The Canadian Historical Association: A History

Donald Wright
The Canadian Historical Association: 

* A History

Using his 1947 annual report to reflect on the Canadian Historical Association's first twenty-five years, the long-serving English Secretary and Treasurer, Norman Fee, remarked that while the Association had not accomplished everything it had set out to, it had confronted and overcome the many challenges associated with trying to keep such a small community of historians connected across such a large country. Every year for twenty-five years the Association had organized an annual meeting, bringing scholars together from across the country to share their research and to renew their friendships; and with a tiny budget that never amounted to more than a few thousand dollars a year, it managed to publish its *Annual Report* which had become an important academic journal publishing original and scholarly articles by the country's leading historians. In becoming a leading institution in Canadian intellectual life, the CHA had displayed, in Fee's words, "a persistent vitality."

In 2002, the Canadian Historical Association celebrated its eightieth anniversary. Admittedly, histories written to mark an anniversary year are often uncritical exercises in self-congratulation. In a sense, this is too. Since its founding in 1922, the CHA has served — with a persistent vitality — the professional interests of historians. Looking back on the past eighty years, we can be justifiably proud of our Association's central role in the development and defence of history in Canada.

But, if written to mark the CHA's eightieth birthday, this is not an official history. Instead, it places the CHA within a larger theme in the history of history in Canada: its professionalization. Professions are a uniquely modern phenomenon and the historical profession is no exception. Its emergence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries owed to the expansion of the middle class, the explosion of scientific and social scientific knowledge, the specialization of functions and the segmentation of the labour market, all features of modernization. But the
professionalization of history was neither a straight forward nor inevitable process. It involved questions of what was and what was not history and who could and who could not be a historian. As the professional association for historians in Canada, the CHA has had to contend with these questions.

I

The beginnings of the Canadian Historical Association can be located in the Historic Landmarks Association which, in turn, can be traced to W.D. Lighthall. A Montreal poet, novelist, philosopher, archaeologist, historian, local politician and successful barrister, Lighthall was also an indefatigable organizer. When he learned in 1905 of the Dominion Government's plans to break up and sell as so many lots the military common adjoining Fort Chambly and the soldiers’ barracks in Chambly, Quebec, he said “enough is enough”. Although the military common would be saved, this “attack,” as Lighthall described it, against Canada's architectural heritage was yet one more indicator of the country's growing obsession with material advancement, its naive faith in inevitable progress and its concomitant disregard for its past. Two years and innumerable letters later, Lighthall oversaw the successful constitution of the Historic Landmarks Association (HLA) at the May 1907 meeting of the Royal Society of Canada (RSC). Although the Royal Society extended a helping hand, and although the Association deliberately followed the Society’s lead in holding its annual meeting in Ottawa in the third week of May, the HLA was its own show.

As its name suggests, the Historic Landmarks Association was primarily interested in locating, recording, protecting and preserving the country's many historic landmarks. In its mission statement, the HLA described itself as a sort of central “intelligence department” that would gather, organize and make available information about “the great souvenirs of our country's history.” As well, and when and where it was possible, the Association would “concentrate effective influence — personal, public and legislative — on [a landmark's] preservation.” For the next fifteen years, then, the HLA busied itself with the organization of its annual meeting in Ottawa, the creation of a national inventory of historic sites
and, beginning in 1915, the publication of its annual report. In an article on the disciplinization of history in French Canada, Patrice Régimbald considered “le rôle moteur” of the Royal Society of Canada; its most important initiative, he asserted, was the creation of the HLA in 1907. True, the Historic Landmarks Association was a national body with a national mailing list, something that would prove useful to the Canadian Historical Association. But there was nothing predestined about the HLA becoming the CHA. It was what it was: a patriotic association steeped in a discourse of romance and dedicated to the protection and preservation of historic landmarks. More than likely written by Lighthall, the Association’s statement of purpose scaled new rhetorical heights. Of the self-governing dominions, Canada’s history “was the most romantic of them all.” Think of its explorers, its soldiers, its Indians; think even of its poets. Yet Canadians neglected this rich history much to their “peril and shame.” In his 1918 president’s report, Pemberton Smith, a St. James Street insurance broker and active member of Montreal’s Antiquarian and Numismatic Society, implored members never to forget “that our work is not only necessary but patriotic.”

Although self-consciously patriotic, the HLA did not attempt to impose a nationalist agenda. Instead, it deliberately sidestepped the country’s competing nationalisms — imperialism on the one hand and French-Canadian nationalism on the other — by seeking local nominations for inclusion in its national inventory, what it sometimes called its Directory of Sites and other times its Classified List. In this sense, then, the HLA was very much committed to the bonne entente tradition, to bridging the French-English divide. In practice, however, the Historic Landmarks Association was an English-Canadian association. Both the membership and the executive were almost entirely English-speaking. At any given time, less than six percent of members were French Canadian. Despite Pemberton Smith’s rhetorical commitment to his “French confrères,” the Association conducted its business in English and it printed its annual report in English. Because the HLA never translated its name, an Association des lieux historiques could not be said to exist, even on paper.
All of this is to say that there is nothing in the archival or printed records of the Historic Landmarks Association to suggest that it played much of a role in the disciplinization or the professionalization of history in either English or French Canada. It was not a scholarly association by any stretch of the definition and nor did it pretend to be. Although the University of Toronto historians George Wrong and W.S. Wallace were members, they did not take part in the Association's activities. At the end of the day, the HLA remained thoroughly outside the changes to the practice of history taking place inside the universities. It was here that history's professionalization was taking root: the creation of autonomous departments, the appointment of men armed with advanced training in history, the growing expectation of original research and scholarly writing and a new emphasis on criticism. It was out of the University of Toronto, for example, that Wrong initiated in 1898 the Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada, an annual publication committed to printing, as its name indicated, critical reviews of historical publications relating to Canada. Twenty-two year later, Wallace transformed the annual Review of Historical Publications into the quarterly Canadian Historical Review (CHR). Although history would remain, and for that matter still remains, a past-time, a hobby, and maybe even a passion, for interested men and women outside the university, it was in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century also becoming a profession, something someone — almost always a man and only very rarely a woman — did for a living. For university-trained and university-based men history could now be a career in a way that it could never have been for someone like W.D. Lighthall.

It was in this context, then, that we see the transformation of the Historic Landmarks Association into the Canadian Historical Association in 1922.

— II —

By 1920 the Historic Landmarks Association had become redundant. The creation of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board in 1919 — an advisory board to the Dominion Government on matters of historical preservation and interpretation — left the HLA without a mandate. When
he assumed the presidency in 1920, Lawrence Burpee made it his goal to transform the HLA into something more effective, something more like the American Historical Association. Burpee spent the better part of two years laying the groundwork for the transformation of the HLA and in May, 1922, he presented the HLA with a new constitution for a new association. To be called the Canadian Historical Association, its objectives were “to encourage research and public interest in history; to promote the preservation of historic sites and buildings, documents, relics and other significant heirlooms of the past; [and] to publish historical studies and documents as circumstances may permit.” After the HLA provisionally adopted the new constitution, the ubiquitous Lighthall moved that Burpee be named the first president of the CHA.

At first glance, Burpee appears an unlikely founder of the Canadian Historical Association. As a career civil servant, he was not a member of the emerging academic community of historians. At least one member of this community, A.L. Burt from the University of Alberta, remained unimpressed. Educated at Toronto and Oxford, Burt was a rising star in Canadian history but he thought little of the newly created CHA. “There are a number of local societies organized for local antiquarian research, but nothing can be hoped for from them.” As for the CHA, he added that, “It will never be a real Canadian Historical Association, for it has been started on the wrong lines and the best students of Canadian history are not taking it seriously. Indeed, it threatens to prevent the formation of a real Canadian Historical Association, which would be a clearing house for ideas on the study of Canadian history.” Burt’s skepticism was understandable. Burpee envisioned the Association as in part a “patriotic agency” dedicated to bridging the gulf between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians and, in one of his first acts as president, he struck the Standing Committee on Historic Landmarks. The first CHA Executive and Council, its first management structure, included an eclectic mix of academics (George Wrong and Chester Martin), archivists (Arthur Doughty, Pierre-Georges Roy and James Kenney) and non-academics (Burpee, Lighthall and British Columbia’s F.W. Howay). This commitment to patriotism and landmarks on the one hand, and the continued presence of non-academic historians on the other, underscored the continuities
between the old Historic Landmarks Association and the new Canadian Historical Association.

But appearances can be deceiving: Burpee may not have been an academic and he may have seen the CHA's mandate as one that included patriotism and landmarks, but he was also committed to making the CHA an effective organization for historical research, research which he himself valued. As early as 1908 he published an article in the University Magazine stressing the use of "original sources" in the writing of history. The days of relying on "secondary material" were over, he said. In addition, the historian must accurately cite his sources so that others might "test" his results. When Lighthall nominated him for the presidency of the CHA, Burpee had published three books and a handful of articles. As president, and later chairman of the management committee, he moved the CHA in the direction of a professional association. Although much of his 1923 presidential address was given over to a discussion of landmarks, Burpee stressed the CHA's mandate was to encourage historical research in Canada, not just in Canadian history, but in all fields and in all time periods, from the ancient world to the modern. This Association, he said, will place "the broadest possible definition on history." Taking a page from the playbook of the American Historical Association (AHA) and American Historical Review, Burpee proposed the creation of a joint CHA membership and CHR or Bulletin des Recherches Historiques subscription. This would allow members, he believed, to keep up-to-date with the latest developments in historical research. Burpee could also report that the CHA had been represented at the annual meeting of the AHA in New Haven, the International Congress on the History of America in Rio de Janeiro and the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Brussels. "If we can measure in any degree up to the standard of the American Historical Association we shall not have lived in vain," he said. In 1924, Burpee traveled across the country, visiting every province except Prince Edward Island, in an effort to beat the bushes and increase interest in the activities of CHA.

In short, history's professionalization came from outside, as well as from within, the university. The story of professionalization is not the straight-
forward story of professional historians pulling themselves up by the
bootsraps and out of the morass of mere antiquarianism. Rather, it is a
story of gradual transition, of how one way of organizing intellectual life
— in local societies located in the country's urban centres — gave way
to another way of organizing intellectual life — in national societies run
by, and for, specialized scholars located in the country’s universities. Behind
this transition was society’s modernization and its increasing demand for
social scientific knowledge and expert advice. Overseeing this transition
were men like George Wrong, W.S. Wallace and A.L. Burt as well as men
like Lawrence Burpee. The professionalization of history must not be plotted
as the inevitable and upward march from nothing to something, from
darkness to light. To see professionalization in such terms obscures the
rich intellectual life that existed before modern, university-based profes-
sional, intellectual life at the same time as it neglects the role played by
those now considered amateurs and antiquarians. Indeed, it would not
be an overstatement to say that it was Burpee, first as president until
1925 and then as chairman of the management committee until 1934,
who ensured the initial survival of the CHA; and it was under his leader-
ship that over the course of the 1920s the Executive and Council began
to consist mainly of academics and archivists. Even A.L. Burt, who initially
believed that the CHA would never amount to much, sat on Council from
1926 to 1931. Twenty-odd years later, in 1949, he became president.

It was also over the course of the 1920s that the annual meeting of the
Canadian Historical Association became more a scholarly conference and
less a meeting for those interested in landmarks. In addition, it became
a social event, an opportunity for professional historians to reconnect
with each other and to reconfirm their shared faith in the historical pro-
ject. As Arthur Lower once confessed, it was the annual meeting of the
CHA that allowed him to feel less isolated and more “a member of a band
that had no local moorings.” “It was this sense of wider brotherhood,”
he continued, “that shored me up during many a dark day in Winnipeg.”
In addition to everything else it does, a professional association provides
a fictive kinship network; it allows its members to say, “I am not alone.”
In fact, it was Frank Underhill who first suggested that the CHA do more to make the annual meeting a social as well as an academic event. Writing in 1926 to the Toronto classicist and CHA Secretary-Treasurer, Charles Cochrane, Underhill urged him to model the CHA’s annual meeting after that of the AHA. The Association, he explained, should do more to provide members with an opportunity to socialize with one another by arranging a lunch or a dinner, though “judging from this year’s experience I don’t know that meeting one another would be a particularly thrilling event.” Underhill later suggested that the annual meeting be organized around a particular theme. Cochrane agreed to both suggestions. Held at the University of Toronto, the 1927 annual meeting featured a series of papers on Confederation to mark its Diamond Jubilee and a Friday-night banquet at Hart House. When Underhill could not attend the meeting, Cochrane agreed to present his paper on Upper Canadian radical opinion in the decade before Confederation. Still, Underhill would describe it as his “first professional historical paper.” For his part, Harold Innis confirmed what every conference organizer knows: it is not the content of the papers but the quality of the coffee. According to Innis, the 1927 meeting was only “average,” with some of the papers being “very good and others beating old straw.” But if mediocre “from the standpoint of intellectual entertainment,” the meeting was “excellent from the standpoint of food.” In any event, the format adopted in 1927 became the basic format of the annual meeting: a series of invited papers organized around a particular theme combined with a social event, sometimes a dinner, other times a lunch, and between sessions, a tour of this or that local historical site. After the 1928 annual meeting in Winnipeg, George Brown from the University of Toronto sent a short note to his University of Manitoba colleague, D.C. Harvey. “I feel that the Association is really beginning to find itself,” Brown said.

Although the CHA was moving unmistakably in the direction of an association for professional historians in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it did not necessarily have a historian at the helm. In 1929 the Honourable Rodolphe Lemieux became president; he was succeeded by the Right Honourable Robert Borden who was himself succeeded by
Judge F.W. Howay in 1931 and Dr. John Clarence Webster in 1932. Even though there is nothing in the archival record to indicate why the Council selected these men, it is not unreasonable to assume that an honest effort was being made to make the CHA a national association: a French-Canadian federal cabinet minister and Speaker of the House of Commons; a former prime minister; a British Columbia judge; and a retired New Brunswick medical doctor. Moreover, these men all enjoyed national profiles. Appointing the Speaker of the House of Commons and a former prime minister, for example, represented an opportunity for a young and not-yet established association to enhance its legitimacy and status. Indeed, there is nothing in the personal papers of either Lemieux or Borden to suggest that they had anything to do with the archival activities of the Association. During the 1931 annual meeting, Borden recorded in his diary that he had spent the day with the Canadian Historical Society, not the Canadian Historical Association. By his own admission, his presidential address on patronage and the civil service was not an academic address but rather “a summary enlivened by anecdotes etc.” Simply put, their presidencies were an opportunity to print “Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux” and “Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Borden” on CHA stationary.

In addition to his status as Speaker of the House of Commons, Rodolphe Lemieux brought something else to the CHA: he was French Canadian. After all, “to further in every possible way the development of the most friendly relations between the two great races” had been one of Lawrence Burpee’s initial objectives. As he explained in 1926, “the most effective way of breaking down the walls of prejudice and misunderstanding that still to some extent divide us is to bring members of the two races into intimate relationship, working together toward a common object, as we are doing in the Canadian Historical Association.” Burpee’s was, no doubt, an honest effort. But he deluded himself. Certainly his version of the CHA’s openness to French Canada was very different from Aegidius Fauteux’s, a prominent Quebec historian and librarian at Montreal’s Bibliothèque Saint-Sulpice.
In a wide-ranging 1927 letter to Gustave Lanctôt, then the CHA’s French Secretary, Fauteux addressed the relationship between the CHA and French-Canadian historians. He observed that in all probability the Association would not want Lionel Groulx’s participation. Groulx may have been Quebec’s leading historian but his challenge to the widely held assumption that the British presence in French-Canadian history had been beneficial and his musings about an autonomous French-Canadian state were beyond the pale to English-Canadian historians. Fauteux proceeded to give Lanctôt the names of four more French Canadians who might be more acceptable to the CHA, including Groulx’s intellectual opposite Thomas Chapais who emphasized the benefits of British constitutional principles and who admired the spirit of French-English cooperation in Canadian history. Then sympathizing with Lanctôt, he acknowledged “la difficulté que tu éprouves à maintenir le principe du bilinguisme dans l’Association Historique.” According to Fauteux, “il y a trop d’incompatibilité entre les deux races pour qu’elles s’associent avec un peu de suite sur n’importe quel terrain, celui de l’histoire y compris. Cela se modifiera peut-être, mais Dieu sait quand.” Indeed, one need only recall the distasteful experience of the only French-speaking participant at the 1923 annual meeting:

Il n’y a que quelques instants, je me suis laissé conter comment le seul canadien-français qui était au programme avait été traité lors de la première réunion annuelle de l’Association. Deux ou trois canadiens-anglais venaient de lire à haute voix leurs travaux, lorsqu’il se leva à son tour, mais il avait à peine ouvert la bouche qu’un membre de langue anglaise proposa brusquement que le travail en français fût considéré lu.

It was this experience and others like it, Fauteux concluded, that explained why French Canadians “ne soient pas chauds pour aller pêrorer au milieu de gens qui ne les comprennent pas ni ne les apprécient.”

Despite Burpee’s best intentions, the Canadian Historical Association was really the English Canadian Historical Association. It is true that beginning in 1926 there were two secretaries on the Executive, one
English and the other French; Council always included at least one French-Canadian member; and between 1922 and 1950 there were five French-speaking presidents. But as did the Historic Landmarks Association, the CHA conducted all of its business in English. The minutes do not contain a single word of French. It would not be until 1962 that the minutes recorded in French the report of the French-language Secretary. Despite the participation of French Canadians in the annual meeting, the programme itself was printed almost entirely in English. “As to bilingualism,” Queen’s University’s Reginald Trotter explained, “I greatly prefer the form such as was used at McGill last year where the title page was set in both languages but the rest of the programme was set in English except for the title of the French papers. I suppose we can continue this practice as a matter of course.” Actually, to refer to the participation of French Canadians at the annual meeting is in itself misleading. The programme always included a French Canadian, but it was the same three or four people who appeared year after year. Before 1950 Gustave Lanctôt presented eleven papers; Francis-Joseph Audet, five; and Arthur Maheux, three. So thoroughly English-speaking was the CHA that Audet intended to deliver his 1935 presidential address in English but publish it in French; a minor accident, however, prevented him from attending. For his part, Maheux both presented and published his 1949 presidential address in English with only a few remarks in French, a concluding nod to what he called his “French-speaking audience.” Finally, those French Canadians who regularly participated in the CHA were not representative of intellectual life in French Canada; as Patrice Régimbald observed, they belonged to “le petit groupe Outaouais” of bonne-ententistes already active in the Royal Society of Canada.

Although the CHA had no presence in French Canada to speak of, it was growing stronger with each passing year in English Canada and, by the second half of the 1930s, the Association could afford to flex its muscles; in the defence of its turf, the expansion of its public profile and the protection of its autonomy, all three professional imperatives. In 1935, Norman Fee, the English Secretary and Treasurer and an archivist at the Public Archives in Ottawa, learned that the Canadian Catholic Historical Association (CCHA), created in 1933, wanted a relationship with the
Public Archives similar to the one enjoyed by the CHA. The Public Archives had supported the CHA from the beginning: it offered the Association a mailing address; it made meeting rooms available; it printed its annual report from 1926 to 1932; and it provided it with an office of its own in 1934. In addition to these material benefits, the CHA's relationship with the Public Archives gave it status as the national historical association. Clearly, steps would have to be taken to defend against any encroachment, perceived or real. To this end, Fee sent Reginald Trotter a quick note. As "you can easily see," he wrote, there is "a very concerted move by certain interests to link up the Catholic Historical Association with the Archives. I dare not write more on this point. We must guard against anything that will leave the way open to even a questioning of the right to the Canadian Historical Association to recognition as the National Body." Then, in the margin, Fee penciled, "Please destroy this letter." Fortunately, Trotter did not comply with Fee's request; unfortunately, we will never know what role Fee and the CHA had in scuppering the CCHA's attempt "to link up" with the Archives.

In 1937, the Canadian Historical Association undertook another professional imperative when the CBC invited Toronto's George Glazebrook and the CHA to prepare a series of radio broadcasts on forgotten Canadians. Here was a marvelous opportunity, Glazebrook argued, for the Association to promote not only a greater appreciation of history but to promote itself as well, to increase its public profile. Unless the CHA seized this chance "to play ball with the CBC," Glazebrook wrote, it would fall into "other hands." Besides, ours "is the proper body for handling this whole question" of historical broadcasting. Council agreed and duly struck a Radio Committee with Glazebrook as chair. Over the course of the next twelve months the committee paired specific historians with specific topics in a series of twenty-seven broadcasts. Although the CHA had intended the series to include broadcasts in French, it simply proved too difficult to co-ordinate a bilingual series between the CBC and Radio-Canada.

On the one hand, the series was what it appeared to be: a public service, a chance to provide Canadian history to Canadians. After all, Glazebrook was not paid for his work and the individual speakers received a small
honorarium of $20.00. On the other hand, the series represented an opportunity to promote professional historians and their work. Professions employ the rhetoric and the practice of service to the public as vehicles of self-promotion and as opportunities to legitimate their authority. We must use this series, a self-conscious Glazebrook declared on one occasion, as a chance to add “to the usefulness [of] and interest” in the Association. “If our committee works as I hope it will,” he explained on another, “we may be able to do a job of considerable importance in forming a bridge between the professional historians and the public.” When the CHA was not given enough public credit during the broadcasts, Glazebrook promptly complained to Alan Plaunt, a member of the board of governors of the CBC, who, in turn, agreed “that the cooperation of the Canadian Historical Association [should be] acknowledged.” Like all professionals, historians used the ideal of public service to promote themselves and what it was they did. Teaching Canadians something about forgotten figures from the past and promoting the Canadian Historical Association were not exclusive goals.

By the end of the 1930s it was quite clear that the CHA considered itself the professional association for historians in Canada. Not surprisingly, it reacted negatively when the Royal Society of Canada approached both it and the Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA) in late 1939 with the following proposal: in addition to its existing sections, the RSC would create a new section to be constituted by the memberships of the CHA and the CPSA. In effect, the CHA and CPSA would become sub-groups of the RSC. According to Columbia University’s Bartlet Brebner, who was then president, the proposal “provoked a positive explosion” among Council members. “The general thesis was that it was no fault of the CHA that the RSC had become moribund and that there seemed no good reason for two vigorous associations to risk their health in going to its rescue.” Although Council agreed to strike an ad hoc committee to investigate the matter further, “it was felt that the high standing which the Association occupies in the field of history should be safe-guarded.” A few weeks later Donald Creighton and Reginald Trotter met with representatives of the RSC and the CPSA. They listened to what the RSC had to say but they also made it perfectly clear that “the members of the
Association would be...unwilling to enter into cooperation on any basis that would destroy the autonomy of the CHA.” In their formal report to Council, Creighton and Trotter noted that while the occasional joint session at an annual meeting was one thing, any proposal that would “subordinate” the Association to the Royal Society was quite another.

But if the CHA acted to preserve its autonomy, it did not draw rigid boundaries between history and other disciplines. In point of fact, the Association demonstrated a real commitment to what today is called interdisciplinarity. In 1933, the CHA held its annual meeting in conjunction with the Canadian Political Science Association. Both societies met separately, of course, but gathered for a joint session followed by a social event. According to the Annual Report, “it was the unanimous opinion that the practice should be continued.” So successful were these simultaneous meetings and joint sessions that, in 1936, the two associations established a joint membership; for $4 one could become a member of both associations with full rights and privileges, including a subscription to the Canadian Historical Review, or the Bulletin des Recherches Historiques, and the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science.

As a member of the programme committee for the 1942 annual meeting at Toronto, it was Donald Creighton’s responsibility to organize that year’s joint session of the CHA and CPSA. He invited McGill’s F.R. Scott, a professor of constitutional law and prominent intellectual. Although Scott accepted the invitation, he did so with some hesitation. What would historians make of a non-historian speaking about a historical topic, in this case, Canadian nationalism at the time of Confederation? According to Creighton, historians would make nothing of it. “I showed your letter to Underhill...[and] we both feel that it would be absurd for you to be concerned about the historical character of your theme. Of course it is historical, but what of it?” Look, he said, “My own paper will be partly economic history and the economists may have their doubts about my economics. But there are few enough of us working in Canadian affairs and I don’t think we should be troubled about its divisions.”

At least on this point, Creighton and Underhill spoke for most of their col-
leagues. The University of Western Ontario’s Fred Landon would have found Scott’s concerns absurd as well. “I have long felt that the separation of disciplines was both arbitrary and harmful,” he told Arthur Lower. “We have much to learn from one another and the breaking down of barriers between [the CHA and the CPSA] would do us all good.”

Boundary work in the social sciences, that is the drawing of lines between disciplines, did occur, but the focus there was on marking off pure research from applied research. The demarcation of a boundary between the social sciences and the humanities also occurred with the creation of the Canadian Social Science Research Council in 1940 and the Humanities Research Council in 1943. The CHA, however, always kept a foot in both organizations because historians conceived of themselves as both social scientists and humanists. In any event, the CHA and CPSA continued to organize a joint session until 1960 while the joint membership option remained on the books until 1964. When they were cancelled it was done not out of some desire to erect disciplinary boundaries between history and political science. Rather, it was a simple wish to reduce administrative headaches: the annual meetings of both associations had become too large and “too unwieldy” to organize a joint session; similarly, it had become too time-consuming to collect membership dues on each other’s behalf and then remit the balance at the end of the year. But if boundary work was not the intention of those changes, it has been the effect: for all the talk about interdisciplinarity, the CHA now rarely attracts non-historians to its meetings.

- III -

When historians gathered at the University of Western Ontario in May 1940 for the annual meeting of the CHA, they listened to the distressing news coming out of Europe. Hitler’s armies were advancing at a frightening pace: Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France had been invaded and now Great Britain appeared to be next in line. “The news of the war these days is alarming.” Fred Landon wrote in his diary. “The 10 p.m. broadcast reported the Germans moving along the coast opposite England. This was a rainy day all through.” Like most Canadians, historians asked themselves how they might best serve their country during this crisis. The answer was
simple: carry on. Intellectual life in general and historical inquiry in particular could not be allowed to decay through disinterest and neglect. During war-time a society will focus, quite naturally, on the here and now; but, it is precisely at this point, historians believed, when a society loses sight of the big picture and the long term, that it most needs a healthy counterweight in the social sciences and humanities.

As the war progressed and political leaders called upon Canadians to make voluntary sacrifices, historians considered canceling the annual meeting of the CHA. But in the end, they decided that it was vital for intellectuals to continue to meet on a regular basis. As Arthur Lower explained, the country’s “cultural life must not be allowed to disintegrate, if our professed war objectives mean anything, and it is our responsibility to carry it on.” In the fall of 1942, historians learned that the National Conference of Canadian Universities (NCCU) intended to recommend that Arts faculties be drastically reduced, if not altogether closed, for the duration of the war. For Lower, this was yet more proof, as if any more were needed, that the Philistine was always around the corner waiting to attack. Harold Innis could not have agreed more and in early 1943, he led a lobbying effort designed to raise the profile of the humanities. Although the NCCU did not in the end make its recommendation, the incident had an important effect in galvanizing humanists across the country: at Toronto’s Hart House in December 1943 the Humanities Research Council of Canada was founded. Just as it had supported the creation of the Canadian Social Science Research Council three years earlier, the Canadian Historical Association lent its support to the Humanities Research Council.

The Second World War marked a transition point for the CHA. By 1939, it clearly saw itself as a professional association. But the experience of the war brought home an important lesson — historians must be more vigorous in the defence of their interests. It was at this point that the CHA became in part a lobby group. In 1940, it launched the Committee on Preservation of War-time Materials whose members targeted all levels of government, local and provincial historical societies and libraries across the country in an effort to encourage the collection and preservation of
war-related records and papers; in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the CHA had a seat on the Public Records Committee, a federal government committee established in 1945, with a mandate to recommend which records should be preserved and which destroyed; also in the late 1940s and into the early 1950s, the CHA consistently lent its voice to the call for a National Library; in 1949, the Association presented a brief to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences in which it made the case for, among other things, public funding for research in the humanities and social sciences; in 1959, W. Kaye Lamb, as past-president of the Association and Dominion Archivist, met with the Civil Service Commissioner to make the case that job descriptions and advertisements must not — by commission or by omission — discriminate against history graduates. As well, the CHA always seemed to be writing letters to local and provincial governments urging them to preserve this or that historic site. In 1953, the Association took a proactive step in the defence of its interests when it established the Archives Committee. As its name suggests, the Archives Committee — which became the Archives Section in 1956 and eventually the Association of Canadian Archivists in 1975 — concerned itself with issues relating to archives: the development of archival training programmes; the protection of various collections; and together with the Humanities Research Council and the Public Archives, the compilation and publication of the Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories.

Meanwhile, there were more mundane matters to consider. Topping the agenda was the Annual Report, the CHA’s single greatest expense. With printing costs low in the 1930s, printing the Report did not mean breaking the bank. But there were other issues to consider. In 1938, Council received a report entitled “The Relations of the Canadian Historical Review and the Canadian Historical Association” which detailed the frustration on the part of the Review at its inability to consider papers presented at the annual meeting and the frustration on the part of the Association at the Review’s status as the “national historical journal.” The report looked at possible scenarios, including the CHA taking over the Review and, conversely, the Review incorporating the Annual Report as a special edition to be published once a year. Like so many other reports, it gathered dust.
But as the cost of everything increased during the war, the Association had no choice but to reconsider its commitment to publishing a learned journal with a limited readership. Committees were struck, presentations were made and reports were filed, all on the future of the Annual Report. In 1941, Council convened an Economy Committee which in turn recommended that Council seriously explore the possibility of printing the papers presented at the annual meeting in the Canadian Historical Review. The matter was referred back to Council. Another committee was struck. And in 1942, Council heard a detailed plan for amalgamating the two journals and creating a new journal to be called the Canadian Historical Review: The Journal of the Canadian Historical Association. “Concessions” would have to be made by both the CHA and the CHR, Toronto’s George Brown explained, but he was confident that an amalgamation of one kind or another could be worked out. Because of the importance of the decision, it was referred back to the incoming Council. It died, as it were, on the order paper. Four years later, Council found itself yet again having to consider the future of the Annual Report when printing the 1946 volume meant dipping into the capital account. Maybe the question of amalgamation would have to be revisited. However, no committees were struck and no action taken. With printing costs increasing by 60% between 1945 and 1948, Council again floated the idea of making the CHR the official journal of the CHA. Nothing happened. In 1951, Council struck yet another committee to investigate ways of printing the Report more cheaply. This time a new printer was found, the Tribune Press in Sackville, New Brunswick. After a decade of lingering indecision, the matter was resolved, at least for the time being. Reading CHA minutes can be an exercise in frustration: Council members come and go; indecision settles in; and things get put off. All of this points to a real problem — then and now — with an Association staffed largely by volunteers who have a multitude of other commitments: who has the time?

If the Annual Report was an outstanding problem for the CHA, the question of its relationship to non-professional historians and to the general public was far more serious and far more difficult to resolve. It was not like changing printers would “solve” the problem of the CHA’s
detachment from people interested in history but who were not themselves professional historians. In part, this was a problem of the profession’s own making. The professionalization of history saw professional historians going to some lengths to distinguish what they did from what their predecessors had done. Those men and women who wrote history in their leisure time and belonged to local and regional historical societies, professional historians argued, preferred romance to science and antiquarianism over scholarship. In this context, historians delighted in debunking cherished heroes: Wolfe was an incompetent; Dollard a bushwacker; and Laura Secord a teller of tall tales. It was all part of establishing a hierarchy. At the 1923 annual meeting, McGill’s Basil Williams defined the amateur as someone “who thought that vaguely picturesque writing could take the place of solid learning.” Every group needs its barbarians, its Other. For professional historians, all men of “solid learning,” it would be the amateur historian. So it was that the professionalization of history also included its amateurization. But creating the category of amateur historian and then casting it beneath the category of professional historian came at a cost.

That cost, obviously, was history’s privatization: historians now spoke almost exclusively to each other in a private, specialized language heavily laden with technical terms and anchored by dozens of footnotes. As early as 1924, a gentleman who had been a member of the Historic Landmarks Association warned the Canadian Historical Association that the annual meeting must not become an occasion “to hear a few eminent historians displaying their learning.” But that was precisely what happened. Arthur Lower once referred to the “cranks” who float around the CHA. “Probably they are our cross and we must bear with them,” he wrote. But they cannot be allowed to become “dominant” in the affairs of the Association. On another occasion he cut to the chase: keep out the “purely antiquarian and genealogical” types. Fair enough, but putting a lid on the “cranks” meant distancing the CHA from the very people who might be interested in history, but who were not historians. Sensing the growing distance between professional historians and the general public, Reginald Trotter warned in 1930 that the CHA faced a choice: it could continue to follow the American Historical Association and have an open
membership, or it could follow the Royal Historical Society and have an
elected membership. No one wanted the latter. But how could the former
be made meaningful? How could the CHA be useful to people who did
not teach at a university?

There were no easy answers then and there are no easy answers now. But
this did not prevent the CHA from at least trying to broaden its appeal,
in particular its appeal to teachers. In the mid-1920s, Lawrence Burpee
sunk a lot of time and energy into the creation of a lecture series for
history teachers — to be accompanied by lantern slides and to be writ-
ten by experts — that in the end never got off the ground. Everyone is
"overburdened with other responsibilities," Burpee concluded in 1926.
In 1930, UBC's Walter Sage argued that the CHA really must follow the
AHA's lead on the question of teaching history in the schools and he
called for closer cooperation "between university professors and teachers
in normal, high, and elementary schools." No doubt his colleagues nodded
in agreement, but who on earth had the time to coordinate such an
initiative? In 1937 historians again considered the question of the CHA's
relationship to history in the schools: George Glazebrook urged the CHA
to do more to assist teachers; E.R. Adair from McGill University recom-
manded that teachers be invited to attend the annual meeting; George
Brown agreed, but noted that the programme was hardly attractive to
teachers. Maybe the CHA should look into preparing material that might
actually be useful to teachers, he said. In 1939, Council instructed Fred
Landon to seek the London school board's permission to invite teachers
to the 1940 annual meeting "without loss of time or salary." In 1943, all
members of Council were asked to approach their local schools in an
effort to bring the Association to the attention of teachers. Three years
later, in 1946, the minutes record that, "Considerable discussion took
place on the suggestion that efforts be made to create an interest in the
CHA among teachers throughout Canada, and that efforts be made by
individual members of Council in different provinces to get in touch with
the inspectors' and teachers' organizations who might assist in bringing
this about." In 1951, Council toyed with the idea of putting together a
"representative group of high school teachers" in an effort to determine
in what ways the CHA might be made more useful to them.
It was against this backdrop that the CHA launched the Historical Booklet series. At the 1951 annual meeting, E.R. Adair proposed that the CHA look into the English Historical Society's pamphlet series on historical revisions. Each pamphlet in this series was written by a historian but aimed at high school teachers. When he became president in 1952, C.P. Stacey agreed to follow up Adair's suggestion and, after consulting various Council members, decided that yes, the Association ought to pursue something very similar, something that would be of use to teachers, of interest to general readers and, ideally, that would contribute to building up the Association's membership. Everyone agreed that the first booklet in the series had to be written by a "big name" and that Donald Creighton was that name. Having just published the first volume of his two volume biography of Sir John A. Macdonald, his stock was high. But Creighton declined. Deep into the second volume, he didn't have the time. Stacey tossed out the idea of inviting Adair to write on the fall of New France. Some Council members objected; Adair was too much of an iconoclast, they argued, especially on the topic of French Canada. Stacey then approached George Stanley at the Royal Military College asking him to write a booklet on Louis Riel, rebel or patriot? Stanley agreed. But when the Ontario Department of Education heard this, it cancelled its advance order of 1,000 copies. "They are afraid of [Riel's] controversial aspects," Stacey later explained. "Riel is regarded as likely to stir up old antagonisms," Toronto's Dick Preston added. Although he had insisted all along that he would never be able to find the time, the task of writing the first booklet and inaugurating the series fell to Stacey. In 1953, the CHA published The Undefended Border: The Myth and the Reality, the Ontario Department of Education purchased 1,000 copies and the Historical Booklet series was born. Although Ontario declined to purchase any more booklets, the series survived and, after more than sixty booklets, it marches on. Although originally intended to reach non-academic audiences, sales figures suggest that its audience now consists almost entirely of university professors and their students.

Actually, the booklet series was not the first attempt by the CHA to broaden its appeal; in 1947 it had established the Local History Committee. As its name suggests, the committee's purpose was to
establish contacts in the field of local history and to find means of “keeping the Association more effectively in touch with the activities of provincial and local societies.” But it languished. In 1951, a frustrated Willard Ireland of the British Columbia Provincial Archives reported that he had made no progress with the committee; maybe “the whole matter should be dropped,” he said. A few months later, however, the issue of local history and the CHA’s relationship to it suddenly assumed a greater urgency.

In the late fall of 1951, C.P. Stacey began to hear rumours about the intention of local and provincial historical societies to create a new national historical association, or federation, which would connect these many groups and allow them to speak with a unified voice. In many ways, such an organization made good sense. But not to the CHA. This is a real threat to our authority as the national historical association, Stacey explained, and we must “head off the possibility of the malcontents setting up some new organization.” There may well be a great deal of “animosity among local historians” at what they take to be our indifference, he acknowledged, but “the formation of a new society would be almost fatal to the CHA.” We must do something, anything, to open up better lines of communication between ourselves and local history types if we are to prevent “a serious secession from the Association.” To this end, Stacey organized a special panel discussion at the 1952 annual meeting in Quebec City. As he told one participant, “The line to take should be, what can the CHA do to assist local societies and people who are interested in local history?” When it was over, when the last expression of concern had been uttered and the final promise made, Stacey observed that it was “obviously the sense of the meeting that the CHA should take an interest in and be responsible for the coordination of the activities of local societies.” The Local History Committee had its work cut out for it.

To be sure, this episode reveals an association acting in its own immediate self-interest; but it was not only about the CHA defending its turf. Like the booklets, it was also about trying to reverse the trend towards history’s privatization and about trying to connect professional historians with a
larger constituency. With UBC's Margaret Ormsby in the chair, the Local History Committee, renamed the Local History Section in 1957, undertook a variety of projects, the most important being the creation of a CHA prize. To be called a Certificate of Merit, this prize would be awarded to local historical societies, museums, libraries, individuals and authors for outstanding achievement in the field of local history.

In 1960, the first year of the award, the CHA conferred a Certificate of Merit to the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française (IHAF) for its work in local history. Founded in 1946, Lionel Groulx envisioned the IHAF "comme un moyen de promouvoir certains objectifs nationalistes et comme centre de recherche imprégné d'une vision scientifique de l'histoire." A year later he launched a new journal, the Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française, that, in his words, would compete with the Canadian Historical Review in terms of its appearance and its contents. Perhaps it was inevitable that French-Canadian historians would create an association and a journal to support historical research. But the CHA's all-but-non-existent bilingualism and the CHR's unwillingness to publish articles written in French did not help. Groulx openly referred to the "prédominance anglo-canadienne" within the CHA. Marcel Trudel, an accomplished historian of New France, also cited a fundamental need for the IHAF and the RHAF. The CHR simply refused to print French text and, as for the CHA, "elle était l'œuvre d'anglophones et valait par son congrès annuel; peu de francophones suivaient ses travaux." There is nothing in the records of the CHA to indicate how it, as an association, reacted to the creation of a new, and in some ways, rival organization. It is quite possible that English-Canadian historians were not surprised. In 1940 Bartlet Brebner conceded that the CHA had never been "successful in acquainting French Canada with its activities and with its annual reports." A year later Arthur Lower urged that more be done "to get the French to take a prominent part [in the Association] and to have them feel that [it] is as much theirs as ours."

Maybe it was the creation of the IHAF and the RHAF that prompted the CHA to make, if not amends, then at least an effort to welcome French-speaking historians. Or, maybe it was the emerging nationalist movement
in Quebec with its talk of the collective rights of the French-Canadian nation and its criticisms of the Canadian federal system. Whatever it was, we can see a definite change taking root in the 1950s. In 1950, the CHA began to print a fully bilingual programme. In 1952, it formally translated its name and became known in French as the Société Historique du Canada. In that year, Council insisted that the index to the Annual Report currently being prepared include an introduction in both English and French. George Stanley even proposed an affirmative action programme of sorts when he recommended a constitutional amendment stipulating that at least one out of the four new Council members appointed each year be French Canadian. As president, C.P. Stacey balked. "If we give our French members a definite proportion of Council seats, we are implying that they are a permanent minority with special interests within the society, and require legislative protection." It would be best, Stacey believed, for the CHA to continue the convention as it had developed over the years, of ensuring the appointment of French-speaking Council members without being constitutionally bound to take someone simply because they spoke French. He was right. From the very beginning, Council had consistently included French Canadians. That was not the problem. The problem was — and still is — the inability of English-Canadian historians to speak French and Stacey knew it. When planning the 1953 programme Stacey instructed J.J. Talman from the University of Western Ontario to separate the two French papers. "I fear that if these two papers were presented as a separate session, very few people would go, and the result on relations with our French-speaking members might be unfortunate." Stacey's remarks can be read in a cynical light — it's all about PR and appearances — or they can be read in the spirit in which they were offered: English-Canadian historians must cultivate a better relationship with their French-Canadian counterparts. Meanwhile, the CHA finally ordered stationary with French letterhead in 1954. Five years later Donald Creighton declined a 1959 invitation to chair a session that included Michel Brunet. "I can't speak French", he said. "Can you not get someone who is reasonably bilingual?" That Brunet — author of the decapitation thesis which, in short, asserted the negative consequences of the Conquest — agreed to attend the 1959 annual meeting in Saskatoon indicates how far the Association had
come. Indeed, it was on Brunet's advice that W.L. Morton, as president, reversed a Council decision to lay a wreath on the steps of the Wolfe monument in Quebec City at an event commemorating the bicentenary of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

The 1960 decision by the Local History Section to award a Certificate of Merit to the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française for its work in local history was part of this larger effort to make the CHA "as much theirs as ours." In that sense, it was sincere. But the decision also indicates that English-Canadian historians just didn't get it. The Institut was not the equivalent of the Ontario Historical Association, which also received a Certificate of Merit that year. What the IHAF thought of the award is unclear. A year later, the Association made Lionel Groulx an Honorary Life Member "in recognition of his valuable contribution to the study of Canadian history." In accepting this honour, which was presented to him at the Université de Montréal, Groulx demonstrated how gracious he could be: for the first and only time in his life he gave a speech in English. As president, Wallace K. Ferguson from the University of Western Ontario reciprocated in kind: he thanked him in French.

In a way, nothing and everything had changed. The CHA still carried on its day-to-day activities in English, so much so that in 1965 the French Secretary actually recommended that his position be eliminated. Council disregarded the suggestion on the grounds that the "elimination of the French Secretary might be resented in the Province of Quebec." Whatever shortcomings the CHA had, no one could write what Aegidius Fauteux had written in 1927.

Between the Second World War and the early 1960s, the CHA matured as an association. On a shoestring budget, it oversaw a vigorous agenda: it lobbied governments and archives and museums; it published an academic journal; it published a booklet series; it initiated the Certificates of Merit in Local History; and it demonstrated a desire to create an association for French-speaking as well as English-speaking historians. But this was no time for the Association to rest on its laurels. Challenges lay ahead.
To write his 1961 presidential address, Wallace K. Ferguson took a few steps back, away from his own area of research and files, notes, and facts. Really what he wanted was a better view, one unobstructed by the endless clutter of scholarly research. He wanted to see what it was that he and his colleagues actually did and he wanted to suggest what they, as a profession, might do better. His address moves from subject to subject, from the “fundamental importance” of research to the need for more imagination in historical writing, and from the necessity of academic publishing to the need for history to recover its association with literature. Ferguson also noted that graduate programmes were killing history. He didn’t use that word, of course — although another historian would some thirty-seven years later — but he certainly implied it. “Unfortunately, the doctoral dissertation frequently sets a pattern which the scholar will follow for the rest of his life, devoting such energies as he can spare from his academic duties to learning more and more about less and less.” And as it must, specialized research leads to specialized audiences. Specialized audiences lead to smaller audiences. And smaller audiences lead to one inescapable, unalterable fact: no one reads what historians write. It’s a variation on that old question about the tree falling in the forest: if a historian writes something that no one reads, is it still history? It is quite likely that Ferguson would have answered, no, it’s not. This is why he encouraged his colleagues to disabuse their students “of the stultifying conviction that it is the scholar’s ultimate goal to leave behind him footnotes on the sands of time.”

Ferguson was wrong, right and then wrong again. He was wrong that graduate programmes were killing history. If anything, they were breathing new life into history. He was right that specialization would be an animating theme within the profession. But he was wrong to imply that specialization was something new. History’s professionalization was also its specialization. In the decades after Ferguson’s address, specialization continued and it not only divided historians from the general public, it divided and sub-divided historians from each other.
Managing these divisions fell in part to the Canadian Historical Association.

The proliferation of graduate programmes and the expansion of history departments in the 1960s forced changes in the ways the CHA did things. The days when two or three men could gather at the annual meeting to quietly select the next vice-president and the incoming Council were over. The profession was now too large. This led to the introduction of elections in 1967: the membership at large would now elect all CHA officers from a ballot prepared by the Nominating Committee. Council also instructed the Nominating Committee to prepare a slate of candidates that would reflect the diversity of the country and of the profession. In addition to language and region, Roger Graham from Queen’s University explained to the incoming chair of the 1970 Nominating Committee, “you will want to keep ‘Women’s Lib’ in mind as well!” The Nominating Committee duly complied. Although the old system may have been undemocratic, it was hardly corrupt. As Peter Waite, the first president to have been elected, recalled in his 1969 presidential address, the image of fat cats in smoked-filled back rooms drinking whiskey, smoking cigars and perpetuating their own privilege could not be further from the truth. The meeting to select a new president usually took place in a “steam-infested cafeteria” over milk and chicken à la king; not only that, this system had produced, “over many years, a series of remarkable presidents.”

If the introduction of an annual election solved one problem, it led to an unintended and embarrassing consequence: the vice-presidential election now saw one senior colleague running against another equally accomplished colleague. In some years, there were four names on the ballot for vice-president. Queen’s University’s James Leith clearly understood the problem as early as 1970. The election was not really an election. In any other electoral contest, a candidate will seek the nomination, present a platform and run a campaign. But to actively conduct an election campaign in the CHA was — and is still — considered gauche and “unseemly.” As C.P. Stacey once said, “people who lobby for themselves seem to me to disqualify themselves, ipso facto.” As Chair of
the Nominating Committee in 1973, Blair Neatby threw up his arms in frustration, calling CHA electoral procedures “absurd.” By 1981, a consensus emerged: it was embarrassing to ask two, and sometimes three or four, senior historians to run, but not really run, for vice-president. In that year, the Council instructed the Nominating Committee to select one name for vice-president. In 1987, the Association amended its procedures to permit additional nominations for vice-president from the floor of the Annual General Meeting.

Accommodating the “Young Turk revolt,” as the University of Manitoba’s Gordon Rothney described the demand for a more transparent, accountable and democratic CHA, involved more than changes to the mechanics of selecting officers; it also involved changes to the format of the annual meeting. In the days of Donald Creighton, Frank Underhill and Arthur Lower, the programme committee invited specific individuals to present a paper. By the late 1960s obvious criticisms began to surface. As Jean-Pierre Wallot explained in a questionnaire sent to past-programme committee chairs, the invitation-only method is “considered by some as possibly conducive to conservative programmes, based on ‘solid’ and known quantities.” In other words, young scholars doing new and innovative work but who have not yet established their reputations found it all but impossible under the current system to present a paper at the annual meeting of their professional association. But, as Wallot acknowledged, there was a flip-side to consider: will moving to an open format lead to a decline in the quality of the annual programme? In 1971 the CHA married the demand for an open annual meeting to the concern about quality. A local programme committee would issue a call for papers but would reserve the right to select those papers that it wanted and reject those that appeared half-baked or ill-conceived.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was clear to everyone that the profession had changed. New historians asked new questions and new questions meant new answers and new answers led to new journals. In the context of all of this intellectual excitement, the centre could not hold. But things did not fall apart. In point of fact, things got better. To have stood in the way of change, like some reactionary old curmudgeon complaining about
French on his cereal box, would have sounded the death knell of the Association. Towards accommodating this change, the CHA introduced elections, it made an effort to present a ballot representative of the profession and it opened up the annual programme. It also changed its structure through the creation of sub-groups or committees. At the fall 1972 Council meeting, the CHA approved the constitution of three sub-groups: the Western History Committee, the Military History Committee and the Canadian Committee on Labour History. New sub-groups have been founded since, for example, the Canadian Committee on History and Computing and the Canadian Committee on the History of Sexuality. Autonomous in their own affairs, sub-groups hold their annual meeting in association with the annual meeting of the CHA. By taking in these new approaches and new specializations, the CHA prevented a series of secession movements and the creation of competing associations.

One of the most successful sub-groups has been the Canadian Committee on Women’s History (CCWH). First proposed by Veronica Strong-Boag in 1975, the CCWH modeled itself on the Canadian Committee on Labour History. Its goal was to provide a scholarly community for women — and men — engaged in the study of women’s history. An executive was assembled, questionnaires were mailed, a newsletter launched, workshops planned and panels organized. Judith Fingard undertook a survey on the status of women in the historical profession which confirmed what everyone knew on an intuitive level: women were underrepresented in the professoriate. All told, these were exciting times. Micheline Dumont recalled that organizers of the 1980 meeting at UQAM had to scramble to find an auditorium big enough to seat the more than 200 people who wanted to hear papers by Bettina Bradbury, Frances Early and Marta Danylewycz. In organizing themselves and in legitimating a new field of research, women historians were working to undo what professionalization had wrought. Sexism was not incidental but rather central to the professionalization of history. Unable to imagine women as objective, rational, scientific creatures capable of knowledge, and anxious to preserve their professional status, male historians deliberately excluded women from the professoriate. In their work, Alison Prentice and Beverly Boutilier referred to history’s professionalization as its masculinization.
For its part, the Canadian Historical Association proved very supportive of women and women's history. Roger Graham's 1970 directive to the Nominating Committee to consider "Women's Lib" in preparing a slate of candidates was not a bone to the feminists but part of a larger and genuine desire to see a representative Council (although until the early 1980s, the Nominating Committee included only one woman on the ballot). When Strong-Boag informed the President of the CCWH's wish to affiliate with the CHA, she received an enthusiastic response: "I cannot but rejoice at your desire to coalesce and organize," Jacques Monet wrote, "and I am convinced that the programme of the Annual meetings will be all the more interesting." Indeed, Programme Committee chairs welcomed proposals on women's history. Carman Miller, for example, went out of his way to help organize a session on "Women, Sexuality and Power" for the 1977 annual meeting at McGill. In her report on the status of women, Fingard detected a difference between individual departments and the CHA. Acknowledging the absence of hard data, she nevertheless suspected that "women are adequately served by the association."

To anyone who doubted or denied the permanence and power of women within the historical profession, the vice-presidential election of 1989-1990 must have been a shock and a half. At the 1989 annual meeting in Quebec City, the Nominating Committee intended to present Michael Marrus as its candidate for vice-president. A senior University of Toronto historian of European Jewry, Marrus was a distinguished scholar with an international reputation. No one questioned that. But Marrus had not been a member of the association prior to his nomination and he opposed both affirmative action and the requirement that candidates for faculty positions at Canadian universities must be Canadian citizens or landed immigrants. In his opinion, his position on hiring practices was "irrelevant." What mattered was "scholarly attainment." When Alison Prentice, as Chair of the CCWH, learned that Marrus was to be nominated she and others decided to act. Far from being irrelevant, Marrus's position on employment matters was altogether relevant. In her own words, "we realized the implications [of Marrus's nomination] not just for women supporting affirmative action, but for many other members of
the CHA.” The CCWH’s decision to nominate a second vice-presidential candidate was not an easy one. “There was a great deal of angst about nominating someone to run against so fine a historian and a non-Canadianist,” Prentice recalled. “We agonized because we admired [Marrus] and we admired his scholarship.” But his position on affirmative action and his lack of involvement with the CHA had to be contested. When, at the Annual General Meeting, the president asked if there were any other nominations for vice-president, Susan Mann moved and Craig Heron seconded the nomination of Gail Cuthbert Brandt. One year later, when the final ballot had been counted, it was clear who would be the next vice-president: Brandt, by a two-to-one margin. To a profession that had consistently discriminated against them, women said, in no uncertain terms, no more. So too did Marrus when he promptly resigned his membership. “It is a great relief to be out,” he said.

The decision to contest the vice-presidential election of 1989 came out of a meeting of the CCWH but the election of Brandt by so wide a margin indicates that the issues at stake were not only “women’s issues.” That Marrus had not been a member of the CHA prior to his nomination upset a lot of people. To many CHA members, it seemed that Marrus had been parachuted into the vice-presidency. To be fair to the Nominating Committee, its decision to nominate Marrus came out of an honest desire to counter a longstanding problem with the Canadian Historical Association: its inability to attract non-Canadianists and its reputation as the “Canadian History Association”. As early as 1923, a frustrated James Kenney confessed that he was finding it “especially difficult” to locate people prepared to present a paper on a subject other than Canadian history. His frustration echoed across the decades. As president, Donald Creighton wanted to see a programme that featured “medieval history, British history, modern European history, and the history of other areas and periods.” “I feel that [the Association is] losing support through [the programme’s] lack of variety.” Alberta’s Lewis Hertzman told Wallace K. Ferguson that he found the 1960 annual meeting all but a waste of his time; as well, “the restricted contents of the [Canadian Historical Review] reflect the same almost parochial view.” Ten years later, Jim Leith said that the CHA must do more to attract the interest of non-
Canadianists if it is to serve the whole profession and not just a segment of it. He pointed to the reluctance of non-Canadianists to run for Council: they know that “their chances of victory are slim” when running against well-known Canadian historians. Why be a sacrificial lamb for the sake of a balanced slate? Jack Granatstein agreed. Perhaps the president could write a letter to each departmental chair explaining what it is that the CHA actually does: “Such a letter could, for example, stress the CHA’s role in negotiating with [the Social Science Research Council], the government, the Canada Council, etc., on behalf of the profession. It might also lay out the opportunity to give papers at the summer meetings that non-Canadians can have. In any case, most of the letter would have to be a pitch to strengthen the professional association for the benefit of all of us.” In an effort to broaden its appeal the CHA created in 1977 the Wallace K. Ferguson Prize for the best book in a field other than Canadian history. Still outstanding, however, was the problem of getting non-Canadianists elected to Council. All the letters, all the appeals and all the goodwill in the world were clearly not enough. In 1995, twenty-five years after he had first raised the issue, Jim Leith, now president of the CHA, convinced Council to adopt a policy of affirmative action. The Nominating Committee must include at least one non-Canadianist on the ballot; the non-Canadianist receiving the most votes will be elected to Council.

By the mid-1990s, the Canadian Historical Association could be proud of how it had accommodated the specialization that Wallace K. Ferguson had lamented in his 1961 presidential address. Not everyone, however, would agree with this assessment. To some, the CHA had become hostage to the special interests, the feminists, the Marxists, the social historians and all those who insisted on killing Canadian history by saying more and more about less and less. Against this backdrop, in the fall of 1994, Jack Granatstein and Norman Hillmer announced a new scholarly association: the Organization for the Study of the National History of Canada. As its name suggested, the Organization would provide a home to “those who research, write and study in such fields as Canadian political history and politics, military history and strategy, diplomatic history and foreign policy, the history of the public service and public policy, etc.”
Conferences were planned, a Web site created and a journal launched. Somewhere along the way Granatstein had given up his desire to "strengthen the professional association for the benefit of all of us." Although there was the occasional intemperate remark about a couple of "grumpy old men" and their "merry band of secessionists," the Canadian Historical Association adopted a deliberate strategy of conciliation over confrontation. There was a sense that, like all things, this too would pass. And it did. The Web site disappeared, the journal folded and the Organization, now called the Organization for the History of Canada, faded all but out of sight.

But by no means is the CHA out of the woods. Annual deficits and a declining membership point, inevitably, to future challenges. On this question, the future of the CHA, I turned to past-presidents, inviting them to speculate on what the next eighty years might have in store for our august association. Although reluctant prophets, they nonetheless ventured forth, and, as might be imagined, their answers varied. Veronica Strong-Boag rightly worried about the university's increasing reliance on limited-term appointments and about the profession's lack of diversity. There are very few people of colour in our ranks and "too often this may lend us the appearance of irrelevance." Jean-Pierre Wallot believed that historians will have to contend with the explosion of electronic, digital and video sources on the one hand and their inherent fragility on the other. Susan Mann and Nadia Fahmy-Eid hoped that the CHA will continue to support women and women's history and that there will arrive a time when reports on the status of women in the profession will not be needed. At the same time, however, the responses carried a common refrain: historians must work to overcome their tendency to speak almost only to other historians. "I have long felt," asserted David Farr, "that academic historians in Canada write too exclusively for their colleagues." Even the CHA Booklet Series, which was intended for a general audience, has become "too academic in subject and presentation." A self-described realist, Desmond Morton foresaw "increasing isolation in the din of incomprehensibly 'professional' self-expression." Peter Waite agreed. "The dreariness of some recent books in Canadian history is hard to believe." J.M.S. Careless worried that the endless sub-division of
history into smaller and smaller pieces will preclude any sense of synthesis. Craig Brown and Jean-Claude Robert both wanted to see the CHA do more to promote — widely and loudly — not just Canadian history but history in general. Jim Miller wondered whether or not the CHA, dominated as it is by academic historians who cannot reach larger audiences, will even survive the next eighty years. "The declining profile and public significance of academic history is what I was whining about in my presidential address. The subtext of that piece was that historians are the principal Architects of this problem."

History, at least in its academic incarnation, finds itself facing contradictory futures. One future is bright: the profession has never seen so many scholars doing so much exciting research. The other future is dark: the divide between the profession and what should be its larger audiences has never been so great. As Jim Miller suggests, historians must bear some of the responsibility. However, the problem is more intractable than dreary academic prose and the imperative to "leave behind footnotes on the sands of time." On the future of the CHA, Blair Neatby referred to "the relegation of the past to the dustbin of history."

"Modern technology," he wrote, "makes even the recent past seem outdated and so of little relevance. The emphasis is on what is new, what is innovative, what is different. Who will care about the past in a world in which past experience seems to offer no precedents for dealing with future problems?" In such a world, what is the role of historians and their professional association? This will be the question facing the CHA over the next eighty years. To answer it the Association will need not only a persistent vitality, but a vital persistence as well.
ERRATA

p.2: "enough is enough" should read enough is enough, without quotations.

p.9: "had anything to do with the archival activities of the Association" should simply read "had anything to do with the Association."

p.26: "away from his own area of research and files, notes and facts" should read "away from his own area of research, the files, the notes, the facts became."

p.34: the direct quote from Jim Miller should read "principal architect" and not "principal Architects."

The Editors of the CHA Booklet series apologize to Dr. Donald Wright for these errors.
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

There has been very little written about the Canadian Historical Association per se. However, there is a rich and growing literature on historical writing, historical practice and historians in Canada.


For a history of English Canada’s largest department of history see Robert Bothwell, Laying the Foundation: A Century of History at University of Toronto (Toronto, 1991).

On historical writing in French Canada see Serge Gagnon, Quebec and its Historians, 1840-1920 (Montréal, 1982) and Quebec and its Historians: The Twentieth Century (Montréal, 1985); Jean Lamarre, Le Devenir de la nation québécoise selon Maurice Séguin, Guy Frégault et Michel Brunet (Sillery, 1993); and Ronald Rudin, Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec (Toronto, 1997). To mark the journal’s 50th anniversary the Revue d’histoire de
l'Amérique-française (51, 2, 1997) contains several articles on historical writing and historical practice in French Canada.


On women historians see Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice, eds., Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History (Vancouver, 1997); Donald Wright, "Gender and the Professionalization of History in English Canada before 1960," Canadian Historical Review (81, 1, 2000); Cecilia Mortan, "History, Nation, and Empire: Gender and Southern Ontario Historical Societies, 1890s-1920s," Canadian Historical Review (82, 3, 2001); and Micheline Dumont, Découvrir la mémoire des femmes: une historienne face à l'histoire des femmes (Montréal, 2001). There have been four studies on the status

A handful of historians have written their memoirs: James T. Shotwell, The Autobiography of James T. Shotwell (New York, 1961); Arthur Lower, My Frist Seventy-five Years (Toronto, 1967); Lionel Groulx, Mes Mémoires (Montréal, 1974); C.P. Stacey, A Date With History (Ottawa, 1982); Marcel Trudel, Mémoires d’un autre siècle (Montréal, 1987); Michel Horn, Becoming Canadian: Memoirs of an Invisible Immigrant (Toronto, 1997); and Ken McNaught, Conscience and history: a memoir (Toronto, 1999). Jill Ker Conway’s True North (Toronto, 1995) deals with her career at the University of Toronto.