

A FORWARD-LOOKING SOCIETY WITH A BACKWARD GLANCE HISTORY SOCIETY MARKS FIRST DECADE

Sanikiluaq is a remote community of under 700 citizens on the Belcher Islands, about 100 off the east coast of Hudson Bay. Nunavut's most southern community, it is noted for the fine soapstone carvings that its artists have been producing for over 30 years. It also boasts John Jamieson, a senior grade history teacher. His exceptional work in the classrooms of Nuiyak School, and in the Sanikiluaq community, to connect students and residents with their Inuit culture and heritage through the innovative use of archaeology, art, radio, and television, has brought him national recognition. Last fall, he was selected one of the best history teachers in the country. At a splendid ceremony in Rideau Hall, officiated by Her Excellency, Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada, Jamieson and five other history teachers from across Canada received the Governor General's Awards for Excellence in Teaching Canadian History.

More than a ceremony, the award carries with it cash prizes and certificates for the teacher and the teacher's school, a medal, and an all-expense paid trip for two to the Ottawa festivities. All this compliments of Canada's National History Society, which established this award in 1995, a year after the History Society itself came into operation in August, 1994.

Based in Winnipeg and created as a popular history society committed to bringing our rich history to a wider audience through its programs, the History Society is the indirect result of the gift, by the Hudson's Bay Company, of its archives and museum collection to the Province of Manitoba and the considerable tax savings this generated to the Bay. Rather than use the proceeds to renovate stores or to mount another Bay Day, the company, with extraordinary generosity, put the entire sum to work for Canadian history. It established the Hudson's Bay History Foundation.

The Foundation provides funds to help maintain the archives and museum collections and to support causes involving HBC history. It also provides an annual grant to the National History Society to help it expand its work and to continue the publication of the *Beaver* which it acquired from the company in 1994.

The *Beaver* is one of Canada's oldest history magazines. It was founded by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1920 as a staff publication; its original content was in-house. Tips on salesmanship, telephone courtesy, social events, and the like – submitted by employees at HBC posts and store locations – filled its pages.

Its move to embrace a wider world began in 1933. Stories about the Canadian West, the North, Ontario, Québec, and First Nations replaced staff news. In 1986, the *Beaver's* passion became Canadian history in the broadest sense – “from the Arctic circle to the Great Lakes waters”, as the song goes.

After 1994, when Canada's National History Society acquired the magazine from the HBC, the *Beaver* was invigorated. A fresh, inviting design and a bright, popular approach to content – the Canadian history you were rarely taught in school – brought the magazine a new visibility and a new audience. Its subscriber base has grown from 37,000 to 50,000 since 1997.

No subject linked to Canadian history is outside the *Beaver's* realm. Stories by knowledgeable authors about family, business, politics, native issues, culture, consumerism, and the military have all found their way onto the pages of the magazine. Additionally, the *Beaver* has produced distinctive special issues on such icons as the Klondike, the RCMP, and Inuit Art that have made an enduring contribution to the story of Canada. The magazine publishes many voices, many points of view. It has published articles by Inuit, francophone, and First Nations writers, academics, history students, as well as enthusiastic amateurs and professional journalists. Academic historians, because of their expertise and specialized knowledge, play a particularly important role. Through the magazine, many historians have the opportunity to reach a broad general audience.

While the *Beaver* may be the History Society's signature project, the magazine is not its only claim to fame. In addition to the *Beaver* and the Governor General's Awards, the History Society introduced the Pierre Berton Award in 1994. Named after Canada's well-known storyteller, the award celebrates Canadians who have brought our history to a wider audience. In addition to Mr Berton, other recipients include the late James Gray, Jacques Lacoursière, Bob Johnstone, Peter C. Newman, CBC/Radio Canada for Canada: A People's History and, most recently, the Canadian Society for Civil Engineers. The Civil Engineers may seem like unlikely historians but their organization has done much important work in the name of history, such as a voluntary project to place historical plaques on railway trestles, bridges, canals and the site of the last spike, all at its own expense.

The History Society has also established a novel, two-part program of support for provincial and territorial historical associations. A grant component helps the provincial bodies expand current activities or introduce new ones designed to further their work. A biannual conference brings

representatives of these groups together to meet face-to-face, exchange best practices, and discuss matters of mutual interest. A third such conference is being planned for Winnipeg in 2004.

The History Society will be ten years old this year. (While it did not come into operation until 1994, it received its non-profit, charitable status from Ottawa in December, 1993.) Marking its first decade will not be a time for reflection. While it is pleased with what has been accomplished, the History Society has its sights set on the future. It has hired Deborah Morrison as President and Executive Director. In addition to her other qualifications, the fluently bilingual Ms Morrison brings an energy and vision to the organization and a solid history administration background, first with The CRB Foundation and, more recently, with the Historical Foundation of Canada, where she served as Director of Operations. Her mission is "to raise profile, raise funds and grow...initiatives."

To that end, the History Society has a three-year strategic plan in place that documents the big picture and the steps to be taken to enhance and/or expand what it does. This includes an ambitious fund raising program to realize the

money needed to do the job. The History Society is blessed with a dedicated board with a common vision. It has also appointed a national advisory council of prominent Canadians with an interest in history to support the work of the organization in variety of ways. And, it has given itself a fresh, new look, to help raise that profile. A distinctive, new logo and symbol were unveiled in late 2002 which will be rolled out in 2003, on everything from stationery to well, who knows, boxer shorts, perhaps? Regardless of the application, the new look has a contemporary flavour that is in keeping with an organization that is popular in scope and which views history as exciting, vital, and alive.

To be sure, the Society has not reinvented itself; it just sees its 10th anniversary as a new beginning.

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Editor's Note N.D.L.R.

At the writing of this newsletter the prospect of two cities comes to mind: Halifax is where the CHA will be having its annual meeting in May of this spring. Our colleagues at Halifax and their associates have been hard at work, preparing for this event. There is a lot to look forward to, as the contributions of David Sutherland and Jean-Pierre Chrestien make plain, in this part of the world.

Ailleurs, s'étend le profil de Bagdad ; cible ultime de deux qui détiennent les rennes du pouvoir chez notre voisin du sud. On y prêche depuis plusieurs mois contre le mal, qu'incarnera Saddam. Toutefois il n'est pas clair à quel genre de croisade nous avons affaire : une affaire de « principe » telle la création du royaume de Jérusalem en 1099, bijou (exclusif ?) de la chrétienté occidentale ; ou une affaire de libération par étape interposée (Venise oblige) telle la prise de Constantinople en 1204. Dans six mois, sinon un an, l'Histoire pourra nous en dire plus.

Entre temps l'intervalle que constitue la valse d'hésitations de notre gouvernement fournit l'occasion en or pour les citoyens que nous sommes de nous exprimer sur toutes ces questions. La discussion s'amorce ici avec un texte du professeur Anoun qui nous rappelle en quoi nous avons un rôle public et constructif à jouer. Il a choisi de ne pas se taire. Souhaitons que d'autres suivront son exemple.

Halifax and Baghdad are thousands of kilometers apart. But there is a connection. We may arrive just in time to see our warships off, or to welcome them home. We could reflect on the means and ends of war while observing the citadel in Halifax and walking along the outworks of Louisbourg.

À bientôt !

John Willis - Peter Bischoff