

# Did the Cold War begin in Ottawa with the efection of Soviet Cyber Clerk Gouzenko. And did it End with a Walk on Eugene Whalen's Farm in Amherstburg, Ontario?

## Gorbechev and Eugene Whalen

The source article "Tipping Points, How Glasnost grew in Ontario" by Brett Popplewell was published in the [Toronto Star](#) Mar 28 2010



## Too much fresh air at Whelan's Farm by Stan Brin, Eric Oppen & Steve Payne

"Yakovlev accompanied Gorbachev across Canada but it wasn't until the walk through Whelan's fields that the two men found themselves free to discuss politics away from spying eyes on both sides of the Cold War. Or so they thought..".

"And so the rising star of the Politburo and the Soviet ambassador to Ottawa, both in three-piece suits and fedoras, kicked through fresh-cut grass, walked among saplings and then past fields of corn, soy and wheat. As they strolled, they talked - of the perils facing their Soviet motherland".

May 19th 1983, an expression of deviationist thought ruined the political career of Mikhail Gorbachev after he unwisely conducted an impromptu one-to-one meeting on this day with a radical free thinker, the so-called "godfather of glasnost" Alexander Yakovlev.

Gorbachev had flown to Ottawa ostensibly in his role as the Minister of Agriculture for bilateral discussions with his Canadian counterpart Eugene Whelan. But as a rising star in the politburo, Gorbachev had conducted a rather more high profile meeting with the Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Also present was Yakolev; formerly the Soviet Propaganda Minister he had been sidelined into his current role as the Ambassador to Ottawa. Matters of protocol became somewhat confused after an invitation to Whelan's family farm overlooking the Detroit River in Amherstburg, Southern Ontario. Whelan was running very late, leaving the Soviet delegation alone with his wife Elizabeth.

To the great displeasure of both the KGB and RCMP, Gorbachev and Yakolev chose to go for a three hour walk. The fresh air encouraged them to conduct a brutally frank discussion about the parlous state of the Soviet Union. They also reached some rather startling conclusions on the main points of a plan to change the face of Euope.

But due to KGB eavesdropping, those plans came to nought. And on his return to Moscow, Gorbachev would be discreetly advised that he had received a new appointment as the Soviet Ambassador to Finland. His seat in the politburo would be occupied by another rising star in the Communist Party known as Boris Yeltsin.

### **Gorbachev's first visit to Canada**

The former federal agriculture minister and senator Eugene Whelan passed away Jan 2020. His home in Amherstburg is for sale. The property was the site of a historic walk that took place between future Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev and Aleksandr Yakovlev, the Soviet ambassador to Canada. It was during the May 19, 1983 meeting that the seeds of Cold War-ending perestroika reforms were planted.

Whelan and his wife Liz played host to a Soviet delegation led by Gorbachev — then agriculture secretary and a rising star within the Politburo. His inaugural visit to North America included a stop in Essex County where the Soviet officials attended a dinner held in the Whelans' rec room. Whelan also introduced Gorbachev and his delegation to Canada's system of farming — a system that convinced the future premier that democratic reforms were desperately needed in his homeland.

Heavy security dodged Yakovlev's goal was to get Gorbachev alone to make the case for reform, but up until the visit to Amherstburg, the two men were under the constant watchful eye of Soviet and Canadian security. That opportunity finally came after they entered the Whelan home and Liz Whelan ushered the two men outside. During a stroll along a lane way that bordered crops of corn and soybeans the pair struck a friendship that subsequently led to a strategy for the radical changes known as perestroika.

### **Walk to be commemorated**

Amherstburg council recently approved a motion to have a plaque installed in front of the Whelan home. The town will work with the family on where the plaque will be located. It will honour Eugene and Elizabeth Whelan for their role in entertaining the Yakovlev and Gorbachev while visiting Amherstburg. Whelan, one of the region's most colourful and enduring politicians, died Feb. 19, 2013 at the age of 88. "My sisters and I are proud our parents were able to host dignitaries as well as family and friends in our home over the years," said Susan, currently a justice of the peace in Windsor and former federal Liberal MP. Thus it could be said that the Cold War may have been seen to have begun in Canada with the defection of Gouzenko but it may also have begun to end in Canada with the walk on Eugene Whelan's farm!