

Izaak Walton Killam: Cultivating visionaries

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Izaak Walton Killam

Yarmouth-born Izaak Walton Killam was Canada's greatest builder of industries, and probably its richest man, too, when he died in 1955.

But even then he was "a mystery man," as *The Canadian Press* reported at the time — a figure whose boldness in developing Canada's resources was matched by what *Time* magazine called "a passion for obscurity."

That suited Killam fine. As Douglas How recounts in a 1976 biography, Killam shunned publicity, seldom gave interviews, was rarely photographed and wasn't much for chit-chat.

He did have a passion for fly-fishing, as befitted a namesake of Izaak Walton, author of *The Compleat Angler*. Killam caught a lot of fish, How writes, because he was patient, persistent and studied "factors that brought angling success." Those were good skills in business, too.

We can appreciate Killam's sane desire to avoid the crush of fame in his lifetime. But in the sweep of history, no Nova Scotian is less deserving of obscurity. In our Opinions section today, Halifax lawyer George Cooper, a former trustee of the enormous Killam education trusts, pays

fine tribute to the legacy of Izaak and Dorothy Killam. And what a remarkable record it is — from the struggle to see his Mersey paper mill through the Depression to bequests that gave us the IWK Hospital, Dalhousie's Killam Library and a \$400-million scholarship and research endowment.

Killam's finest monuments are these health and education legacies. But it would be fitting, too, to mark his life with a public statue in Halifax, where he and Max Aiken (later Lord Beaverbrook) founded Royal Securities, the firm through which Killam developed far-flung pulp, paper and hydro resources that were the oilsands of their time. Nova Scotia needs builders of Killam's vision and tenacity. Recognizing his story serves to remind every generation that they, too, can realize great visions from here.

How recounts that late in life Killam talked of bringing cheap nuclear power to this region to enable more people to make a living here. It was a visionary idea in the early 1950s and no doubt would have been a challenge to pull off. But the point is Killam cared about making opportunities where he came from. If we cultivate more such visionaries in Atlantic Canada, we stand to reap more opportunities.