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WE'RE ON A ROLL — LET'S KEEP IT GOING

Craig Heron

CHA President

The pulse of the CHA is remarkably strong right now. New members have been pouring in, bringing new energy and commitment. Important new projects are unfolding. Our association has been rising to the many challenges facing historians and others in historical and cultural work. It has been an exhilarating time to be President.

Yet, as I look around at all that we are trying to accomplish, I worry that we are severely hampered by an administrative apparatus that we inherited from a much quieter time, that may hamper our continued dynamic development, and that no other organization of our size would try operate with. It's time to invest in ourselves as professionals and citizens with a more substantial commitment of resources to a stronger organization. It's time to strengthen our national office by hiring an Executive Director. Here's my pitch.

Bigger and Better

We are passing through a major phase of renewal and expansion. We have nearly 1,200 members, the highest in many, many years. The flood of proposals for papers and sessions at our annual meetings over the past few years has been staggering. The numbers attending these conferences have reached record highs, and the buzz around each of these annual events is turning consistently positive. The upcoming extravaganza at UBC promises to outdo anything the association has ever mounted before. Out of that new energy have come new affiliated committees in such cutting-edge fields as environmental, media, and childhood histories, along with a revived public history group.

More Inclusive

The CHA has also opened up to more diverse people. We continue to reach out to graduate students and junior scholars, and give them the financial support to be able to participate in our annual conference. We sponsor more sessions every year on public history, and draw in many practitioners of our craft from outside academic history departments. We are working with the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française to find ways to integrate francophones more effectively.

For the past few years, CHA officers have also made a consistent effort to welcome more scholars in non-Canadian fields. We have members on our Council from these areas, and our incoming vice-president will be a European historian, Mary Lynn Stewart. We have also launched a series of short books for use in undergraduate classrooms that span international borders, the first of which will be on the history of sexuality. The new on-line version of our *Journal* makes a special effort to reach out internationally to scholars from diverse backgrounds. We maintain links with the International Congress of Historical Sciences to encourage international dialogue among historians.

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Our affiliated committees regularly reach out to these groups, and, often thanks to their initiatives, our AGMs have many more transnational and comparative sessions that bring together people from diverse fields of scholarship around common historical themes. In fact, the CHA seems uniquely placed to encourage such globally inclusive sessions in ways that few other academic organizations in North America can do. In an effort to expand this kind of intellectual cross-fertilization, the Council has agreed to try an unprecedented form of outreach to non-Canadianists by approaching other scholarly societies to co-sponsor sessions at both their conferences and our own. We are pursuing the same idea with the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française.

Expanded Services

CHA members have also been getting a lot more from their association. Three lively, engaging issues of our *Bulletin* every year keep us in touch with each other. Our *Journal* has expanded to two issues a year, one of which is an online version and more wide-ranging in its content than the print version, which continues to draw its articles from the AGM. Our ethnic booklet series steams ahead. Our new short-book series will soon have the first volume off the presses, in both French and English. We continue to produce an on-line directory of dissertations under way in Canada and to help members order other journals through our membership renewal system. And this spring a brand new edition of the valuable handbook *Becoming a Historian* will appear.

We have also digitized everything. Our website allows members to connect electronically with all the issues of our *Journal* back to 1922 and all our booklets back to the 1950s. Papers presented at the AGM are now on line in advance to make prior access easier. We are also now developing a database of information on historians in Canada that will allow CHA members to find people by their field of interest.

And, of course, every year, we pour great efforts into bringing together hundreds of scholars at our conferences and into assessing and honouring excellence in historical scholarship with our growing list of prizes covering many fields.

Taking a Stand

Beyond all this institutional growth, the CHA has had to step forward as an advocate in a sharply rising number of causes. Public programs and institutions dedicated to preservation and commemoration of the past have faced many challenges in recent years. Census data has become less accessible, museums exhibitions have been attacked, and, above all, it seems, archives have been facing draconian measures that threaten to make the historical record less accessible. The CHA has publicly criticized such developments in Washington, Regina, Victoria, Toronto, and, above

all, Ottawa, and in some cases mounted lobbying campaigns. Our efforts have not been in vain. We have a useful dialogue under way with Statistics Canada on revisions to the consent question on the 2011 census form. We helped to make the United Church of Canada aware that its records could not be shut away from the public. And, perhaps most important, we convinced the Library and Archives Canada to backtrack on its drastic cuts in hours of service.

It was clear in these campaigns that other organizations have been looking to us for leadership. We worked with sociologists, political scientists, and economists on the census issue. We had numerous allies in the Save the United Church Archives Coalition. We led a delegation of ten organizations to the LAC meeting in October — genealogists, professional writers, aboriginal researchers, and more — that finally convinced Ian Wilson to change his mind. This prominent role will unquestionably continue in an era when cultural institutions and programs fall off the table as priorities for all too many governments.

We also take our place in the councils of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences to help promote better policies and resources to sustain academic research of all kinds in Canada. And we maintain fruitful dialogue with other national organizations running programs on history and memory, notably Canada's National History Society.

Away with Ad-Hockery

So we are bigger, more diverse, busier, more engaged. The wonder of it all is that we have ever been able to keep so many programs and projects in motion with the pathetically limited administrative apparatus that we have inherited. We have a small army of volunteers serving on prize committees, editorial boards, and conference program committees. We pay indecently small honoraria to a corporal's guard to edit journals, books, booklets, and directories, and to manage our website. As particular issues emerge, we strike ad-hoc committees, whose members shift and change. Holding us all together is an overburdened administrative secretary in Ottawa, another part-time assistant to the treasurer, and, of course, the President, who is usually permitted to reduce his or her teaching load by no more than one course.

What's wrong with such a system?

Lack of coordination and oversight. Aside from the President, there is no one at the centre making sure that all the parts of the CHA's far-flung empire are functioning properly. We do not even have a managing editor for our *Journal*, which now has four editors, two editorial assistants, and an editorial board of twelve, and requires more complex relationships with both print and on-line publishers. The links between

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these publications and our annual conferences have become complicated. In fact, we have a small publishing empire that requires careful watching and guiding.

Lack of consistency, follow-up, and accumulated expertise. Newcomers to the CHA Council who step into the various portfolios to watch over specific projects and programs are typically at sea for some time, and then leave after three years. There are often frantic questions floating back and forth across cyberspace about our established policies on this and that. The two-year presidency helps, but there is a great deal of organizational knowledge lost every time a president retires.

Lack of an effective liaison and communications strategy. We need to more effectively coordinate our own electronic and print media. We also need the administrative strength and flexibility to be able to communicate regularly with government offices, non-governmental agencies and associations, and the media.

Lack of promotion and proactive intervention. We lack the ability stay ahead of policy developments, to lobby politicians and government officials effectively, and to promote the work of our association and its members.

It's Time to Invest in Ourselves

In fact, what we need is a full-time Executive Director, who can take on this work of administrative coordination and leadership. Canadian political scientists, geographers, sociologists, even the archivists, have long had such a person managing their professional organizations. It is time we woke up to the same need.

We can't take such a step within our current budget, and early in the spring I will be circulating to all members a proposal for a large increase in fees (the precise amount is currently being worked out, but it will have to be large). I hope you will agree with me that, as professionals, we deserve an association that can work effectively in our collective interests. To make that happen, it's time to give that association the resources it needs to do the work.

The CHA can be a vital link among all practitioners of history in Canada. It can be a leader in promoting and defending the processes and products of historical research in this country. It can be a player of considerable consequence in national forums on history, heritage, and culture. But first we need to get our house in order.

