

INTERNATIONALIZING THE CHA

By Craig Heron

“Why should I bother going to the CHA? It’s all about Canadian history.” How many times have friends and workmates muttered some such line when we ask if they are planning to attend the CHA’s annual meeting. That is an understandable, but unfortunate perspective on the leading professional organization for historians in Canada.

All of us, regardless of field, share a common interest in an agency that can represent our interests to the Canadian state on issues of research funding, scholarly publishing, and other issues of public policy. The CHA does this on its own and through its membership in the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

All those who teach history in Canadian post-secondary institutions have similar experiences in dealing with broad issues of curriculum development and delivery in state-run (not private) universities and colleges. These concerns have often found their ways into CHA programs.

And, in practice, in our own departments and academic networks, we are not all that isolated from each other. As scholars and teachers, we regularly talk across geographical boundaries, sharing insights drawn from widely diverse contexts and historical and theoretical literatures. Broad thematic fields on the history of women, aboriginal societies, popular culture, the environment, and much more draw us together into comparative and transnational dialogues.

In fact, the CHA has been attuned to these intellectual trends and has been shedding its old (often ill-deserved) image of parochialism in many ways to make itself into a more “international” association.

- We insist that at least one of the three new Council members elected each year is in a field outside Canadian history.
- We have nominated a French historian – Mary Lynn Stewart – as our next vice-president. She will become president in 2009.
- We have a wide range of affiliated committees, organized around specific historical interests (military, gender, environment, childhood and youth, urban life, business, labour, and so on), which welcome practitioners from all fields.
- We have made great strides in “internationalizing” the programs of our annual meetings. Last year at York University, one third of the papers presented were comparative, transnational, or non-Canadian in subject

matter, and many of the most successful sessions drew together scholars from diverse geographical regions.

- We plan to use our annual meetings to promote more discussion about transnational teaching, especially in “World History” courses.
- We are considering ways to liaise more effectively with francophone historians in Canada, to encourage greater francophone participation in the association, and to increase francophone representation in the annual conference program.
- We have launched a new series of short books on a variety of international themes. The first manuscript, on the history of sexuality in western Europe, is due this summer.
- We have expanded our *Journal* (which has always published articles in diverse geographical fields) to add a second, on-line issue each year, to be devoted in particular to broad thematic issues of historiography, theory, and international comparisons. We have reached out to distinguished “international” historians to contribute.
- We are exploring ways to co-sponsor sessions in other historical societies’ meetings and to encourage them to do the same in ours.

We recognize that historians of Africa, Latin America, Asia, or Europe have many other professional connections and conferences to attend, but we certainly hope that they will continue to find our conferences hospitable places to gather as well. If they worry about being marginalized in small, thinly attended sessions, we will urge them to join in comparative discussions around shared themes and issues.

So tell your friends and workmates that they are wrong. The CHA has a lot to offer them.