

Review: Profile of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, ten years after 9/11

November 24, 2011

REVIEW

As part of a series of reports commemorating the 10th anniversary of the so-called 9/11 attacks, CBC Television's The National [profiled the community](#) of [Yarmouth, Nova Scotia](#), on September 5, 2011.

The series examined counter-terrorism, security and civil rights in the post-9/11 era, and the report by Havard Gould focused on the economic impact on Yarmouth in the wake of tighter security and passport requirements that seemingly served as a dampener on once-thriving American tourism to the town.

The report started with footage of the closed ferry terminal and a man, later identified in the report as a former ferry worker, saying "9/11 changed everything." The town's mayor, Phil Mooney, told Gould that Yarmouth was "probably the biggest loser" post-9/11 without realizing it.

The report noted that the community was making a "desperate appeal" online for help. It showed images from an online video and, incongruently, CBC superimposed a date of "June 1, 1998" on it.

The report showed older footage of Americans visiting, then a 2005 clip in which one tourist expressed concerns about safe traveling post-9/11. Around that time, tourists between the two countries were required to hold passports. Subsidies that temporarily supported the ferry business were stopped.

The result, Gould said, was a quiet harbour, closed hotels, and a depressed real estate market. Business owner Lenn Burkitt predicted more business closures ahead, while the owner of Captain Kelley's restaurant said he was not going to be able to hang on much longer.

There were efforts to reopen the ferry business, and Gould concluded that Yarmouth's hopes rested on its return.

The complainant, Eric Ruff, wrote September 28 to say that Gould “missed the main point of Yarmouth’s present situation. And, he chose to illustrate the piece in a cunning, negative and selective fashion.” He noted the opening scene featured rainfall, imagery that conjured pathetic fallacy.

Ruff, a resident of Yarmouth, asserted that Gould “was out for a specific story and the story which he produced was contrived to suit his needs.” He was selective in his depiction of the community and the reporting was neither unbiased nor accurate, he said.

His conclusion: “9/11 did NOT have a detrimental effect on Yarmouth - at least, no worse than any other small Canadian tourist town.”

Mark Harrison, the executive producer of The National, wrote back October 5 and explained the extent to which the program went to canvass opinion and chronicle the situation.

“People living in Yarmouth have every reason to be proud,” Harrison wrote. “But we also found they were worried about the economic slowdown brought on by the cessation of ferry service and anxious about the future. I believe Mr. Gould’s report fairly reflected that uncertainty.”

As for the footage in the rain, Harrison said that was the weather when the crew arrived in Yarmouth, just as later footage featured sunshine on the day the crew departed.

Ruff wrote November 11, still puzzled by the superimposed 1998 date on the video and asserting that the ferry cancellation was political and not related to 9/11. He asked for a review.

CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices call for accurate, fair reporting. *“We seek out the truth in all matters of public interest. We invest our time and our skills to learn, understand and clearly explain the facts to our audience.”*

To ensure impartiality, the policy requires CBC to *“provide professional judgment based on facts and expertise.”*

CONCLUSION

The report combined anecdotal and empirical evidence to make its case. It featured the mayor, two business owners and a former ferry worker essentially saying that Yarmouth had been hard-hit by a chain of events following 9/11.

It provided information on an ongoing economic impact based on the journalistic policy's requirement of "facts and expertise."

It is to be acknowledged that the report would be uncomfortable for some proud residents, but the journalism was supported thoroughly. I could find no evidence elsewhere that would suggest inaccuracy.

The imagery in the report helped support the story, but reflected the conditions during the reporting and did not distort the facts of the matter.

There was no violation of CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices.

The superimposed date on the online video about Yarmouth's difficulties was a technical error that would be better to reflect its 2011 date of origin.

Kirk LaPointe
CBC Ombudsman