely unreported facts on which to build.

But can we look forward to future relationships that are not built on “grievance and guilt”? This is the essential and very big question. Poelzer and Coates imagine the possibilities of “a thousand acts of good will – spontaneous, individual, creative, heartfelt”, a multitude of mutual engagements, shared stories, and shared enterprise.

Poelzer and Coates do not underestimate the challenges, particularly around the difficult issue of membership, “status” and non-status, and finding ways to bridge the distance between aboriginal homeland and the reality that half of Canada’s aboriginal population lives and works in urban settings. They recommend creating a Commonwealth of Aboriginal Peoples, largely as a replacement for the present Federal bureaucracy and as a way to support a third order of government in Canada. They believe there is much opportunity in finding common ground, moving beyond the emotional polarities “between advocates of Aboriginal sovereignty and those who would eliminate Aboriginal rights”.

What can be done to promote “reconciliation” between native and non-native Canadians? Much can and needs to be done on at the National, Provincial and Territorial levels. But reconciliation will only acquire substance when it is realized locally in our communities where people live, work and play together. It will mean multiple local interactions, freely undertaken and mutually beneficial.

What would this mean for us as Canadians - Americans too - with a special interest in Temagami? In Temagami we have a richly documented story of native/non-native interaction over the past two centuries. Our Temagami story like most histories contains the good and the bad, differing perspectives and sometimes conflicting opinions. However, in the wise words of a Supreme Court Justice “We are all here to stay”. Let’s think about it. Many non-native citizens of Temagami began

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8 On two occasions I have attended the annual conference of the Aboriginal Finance Officers Association (AFOA). These conferences attract about 1000 participants. The professionalism evident at these conferences is very impressive.
their connection to the region at one of the summer camps\(^9\) travelling the native canoe routes.\(^{10}\) Others arrived in the region in search of employment from the fur trade, forestry or mining. And of course the Teme Augama Anishnabai have made N'Daki Menan their homeland for much longer.

Let’s begin with the Teme Augama Anishnabai (TAA). Over the past several decades the TAA and the Temagami First Nation (TFN)\(^{11}\) have gradually been assuming more control over their own destiny. The Wendaban Stewardship Authority, operational for several years in the 1990s, was created as a joint project of the Ontario government and the TAA and TFN to provide for long-term stewardship of the Temagami region. The basic idea was sound and much was learned. A revived Wendaban Stewardship could open doors to future regional cooperation.

The TAA and TFN have also been entering into other agreements with non-native neighbours. For example, the TFN and TAA have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality of Temagami (signed in 2004) covering certain local planning matters and setting out a robust set of sustainability principles. In 2012 the TFN and TAA entered into a significant Impact Benefit Agreement with Alamos Gold with respect to the Young Davidson mine near Mattachewan. As the Temagami native community assumes greater responsibility for its own affairs and achieves an appropriate land settlement they will become the major economic force in the region.

Others too will play an important part. There are so many strengths on which to build. The magnificence of the natural beauty of the region is something we all celebrate and which is of national significance. However, any vision of Temagami as a sustainable region will require the efforts of us all. Temagami constituencies have specific responsibilities – to Band members, to taxpayers, to seasonal residents – but what if we all committed to thinking regionally?

A small but significant step took place in 2000 with the creation of the Temagami Community Foundation (TCF). At the time it was the only community foundation in North America created as a partnership between native and non-native community

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\(^9\) John Turner, the former Prime Minister of Canada, spoke at a Temagami Community Foundation event several years ago about his experience as a camper at Camp Temagami. His experience travelling the native canoe routes was a formative experience for him that influenced his entire life and career.

\(^{10}\) Craig MacDonald has produced a map that records the native summer and winter travel routes. He also documented conversations with many of the Bear Island Elders as he was preparing this map.

\(^{11}\) The TAA comprises all of the people that have native roots in Temagami. The TFN represents a subset of the TAA and comprises those defined as “Status Indians” by the Government of Canada under the Indian Act.
The inaugural Board came to a consensus on the following objectives for the TCF:

- Promoting environmental stewardship and awareness,
- Supporting community arts and culture,
- Honouring First Nations heritage, and
- Fostering sustainable community economic development.

Our grants to date – approximately $250,000 – have supported these objectives, many hopefully contributing to “reconciliation”. In this regard the TCF is particularly proud of the TCF Art Camp, now in its twelfth year, and the sponsorship of the Angèle Project, the story of Angèle Egwuna and Archie Belaney later known as Grey Owl. The TCF has also convened roundtable discussions on sustainable community economic development.

Perhaps all Temagami entities might review their mandates in the evolving context of reconciliation with aboriginal Canadians. There are so many possibilities for mutual engagement, such as:

- Listening to each other. Story telling opportunities, arts, music and canoe festivals.
- Learning about and celebrating the rich history of the region, perhaps a community meeting place that would have national appeal.
- Water quality and watershed planning initiatives.
- Community sustainable forestry and renewable energy possibilities.
- Collaborative infrastructure projects, schools and long-term care facilities for seniors and elders.
- Revitalization of the Temagami town-site as the gateway to a shared stewardship natural region.

Could Temagami be a community of reconciliation, mutual understanding and regional stewardship? Might this be an inspiring and enduring vision for Temagami that appeals to our next generations?

Walter Ross, May 1, 2016

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12 I began to understand the importance of “mutuality” in native/non-native relationships from John Turner - the Temagami John Turner that is and not the Former Prime Minister referred to in a previous footnote. In 2002 John and I were making a presentation to Community Foundations of Canada in Ottawa about the creation of the TCF. John noted that participating in the creation of the TCF was the first time that the Temagami First Nation had voluntarily joined in the mutual creation of a community institution.

13 The Art Camp annually brings together kids from the entire region – from Bear Island, the town and the seasonal community – for a week of arts related activities.
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