

# Bulletin

Canadian Historical Association - Société historique du Canada

## Sommaire

Registration for the 18th  
International Congress of  
Historical Sciences

3

Announcing H-Canada

4

H-Canada est née

5

Introducing SSHRC New  
PresidentPrésentation de la nouvelle  
présidente du CRSH

7

Historians in the News

8

The Nation

14

Ben Wicks et le harcèlement

Ben Wicks on Harassment

16

## Inside

## INTERDISCIPLINARY AND TEAM RESEARCH

*By Rosemary E. Ommer*

As funds grow scarcer for research in Canada, the vulnerability of the social sciences and humanities to budget restrictions appears to be growing ever greater. This has been a matter of considerable concern both to the scholars in the disciplines themselves, and to the SSHRC. In the recent past, the CHA has voiced that concern in communications with the Council and in the pages of the CHA newsletter.

While it is certainly the case that, for some scholars, the solitary work of the individual researcher remains the most appropriate way of carrying out their research mandates, it is also true that there are many opportunities for historians to do very valuable research in combination with other scholars, and with other disciplines. This article is concerned with laying out some of these options in a general way, not with arguing against the value of individual research.

Interdisciplinary research has, in fact, much potential for historians. In the growing field of environmental history, for example, there is a great deal of valuable work that needs to be done by historians working with sociologists, anthropologists, and natural scientists particularly those in the fields of biology and the earth sciences. Problems of the mismanagement of our resources most usually stem from past perceptions of the environment and the way in which those have come to be accepted. As we witness a revival of

interest in the work of Harold Innis, to take just one example, the new fields of endeavour in "Innisian studies" (as these are coming to be called) are inherently interdisciplinary, asking questions that are best answered by researchers in history, sociology and economics working together with people in biology and related sciences. Such work is "a natural" for funding.

Another, and related, set of questions that is being asked these days concerns property and the nature of the ownership of resources. Here, there is a natural partnership to be formed with researchers in legal studies as well as those in political science. Whether this be over issues of property in the sense of land claims (which stem from historical situations) or the ownership of so-called "common property resources" and the need to manage these, there are vital issues here that need the investigatory and interpretive skills of historians.

Compelling too, these days, are matters of social equity and a host of issues surrounding social benefits. The year after the International Year of the Family draws to a close, social historians will find many issues surrounding present perceptions of what the family "is", and what it "was", worthy of detailed research. Politicians and others talk cheerfully about the "traditional nuclear family" - but historians know that the roots of the nuclear family

...p.2

from p.1

are less deeply rooted than our society generally realises. How did families work in Canada and in the countries and societies from which Canada was made? Were they different in different parts of the country and at different times in its history? Why? This whole research area is inherently interdisciplinary as well as topical and perhaps it is crucial for us to know more about it as our social benefit structures come under the budgetary microscope.

These few examples come off the top of my head and serve only to show that it is often possible to ask an historical question in an interdisciplinary way. We may or may not like what is going on in the fiscal regimes in which we find ourselves these days, but the sad fact of the matter is that they are going to be with us for some time and, if we want to be successful in raising funds, and in attracting students, we are going to need - some of us at least - to be pragmatic about how we approach the search for research dollars.

That is an argument from pure pragmatism. I think there is also a wider one, which is going to be increasingly important. The age of specialisation in research may be ending - slowly and unevenly, but none the less winding down. More and more the questions that researchers will be asking are going to be rich and multi-faceted and the courses we teach likewise are often breaking old bounds. Witness the preponderance of new studies: women's studies and native studies are perhaps the most dynamic examples at this time, but think, too, of medical, legal, environmental,

demographic, labour, public and other sub-fields of history that appear year by year at the Learned's. This blossoming of sub-fields is often taken to be a sign of increasing specialisation, but it is, I think, actually the reverse...or could be, if we wish that to happen. It could be a first step in the growth of interdisciplinary linkages with other fields of research in other disciplines where the value of the historical perception is now being realised.

In the granting competitions these days, we see small but increasing numbers of applications from specialists in other disciplines - quite often in the sciences - in which funds are being sought to research the history of (let me take an imaginary example)...the role of women in the discovery of a particular cure for a disease. These are usually not well written, and not funded, just because the historical expertise is missing. But a joint research proposal might have been solid, fascinating and quite possibly fundable. It would have supported students, encouraged the spread of appreciation for what historians do, built bridges across disciplinary divides, and enriched our appreciation of the work and interests of scholars around us.

Interdisciplinarity (and/or teamwork) is not for everyone, and it is not for all sub-fields in history, but it is a challenging and interesting approach for some of us. It would, I think, serve the discipline well were we to consider it as something that we will foster where we can and where it is appropriate, not only to expand our horizons, but also to allow us to make a stronger case for the "pure" history projects that we also need to protect.

---

*...a joint research proposal might have been solid, fascinating and quite possibly fundable.*

---

## Editorial Policy Politique éditoriale

The *CHA Bulletin* is published three times a year by the Canadian Historical Association. Notices, letters, calls for papers and articles of two pages or less, double-spaced, are welcome on topics of interest to historians, preferably accompanied by a translation into the other official language. Deadlines for submission of articles etc. are the following:

**June 15, 1995** for the Summer issue;  
**October 31, 1995** for the Fall issue.

We reserve the right to edit submissions. Opinions expressed in articles etc. are those of the author and not necessarily the CHA. Direct correspondence to: Bulletin, Canadian Historical Association, 359 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N3; Tel.: (613) 233-7885, Fax: (613) 567-3110.

Le *Bulletin* de la S.H.C. est une publication bilingue qui paraît trois fois par année. Les articles, les notes et les lettres de deux pages ou moins, dactylographiés à double interligne et portant sur des sujets d'intérêt pour les membres, sont les bienvenus, de préférence accompagnés d'une traduction. La rédaction se réserve le droit de couper ou de modifier les textes soumis. Les opinions exprimées dans les articles ou les lettres sont celles des auteurs. Les dates limites de tombée des articles sont les suivantes:

**le 15 juin 1995** pour le numéro d'été;  
**le 31 octobre 1995** pour le numéro d'automne.

Veillez acheminer toute correspondance au Bulletin, Société historique du Canada, 395, rue Wellington, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N3, Tél.: (613) 233-7885, télécopieur: (613) 567-3110.

**Editors/Rédacteurs:** Edwidge Munn,  
Donald Wright  
**Transcription:** Joanne Mineault  
**Translation/Traduction:** Edwidge Munn,  
**Layout/Mise en page:** Gabriel Proulx