



# Glimpses

Items of recent and historical interest  
from members of The Heritage Library

Vol. 2, No. 6

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## *Merry Christmas from the Heritage Library*

### Who Wrote

#### “The Night Before Christmas”?

#### An amateur genealogist seeks vindication for her ancestor’s authorship

For over 150 years it’s been thought that Clement Clarke Moore wrote the poem whose original title was “A Visit from St. Nicholas.”

But the Livingston family has for years insisted their ancestor, Henry Livingston, wrote the poem, and that it had been in their family for years before it was published in a Troy, New York, newspaper in 1823.



*Henry Livingston*

Mary Van Deusen, a seventh-generation descendant of Henry Livingston, enlisted the help of Don Foster, a Vassar professor and an acclaimed literary sleuth. The results, published in 2000, seem to have settled the matter to the satisfaction of most experts. Arguably the most quoted poem

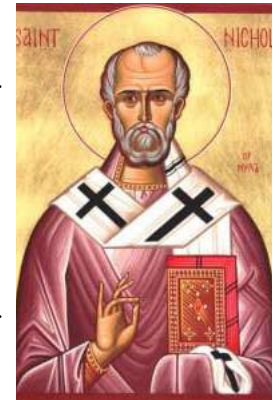
in the English language, it was not written by Moore, but by Henry Livingston.

Even to those of us who are not literary sleuths, it is apparent that “The Visit” was not in Moore’s didactic and humorless style. Moore was a professor of Biblical learning at the General Theological Seminary (Episcopal) in New York and the seminary’s first professor of Oriental Languages. He published an English-Hebrew lexicon.

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### The Evolution of Santa Claus

Most people trace the origin of Santa Claus back to St. Nicholas of Myra, a 4th century bishop in what is now Turkey who, legend has it, saved three impoverished daughters of a lord from being sold into slavery because they had no dowries. Depictions of Saint Nicholas show no resemblance to today’s jolly red-suited Santa. Some versions had him dropping a bag of coins down the chimney. In one such version, the coins fell into a stocking which had been hung near the fire to dry, thus giving rise to the custom of hanging stockings from the fireplace mantel.



Depictions of St. Nicholas show him in canonical robes, usually with a bishop’s miter and crozier.

As the tradition of St. Nicholas spread to Scandinavia, Germany and Belgium, characteristics of the Norse god Odin became associated with St. Nicholas.

Odin had a long white beard, was said to lead hunting parties across the night sky, flying on an eight-legged horse. Children would fill their boots with hay for the horse; Odin in gratitude would leave small gifts for the children in their boots.

When he arrived in Holland, the name St. Nicholas became Sinterklass. To this day he arrives there on St. Nicholas Eve, December 5, by boat, and leads a procession through town riding a white horse. In Holland, he still wears priestly garb: a miter and a chasuble.

Children may leave their shoes outside, filled with hay for Sinterklass’ horse, or perhaps leave their shoes

*Cont’d on Page 6*

*Who Wrote The Night Before Christmas? Cont'd from Page 1**Clement Moore*

Foster also pointed out that the Christmas poem was written in anapestic tetrameter, a meter never used by Moore until many years after the Christmas poem was published. Moore seemed to favor iambic meter.

In fact, according to Foster, as a young man “Moore condemned the ‘depraved taste in poetry’ of those who read anapestic satire, together with every ‘bawd of licentiousness’ who writes it. Moore at age twenty-

five fairly wept over ‘the influence which nonsensical and immodest verses may have upon the community.’”

Moore’s surviving poems are more notable for their awkward, forced style than for poetic grace. They prove mainly that he was against sin. A poem attributed to him, *Old Santeclaus*, has the following lines:

But where I found the children naughty,  
In manners rude, in temper haughty  
Thankless to parents, liars, swearers,  
Boxers, or cheats, or base tale-bearers,  
I left a long, black, birchen rod,  
Such as the dread command of God  
Directs a Parent’s hand to use  
When virtue’s path his sons refuse.

Another poem scolds young women for their “half-robed bosoms”:

What mean those careless limbs, that conscious air,  
At which the modest blush, the vulgar stare?  
Can spotless minds endure the guilty leer,  
The sober matron’s frown, the witling’s sneer?  
Are these the charms which, in this age refin’d,  
Ensure applause, and captivate the mind?  
Are these your boasted powers; are these the arts

Which kindle love, and chain inconstant hearts?  
Alas! some angry power, some demon’s skill  
Hath wrought this strange perversity of will;

**The attribution to Moore**

A thorough analysis of the controversy can be found on a site created by Mary S. Van Deusen, a descendant of Henry Livingston.:

<http://www.iment.com/maida/familytree/henry/xmas/>

This seems to be the chronology. The poem, published anonymously in 1823, was brought to the publisher by someone in the Moore household, who found it in an album.

By this time, the Livingston family had been hearing this poem for fifteen or more years. But since the original publication, and the widespread reprinting of it, never credited an author, perhaps the Livingston family thought nothing of it. It was only after Moore claimed credit for the poem, in a collection published in 1844, that the Livingston family realized that their traditional poem had been “stolen.”

The Livingstons surmised that a governess who had been in the Livingston home and later the Moores, must have taken a copy of the poem with her. Perhaps it was she, or a house guest, who took the poem to the newspaper.

Henry’s son Sidney recalled hearing the poem about 1804 or 1805. He also said that Henry’s original manuscript, with many corrections, had been in his possession, that he had given it to his brother Edwin, and that it had been lost in a fire in 1848.

Moore is said to have asked the Troy newspaper if they knew the author, and that only after he received a negative reply from the paper did he claim authorship. He explained that he wrote the whole 56-line poem in his head one Christmas Eve while shopping for a turkey, and later wrote it down in finished form, thus explaining why he never had a draft copy with cross-outs and corrections.

It has been said that Moore called the poem “trivial,”



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*Who Wrote The Night Before Christmas? Cont'd from Page 2*

and it was assumed that modesty prevented him from claiming it as his own for years. However, in 1844 he published a book of poetry in which he included the poem.

### Dunder and Blixem? Or Donner and Blitzen?

For the printer, Moore copied out the poem in his own handwriting, but a notable error crept in, perhaps quite unconsciously. The original poem named two of the reindeer Dunder and Blixem – Dutch for thunder and lightning. When Moore, who spoke German but not Dutch, copied it out, he wrote Donner and Blitzen – German for thunder and lightning. Furthermore, he failed to recognize many changes that had been made by various editors since the first publication of that poem which he claimed had sprung full-blown and perfect “in his head.”

Some wondered how this staid and rather stodgy Episcopal priest could have committed plagiarism. Don Foster said it was not the first time. An article in the *New York Times* on October 26, 2000, says of Moore: Donating a sheep-farming manual to a library, Moore wrote inside the cover that he had translated it from French. But a small copyright note printed on the last page credits someone else as sole translator.

Van Deusen began her genealogical research in a quest for her father, whom she had never known. Drawing a blank there, she decided to dig deeper. Describing her research in *People* magazine, she said she turned up Revolutionary War generals and a judge advocate for the Lincoln assassination trial. Reading Moore’s poetry, she found him too moralistic and self-obsessed to have written the Christmas classic.

After she found another descendant of Henry Livingston with a cache of almost every poem Livingston had written, Van Deusen was able to interest Don Foster in the problem. Foster, who had unmasked Joe Klein as the anonymous author of *Primary Colors*, was intrigued, compared styles, and agreed with Van Deusen that Moore could not have written the poem, and said so in a book published in 2000, *Author Unknown: On the Trail of Anonymity*. He described Livingston as playful, and Moore as puritanical.

Who doubts this story? Antiquarians who have invested in handwritten copies signed by Clement Moore.

BARBARA MULLER

## Home for Christmas

It was December 23, 1783, and the last skirmishes of the Revolutionary War were over. George Washington, whom Congress had made Commander-in-Chief, indicated that all he wanted to do was to go home for Christmas. He had not observed Christmas there for nine years.

Accordingly, he sent a notice to Congress saying that he wished to resign his post. His resignation was depicted by John Turnbull in a famous painting still on display in the Capitol.



It was a simple ceremony. Washington said:

“Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theater of action; and bidding an affectionate farewell to this August body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my commission, and take leave of all the employments of public life.”

He then took leave of them and made his way back to Mount Vernon, arriving there on Christmas Eve. According to Steven Weintraub in *George Washington's Christmas Farewell*, “The next day, as a heavy snowfall locked the plantation in snow and ice, Washington at long last celebrated a festive and unmilitary holiday. There he confronted, he later wrote, just one challenge: an ‘Attack of Christmas Pyes.’”

According to a cookbook that Martha Washington had, a Christmas pie was rather formidable, containing the boned meat of a turkey, a goose, a chicken, and a partridge, a hare, and assorted wild game such as woodcocks, spices, and four pounds of butter.

## Hilton Head's Bloody Legion

### Slaughter on Christmas Eve



by **Lyman D. Wooster**

Rather than being a regular military unit and participant in the American Revolution, as one historian would have it, Hilton Head's Bloody Legion was more likely a group of men gathered together for the purpose of avenging

the senseless killing of a local friend, Charles Davant, by a Daufuskie planter.

The historian referred to is Bobby Gilmer Moss, a reputable student of the War for Independence, particularly the South's role in the conflict; he in effect credited the men of the Bloody Legion as being Revolutionary War veterans with service in 1781 and 1782 by applying the term Patriots to them in his published roster.<sup>1</sup> And some other writers on the subject have followed Moss' lead.

Moss' source for the names of Bloody Legion participants in the gory retaliation is unquestionably the South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine's *Historical Notes*.<sup>2</sup> According to that issue, the *Charles Town Royal Gazette* of January 30, 1782 wrote, misspellings included, of the Bloody Legion as follows:

We are informed from Savannah, that about Christmas last, a gang of banditti came to a house on Daufusky Island, where Capt. Martinangel of the Royal Militia was lying sick, and whilst two of them held his wife, another, named Israel Andrews, shot him dead; they afterward plundered Mrs. Martinangel and her children of almost every thing they had ~ These wretches came from Hilton-Head; they stile themselves the Bloody Legion, and are commanded by John Leaycraft. The following is a list of the gang: John Erving, Lewis Bona, Daniel Savage, Christian Rankin, James Devant, John Bull, James Erving, James Allan, Charles Floyd, Isaac Davids, Nathaniel Gambal, William Chiswell, Thomas Roberts, John Mongin, sen, John Mongin, jun., David Ross, Patrick M'Mullin,

Isaac Bolder, Meredith Rich, John Fenden, William Scott.

There is also a grim account of the raid and killing in Martinangel family correspondence:

Lee Craft's party landed on Daufuskie Island. There they visited the Martinangele plantation. [Phillip] de Martinangele had been very ill and they had left his little daughter [Margaret], about three weeks old, on the bed with him. The breakfast table was set waiting the assembly of the family when lo, the stillness of the scene was interrupted by the visit of Lee Craft's party. They entered and all [the family] fled like frightened birds. The [raiding party] stole the silver from the table. Then they entered the room of the invalid and murdered him in his bed and left yelling like so many bloodhounds let loose. When quietness returned to the family, the husband and father was no more and the little baby was [nearly] strangled in her father' blood.<sup>3</sup>

In this account the name "Bloody Legion" is not mentioned, but a member of the family must have used the term when reporting the raid to someone in Savannah who in turn provided information of the event to the *Royal Gazette* in Charles Town. A member or members of the raiding party, when yelling like "so many bloodhounds," must have hollered something like "we are the Bloody Legion."

The Heritage Library has some biographic information on fourteen of the twenty-three Legionaires, with by far the most data on John Leacraft. He was twenty-four years of age at the time of the invasion, and was probably designated the leader of the group, because he had developed into a skilled guerrilla fighter having engaged in a number of military actions during the War for Independence, and because of his rank: he was a lieutenant in the militia and possibly a captain in the Continental Army. While he has not been identified as a captain in several reputable documents that print such information, he may have been granted a field commission without proper supportive paperwork.

Leacraft and Thomas Talbird were witnesses in January 1781 to a clash of opposing militias in which Leacraft's uncle, Capt. James Doherty (Daugherty) was killed by Capt. Richard Pendarvis and William Patterson, Loyalists of Daufuskie Island. Later, both Leacraft and Talbird were among the 5,500 troops

1 Moss, Bobby Gilmer, Roster of South Carolina Patriots in the American Revolution, Genealogy Publishing Company, 1983

2 *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, Historical Notes* 5, No.1, January 1, 1904, 59. Hereinafter SCH&G.

3 Burn, Billie, *An Island Named Daufuskie*, The Reprint Company, Publishers, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1991.

*Hilton Head's Bloody Legion, Cont'd from Page 4*

under General Benjamin Lincoln that surrendered Charleston. Leacraft subsequently broke his parole, captured two Tory officers at Fort Balfour, and then located the two Tories who had killed his uncle, and killed them, at what is now known as Palmetto Bluff.<sup>4</sup>

As an adult Leacraft owned a large Skull Creek plantation on Hilton Head and had 33 slaves, according to the 1790 census.<sup>5</sup> He died in 1806 after a "tedious" illness, so the Charleston Courier reported in August 27, 1806.<sup>6</sup>

Other members of the Bloody Legion for whom some biographical information is available are:

-- Charles Floyd and his family lived on Hilton Head's Walnut Plantation until 1797 when they sold the place and moved to Camden, Georgia.<sup>7</sup> He died in 1820.

-- James Davant, brother of the murdered Charles, had the Point Comfort Plantation. He served in the military from August 1779 to May 1780 and from November 1781 to April 1782; he is listed in the DAR Index as "sol" [soldier].<sup>8</sup> He died in 1803, and was buried in Zion Cemetery where his grave and those of three others, including brother Charles, are marked by bronze plaques acknowledging their Revolutionary War service.

-- Lewis Bona owned property incorporated into Folly Field and Marshlands Plantations.<sup>9</sup> He served in the militia as a captain in the Granville Regiment of Foot from August 1, 1779 to March 8, 1780.<sup>10</sup>

-- David John Mongin, the father, was born in London and the son was born in America. They owned a plantation on Spanish Wells, which was called Mongin Bluff, as well as other properties where they raised indigo.<sup>11</sup>

4 Peeples, Robert E. H., "Capt. Dougherty Tried to Avenge His Death," *The Island Packet*, June 10, 1976 and "Militia Captain Was Island Planter," *The Island Packet*, August 17, 1976

5 Ibid

6 SCH&G 30,118

7 Peeples, *An Index to Hilton Head Island Names*, 1972 (on file in the Heritage Library) and "Islander Part Of Bloody Legion," *The Island Packet*, June 15, 1976.

8 *DAR Patriot Index*, Centennial Edition, Part I, II, III

9 Peeples, *Index of Hilton Head Names*

10 Moss, *Register of Patriots*

11 Peeples, "Mongin Bluff, Now Spanish Wells, Owned by Patriot." *The Island Packet*, July 8, 1976.

-- Daniel Savage had an 850-acre plantation as of 1783 that was sold to William Baynard when Savage either died or moved away.<sup>12</sup>

-- Christian Rankin was a Hilton Head resident who married Elizabeth Fendin Bland, the widow of Charles Davant.<sup>13</sup>

-- A Thomas Roberts has been identified as a Charleston chairmaker, and if he is the Thomas Roberts who was in the Bloody Legion action he apparently moved to that city following the Revolutionary War.<sup>14</sup>

-- Isaac Baldwin is cited here for 'Isaac Bolden' who is listed as one of the Legionnaires; Bolden is probably a misspelling of Baldwin. Isaac served 286 days in the militia in 1779-80, 110 days in 1781-82, and 95 days as a lieutenant in 1782. Buried in Zion Cemetery, he is one of the four Revolutionary War veterans with a plaque marking his grave and citing his patriotism.<sup>15</sup>

-- William Scott owned 360 acres, probably Grasslands, on the inland side of Coggins Point as of 1791. The Scott family was closely allied to the great plantation families on Hilton Head.<sup>16</sup>

-- John Fendin was a brother-in-law of James Davant.<sup>17</sup>

-- Nathaniel Gambol may be a misspelling of Gamble, which is the name of a Hilton Head family.

-- John Bull was a member of a prominent family in the Lowcountry that owned 990 acres on Hilton Head.<sup>18</sup>

As for the other members of the Bloody Legion, information regarding their residency, personal history, and military service has not been found, but it is almost certain that all of them were residents of Hilton Head and acquainted with most if not all of the other Legionnaires and probably with Charles Davant.

In the Revolutionary War, Daufuskie planters were for the most part supportive of the British Crown while Hilton Head planters favored independence, and mili-

12 Peeples, *Index of Hilton Head Names*

13 Harberger, Norma, *People*, 2001, Heritage Library Notebook.

14 SCH&G, 38, 18

15 Moss, 40.

16 Peeples, *Index of Names*

17 Ibid

18 Harberger

*Hilton Head's Bloody Legion (Cont'd from P. 5)*

tary personnel of the two neighboring islands clashed a number of times over their conflicting loyalties. The confrontation that prompted the Bloody Legion to invade Daufuskie and kill Martinangel occurred in the autumn of 1781. Capt. Martinangel and his militia unit covertly invaded Hilton Head, via Broad Creek; then the captain hid in ambush and shot and mortally wounded Charles Davant as he stopped to open a cattle gate; John Andrews was also wounded. On Christmas Eve, 1781, the self-styled Bloody Legion invaded Daufuskie seeking revenge.

The only source of information about the homicidal retaliation that ensued is the Martinangel family, which informed someone in Savannah, who in turn informed the *Charleston Gazette*, and which wrote of the incident in a letter.

In short, there is no other source of the Bloody Legion's actions on Daufuskie to verify the information provided by members of the Martinangel family: misinformation and distortions could easily occur in the process of transmitting details from one person to another and finally to the press; misspelling is clearly evident and it is conceivable that there might have been more men than the twenty-three named or their might have been fewer.

Several misrepresentations occur in Moss' *Roster of Patriots*. Leacraft is referred to as captain of the Bloody Legion, but in the *Gazette's* account he is simply referred to as "commanding" the "wretches." Leacraft is also listed as captain of the group in 1782 as well as 1781, but there is no evidence that the Bloody Legion was in existence in 1782 or for that matter that it existed prior to Christmas Eve 1781. It is noteworthy that the *DAR Patriot Index* has no mention of the Bloody Legion in its multi-volume publication.



*Lyman Wooster was born in Kansas in 1917. His colorful career includes stints as a political science teacher at the U. of Pennsylvania, a civilian analyst of Soviet military and political affairs in Army Intelligence, then in Defense Department Intelligence, and subsequently an analyst with the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. He moved to Hilton Head in 1988. His interest in history led him to the Heritage Library, where he has contributed both research and articles.*

*The Evolution of Santa Claus (Cont'd from P. 1)*

*The Dutch St. Nicholas, Sinterklass (sint=saint) does have the familiar beard, and red garments -- but they are canonical garments, the mitre and chasuble (something like a cape) that a bishop wears, and he carries a bishop's crozier. Sinterklass is accompanied by a helper, most often Zwart Piet (Black Pete) who is black by nature or through sliding down sooty chimneys. The Dutch still celebrate St. Nicholas' Eve.*

by the fireplace, for the tradition has come to the Netherlands, too, of a gift-giver coming down the chimney.

St. Nicholas Eve is still celebrated in Holland on December 5; the tradition has not merged with Christmas as it has in this country.

But there are many similarities in the tradition. Sinterklass supposedly has a book in which he has a record of which children have been naughty and which nice. Sometimes the book is kept by Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) who may leave switches or lumps of coal for children who have been bad.

On the next page in the 17th-century painting, *The Feast of St Nicholas* by Jan Steen, we see familiar Christmas elements. The little girl is delightedly showing her doll to her mother or grandmother, while the little boy, rubbing his eyes, has apparently been snubbed by Zwarte Piet. Another little boy points mockingly to the unhappy child.

Sinterklass (or his helper, Zwarte Piet) had appar-

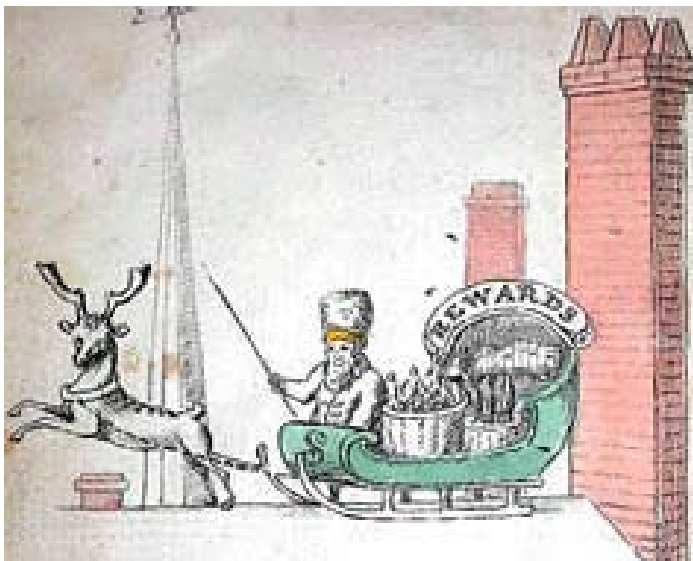
*The Evolution of Santa Claus (Cont'd from P. 1)*

*The Feast of St. Nicholas by Jan Steen, c. 1665, shows a typical family celebration. It is in Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.*

ently already picked up the habit of going down chimneys; the two persons in middle right are said to be pointing in amazement to the chimney.

The Dutch brought Sinterklass to this country and, through mispronunciation and a series of evolutions, he morphed into Santa Claus.

The New-York Historical Society (so named), founded by patriot John Pintard after the Revolution, was to make the next contribution to the legend. Wash-



*The Children's Friend, 1821, shows Sante Claus on a rooftop with the added detail of a sleigh drawn by a reindeer.*

ington Irving joined the Society and on St. Nicholas' Day in 1807 published a satirical fiction, *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, with numerous references to a jolly St. Nicholas character. This was not the saintly bishop, but rather an elfin Dutch burgher with a clay pipe.

In 1821 the gift-giver, now dubbed Sante Claus, was moved to Christmas Eve in a book called *The Children's Friend*. This was a stern character who rewarded good children and punished bad. The style of the poetry leads some to think it was the Christmas poem actually written by Clement Moore (not *The Night Before Christmas*; see Page 1).

It seems likely that Irving's elfin image of St. Nicholas influenced the writer of *The Night Before Christmas*. The poem was enormously popular and widely reprinted. In it St. Nicholas is a jolly, elf-like character, the basis for a series of drawings during the Civil War of Santa by Thomas Nast for *Harper's Weekly*. These are said to have demoralized the Confederate soldiers by showing Santa as on the Union's side. In any case, the poem influenced all subsequent images of Santa.



*Santa in his workshop by Thomas Nast, 1869. Nast has given him a red suit. Note the icicles.*

By the 1920s the image of Santa had become more or less standardized by artists like N. C. Wyeth and Norman Rockwell: Santa had a flowing beard and wore a red suit, a wide black belt, and black boots. This is the Santa who was the basis of the familiar portrayals in the ads for Coca-Cola in the Thirties.



*The first Coca-Cola Santa, 1931, by Haddon Sundblom*

BARBARA MULLER

## Santa's Reindeer are Female Caribou

Reindeer and caribou are the same species (*Rangifer tarandus*), with the term reindeer generally used for the domesticated variety. The males shed their antlers after the mating season, while the females wear theirs all year round. Depictions of Santa's sleigh normally show it drawn by antlered deer.

Reindeer and caribou are designed for the cold: they are covered with hollow hair that traps air and keeps them insulated, but they are threatened by climate change and industrial development.

Studies indicate the number of reindeer and caribou has decreased nearly 60 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

According to [livescience.com](http://www.livescience.com), earlier springs are depriving mothers and calves of quality feeding; freezing rain (rather than snow) impacts the lichens on which they feed, and warmer summers make insect activity more intense.

"The caribou is central to the normal function of

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.livescience.com/environment/090611-reindeer-populations-plunge.htm>



*Reindeer are adapted to the chilly climes of the Arctic tundra, including Scandinavia (shown), as they sport hollow hairs that hold air and act as insulation. Credit: Dreamstime.com.*

northern ecosystems," said Justina Ray, executive director of Wildlife Conservation Society-Canada. "With their huge range requirements and need for intact landscapes, these animals are serving as the litmus test for whether we will succeed in taking care of their needs in an area that is under intensifying pressure."

## The Heritage Library

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