

AN INTERVIEW WITH A PIPE SMOKER

By
John P. Seiler

(This is a work of FICTION, but it may become true!)

BACKGROUND:

In the year 2039, the United States of North America is truly the united states of all the old North American nations. It stretched from the upper tip of Alaska to the southern Isthmus of Panama. One national government maintained order at the Federal Level with the old states and nation-states enforcing the laws and regulations at the local level. One such law was the National Health Improvement and Smoking Ban Act of 2015 (referred to as the "2015 Act") was enacted into law in 2015. It was a codification of local state laws, bans and the laws of the old independent states in North America. The 2015 Act was draconian in nature. It prohibited smoking of any form and in any place where two or more people occupied the same breathing space. It made it a crime for any person born after 2015 to use tobacco products, in any form with stringent punishments for the seller/distributor/ of the tobacco product and the consumer. Any person born prior to January 1, 2015 could legally purchase and use the tobacco product, but only in isolation, away from any other person. However, such a person was ostracized from the community and his fellow man. For those that continued to be 'addicted' to tobacco, the National Smoking Health Institute (NSHI) offered mandatory comprehensive smoking cessation programs, however, no one seemed to come out in the mental state the way they went into the program. Entry to this program was either voluntary or through the court system if a criminal violation of the 2015 Act was found. Additionally, the 2015 Act prohibited any form of advertising of tobacco products to anyone in any form of media. Smoking all but disappeared from any of the media of the day and the authorities went as far as to alter the historical perspective of tobacco, even to the extent of its importance in the founding of the original United States. Tobacco and smoking had been expunged from the historical records. However, there were some historians that suspected these actions and studied tobacciana.

John Smith (not his real name as he could be persecuted under the 2015 Act for his comments in this article) is 90 years old. He is a pipe smoker and pipe collector. He has been a pipe smoker since he was 18 years old. At one time he had been involved in the pipe smoking - pipe collecting hobby, which became illegal with the 2015 Act. After all, how could you get together to enjoy a pipe with someone when you could not smoke in another person's presence? He continues to smoke his pipe and looks hale and hearty for his 90 years. The

remainder of this article is an excerpt of an interview with John, and is reprinted with the thanks of History Today Magazine (HTM).

HTM Interview:

HTM: We at History Today Magazine would like to thank you for this opportunity to interview you today. There are not many smokers today, or at least those that would acknowledge themselves to be in public.

JS: No problem. I could hardly pretend not to be a pipe smoker after being one for so long and so involved in the hobby.

HTM: We understand that smoking in general and pipe smoking in particular was once very popular.

JS: In the 1970, it was estimated that 1 man in 10 smoked a pipe. By 2008, that estimate dropped to 1 in 100. The sale of pipe tobacco was estimated to be about 30 million pounds in 1970 dropped to about 3 million pounds in 2008. The decline in smoking in the old United States began with the original Surgeon General's Report and the institution of politically correct policies. The politically correct Environmental Protection Agency's report on Environmental Tobacco Smoke with its placement on the list of carcinogens hastened its demise. These actions and the action of the anti-smoking organizations resulted in the enactment of smoking bans in most states. Whereas once smoking pipes was seen as an aspect of being a gentleman, by the early 21st century a pipe smoker was viewed as a decrepit addict. When I was young, everybody's father or grandfather smoked a pipe. Smoking your first cigarette or corn silk in a pipe was a right of a young man's passage. Smoking in general and pipe smoking in particular went from being the norm to smokers becoming outcasts in society. The state smoking bans limited pipe smoking but the 2015 Act sealed the coffin.

HTM: Did the smoking bans have an impact on the quantity and quality of the pipe tobacco that was available?

JS: Right up through 2008, many quality pipe tobaccos were widely available. For example, many fine tobaccos were available but the cost from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s doubled. A \$10 - 100 gram tin in the mid-1990s was priced the same as a mid-2000s 50 gram tin. Taxes were the largest part of the price increase. Due to so-called liability issues, after 2000, some of the tobaccos that had been widely available in the United States became unavailable. Also, because of the decrease in demand and the small percentage of sales that pipe tobacco represented compared to cigarettes and cigars, there was a consolidation within the industry. Many brands once sold by the large conglomerates became unavailable or the formulation changed. Whereas there were a number of large

blenders with sources of high-grade leaf or took more time to let their products age, the business went to a few large scale blenders with changed formulations. However, early 2000 saw a rise of the boutique blenders, high quality small batch tobaccos. This all ended with the 2015 Act which put all tobacco production under state control. Aged and high grade leave disappeared. All tobacco products were made by and for the state and distributed through a chain of state stores like alcohol products had been done in earlier years. Most of the older pipe smokers had seen this coming and had stocked up their tobacco cellars prior to the 2015 Act; however, I just about did not put up enough as I did not foresee living until 90 years of age. For those old timers that did not put away tobacco, I feel sorry for them as you really cannot purchase tobacco today from the state store that is of any quality. Most of it we would not smoke years ago and would have considered to be garbage. Under the 2015 Act, the importing of tobacco is prohibited. You can obtain some quality pipe tobacco on the black market, but at a very high price as it represents pre-2015 tobacco. However, in a few years it will not matter as many of us will not be around anymore and the demand will dwindle since it will be illegal for the new generation to use any form of tobacco.

HTM: Has the creation of pipes been impacted by the smoking ban?

JS: Yes it has, quite dramatically. Prior to the 1980s, most pipes were produced by factories with few artisan pipe carvers. However, these pipes from both sources were of a very high quality in terms of materials, design, and workmanship. From 1980 through 2010, most of the factory pipe makers had gone out of business and pipes were produced by small carvers or individual artisans. Factory operations such as Dunhill, Castello, and Charatan folded while individual artisans such as Cooke, Tinsky, Lewis, Von Erck, Learned, and many others arose. By 2015, the business was solely in the hands of the small artisans. The 2015 Act requires pipe carvers to have licenses to make their pipes. They then must sell them to the state. The state then resells them at a tremendous markup to those legally permitted to purchase pipes. Again, with the lessening in demand for smoking; there has been a lessening in the demand for the manufacturing of pipes. High quality pipes are found in personal collections and the black market. Once a pipe received the connotation as a “drug delivery system”, the government found a way to regulate its production and distribution.

HTM: I understand that people once attended pipe shows. What were they and how did the ban affect them?

JS: A pipe show was a venue where pipe collectors, carvers, distributors and pipe smokers got together to buy/sell/trade pipes and tobacco, and to just enjoy each others company. Prior to 2000 smoking was pretty much wide open at a show.

From 2006 – 2008 it became restricted in parts of the pipe show hotel, but was permitted during the show on the show floor. Starting with the Chicago show of 2008, pipe smoking was not permitted on the show floor and was restricted to the 'smoking' rooms in the hotel. Over time, it became more and more restricted in the show venues which saw a decline in attendance. Another factor was the high transportation costs to get to the pipe show due to the rise in the cost of petroleum products. By the time of the 2015 Act, pipe shows had become too costly to produce and with the smoking limitations, not many people attended. The 2015 Act, of course, made them pretty much a thing of the past as it limited when people could get together to smoke, whether in public or private.

HTM: You have lived through 24 years of the 2015 Act. How has this affected your pipe collecting and pipe smoking?

JS: My pipe collecting ended the day the law took affect. I have made no pipe or tobacco purchases since then. Why? Because the pipes and tobacco available through the state system are just plain junk. But this has been good in some respects. My pipes are well smoked and enjoyed. I started in 2015 with a tobacco cellar of about 1500 tins of tobacco and 100 pounds of bulk tobacco. I am down to about 600 tins and half of the bulk tobacco. However, I now smoke less, and enjoy each bowl to the fullest. I actually have become a better smoker, savoring each bowl full of tobacco. I now take care of and treasure each of my 100 or so pipes. The only big negative is that I pretty much have to smoke in solitary confinement and out of doors. I refuse to go to a smoker's haven wherein each smoker is in an individual ventilated sealed cubicle where they can smoke, but must communicate through the window and over an electronic system with each other. I also refuse to purchase a smoking mask which goes over the head, contains the pipe in an enclosed volume, and lets you smoke without any of the pipe smoke going to the outside the mask environment. Finally, I will not try the state sponsored auto-capture pipe which basically burns the tobacco, captures any of the smoke coming off the top of the bowl, and you exhale through a tube so the pipe smoke laden air can be collected and treated. I will be like a hermit on an island still living and smoking in the tradition of the old ways.

HTM: How has it affected the general public?

JS: The 2015 Act, in retrospect, has shown that politicians and political correctness can be a dangerous thing. The rationale for the law has been shown to be bogus. The scientific studies were suspect. The promised results have not been met other than there is a whole underground of 'criminals' that chance their living and lives daily to enjoy pipes and tobacco. For someone under the age of 24 to smoke, they risk their economic and social status, and could face the

sanctions of the Act. If they choose not to smoke, they will never know the calm relaxation and introspection you can achieve by pipe smoking. We were told that the 2015 Act would result in less medical costs, lower taxes, and 40,000 lives saved each year through the ban. What a joke! With fewer smokers, fewer taxes were received on tobacco products which meant that sin taxes were subsequently increased on alcohol, fatty foods, unhealthy life style choices, etc. The 40,000 lives saved never materialized and it was finally established that pipe smokers lived longer than the average. Also, with advances in medicine, deaths from lung and other forms of cancer became a thing of the past. Newer diseases, unheard of 20 years ago are now causing death. Finally, it was found that tobacco use had positive medical consequences, but the government had gone too far to change things now and has consequently suppressed these findings.

HTM: I and our readers would like to thank you for this interview. I would like to end it by asking you what you foresee for the future.

JS: I basically see no change in the status quo. We old timers will die off until we get to the point where there are no 'legal' smokers left alive. There will only be an illegal underground. This will be the future unless we, as a populace, go out and reclaim our human rights. It is not just the area of smoking, but our individual right to choose has been seized by the state in the name of 'save the children', 'save us from ourselves', 'don't bother your neighbor' and political correctness. Our future is in our own hands. We must grasp it or it will be lost like water flowing through our fingers.

HTM: Thank you Mr. Smith

JS: My pleasure.