

Journal of the Canadian Historical Association Revue de la Société historique du Canada



Presidential Address: The Invisible Historian

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Volume 8, Number 1, 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031114ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/031114ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (print)

1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Miller, J. R. (1997). Presidential Address: The Invisible Historian. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 8(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.7202/031114ar>

Article abstract

Although contemporary events have made it appear that there is widespread support in Canada for history as a discipline, the reality is otherwise. Many individuals, interest groups, and even institutions make considerable use of historical arguments in public debate to advance their causes, it is true. However, it is almost invariably the case that these advocates making historical arguments are not historians. This painful reality was brought home to the historical profession in 1996-97 by such events as the release of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the debates over public policy issues such as copyright reform and a protocol for research involving humans. It is essential to the future of the discipline and of organisations such as CHAJSHC that historians reassert their role in the processes of researching, interpreting, and utilizing history in public discourse and academic arenas.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS DISCOURS DU PRÉSIDENT

The Invisible Historian

J.R. MILLER

MOST PEOPLE ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE FIGURE OF THE CHESHIRE CAT. THIS IS the feline in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* that gradually fades from view until, finally, there is nothing left of the Cheshire Cat but the grin. The Cheshire Cat makes one think of historians, in part because of the guidance it gave Alice. When Alice asked which path she should take, the Cat replied, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to."

"I don't much care where —" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"— so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."¹

Carroll's fading feline also comes to mind when the historical profession in the 1990s is under consideration: our profession seems alarmingly to be receding from prominence in public discourse, and even in the public's consciousness. Although gatherings such as the present Annual Meeting of The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada [CHA/SHC] might appear to contradict this gloomy assessment, it is sound all the same. Similarly, although there are many superficial signs of the prominence of history in the public life and consciousness of this country in the 1990s, it is greatly to be feared that our profession is very much the Cheshire Cat.

Is this a credible concern at the present time? After all, we are meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland, largely because this month marks the five hundredth anniversary of Giovanni Caboto and his ship, *The Matthew*, the landfall of which will soon be re-enacted at Cape Bonavista, not all that far from where we convene. Another intimation that history appears to be all around us: Native groups in St. John's yesterday marked the 168th anniversary of the last Beothuk,

1 Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland and other favorites*, Washington Square Press edition (New York, 1951), 56.

Shawnadathit, who died of tuberculosis on 6 June 1829. And as though the restaging of *The Matthew's* trip were not enough proof of the vitality of history and the historical profession, the voyage has touched off a debate about the appropriateness of commemorating such events. Much as the anniversary five years ago of the arrival of Christopher Columbus stimulated intense debates about the moral significance of marking the occasion, *The Matthew* has provoked parallel objections from those who fear that remembering Cabot will accelerate the historical erasure of First Nations in Newfoundland and elsewhere. Being Canadians, though, our discussion of this act of public memory is temperate, even restrained.² Much more typical is "NewTel Cabot 500," a collaborative venture of New Tel Communications, Heritage Canada Foundation, The CRB Foundation, the Smallwood Centre, Memorial University, and departments of two levels of government.³

The contemporary world of politics also seems replete with examples of the influence of the craft of history on the everyday life of Canada. Three of our colleagues, all distinguished military historians, recently were invited to advise the minister of defence on how to reform the Canadian military. The recently concluded federal election did not turn particularly upon questions with deep historical roots, save, perhaps, in Quebec where the Bloc Québécois campaign implicitly, if not overtly, dealt with lingering perceptions of historical grievances. And it is not very long ago that we experienced the Quebec referendum of October 1995, in which historical arguments were at the heart of the debate between the Oui and the Non. The manifesto of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, for example, opened with a prediction that "La Souveraineté nous ouvre l'avenir," but on the next page commenced to make the case for the Oui with "L'histoire d'une Constitution qui nous exclut."⁴ The lengthy preamble to the referendum question itself began "At the dawn of the 17th century, the pioneers of what would become a nation and then a people rooted themselves in the soil of Québec."⁵

2 The Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work protested the linking of the 1997 Learned Societies meeting and the Cabot 500 celebrations, some of the material for "which celebrates the oppression of colonialism." Resolution of General Assembly of CASSW, 1996; posted by Jacynthe Larivière (cassw@ottawa.net) on H-CANADA, 9 December 1996. For the dearth of other protest, see *Globe and Mail*, 26 December 1996. Concerning the moderation of Newfoundland Aboriginal groups, see "Cabot 500 invitations get cool response from Innu" and "Inuit say public protest not their way of doing things," St. John's *The Evening Telegram*, 5 June 1997.

3 "NewTel Cabot 500 Internet Heritage Project Launched," *Heritage Canada* (March/April 1997): 18-19.

4 Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, *L'abrégé du Manifeste 1995* (Montreal, 1995) unpaginated.

5 *Globe and Mail* 7 September 1995. As Susan Mann perceptively noted in a speech in Hong Kong (ibid. 26 October 1995), both sides in the referendum debate argued cases based on their diametrically opposed interpretations of history.

THE INVISIBLE HISTORIAN

At the federal level, during the last winter a landmark public inquiry, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, based its analysis and its arguments for reform on its reading of the history of relations between indigenous and immigrant peoples in Canada. The Commission had foreshadowed this Clio-centred approach more than three years earlier in its *Integrated Research Plan* of July 1993, which argued:

History is not only about the past. It is also about how we understand ourselves, now, as peoples and nations, how we interpret who we are and where we came from, and how we value our successes and explain our failures in relation to present morality. Even as we are in the process of making history by our actions, the shape our choices take is influenced in countless ways by our sense of what has gone before.

. . . Historical perspectives are woven through almost all the work of the Research Directorate.

. . . The Commission proposes to develop a framework for a multi-volume general history of Aboriginal peoples and to produce the first volume as an example of new approaches to Aboriginal history.⁶

The November 1996 Final Report of the Royal Commission was at least partly true to this emphasis, for the introductory volume, *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, devoted two of its three sections – more than six hundred of its nearly 700 pages – to a historical overview.⁷

For those who would deny that the historical cat is fading, the fields of arts and entertainment seem superficially also to provide evidence of the vitality of the historian's craft. Both the English-language CBC and Radio-Canada television networks during the year carried historically based programs or series – *Lyddie* on the English network and *Marguerite Volant* on Radio-Canada – that were elaborately mounted. Three of the most praised English-language novels of 1996 were based squarely on historical themes. Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (Alfred A. Knopf Canada), which won the Canadian Authors Association Fiction Prize, focused on the lives of a Cape Breton family, while the Giller Prize-winning *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood was inspired by a mid-nineteenth-century murder in Upper Canada. The novel that won the Governor General's Prize for English Fiction, Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*, rested on the twin foundations of the Cypress Hills Massacre, a western bloodbath of 1873, and the novelist's fictionalized dissection of Hollywood in the 1920s. To drive the point home forcefully, Vanderhaeghe's frontispiece even quoted Donald Creighton's famous definition of history as "the record of an

6 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], *Integrated Research Plan* (Ottawa, 1993), 27-8.

7 RCAP, Final Report Volume One, *Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Ottawa, 1996).

encounter between character and circumstance . . . the encounter between character and circumstance is essentially a story.”⁸

If Vanderhaeghe's overt appeal to history is unsurprising given the fact that he holds two degrees in History and taught Social Studies, the qualified endorsement of our craft by other notables is somewhat more unanticipated. CBC television news anchor Peter Mansbridge, for example, spent a good portion of the First Annual Lecture in Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University lamenting Canadians' comparative ignorance of their culture and history.⁹ Not to be outdone, novelist Margaret Atwood, fresh from her appearance before a Commons committee, took the stage at the University of Ottawa on 21 November 1996 to deliver the Charles R. Bronfman Lecture on Canadian Studies. Her analysis of post-1960 English-Canadian literature contended that the first wave of modern writers in the 1960s wrote about their own times and country. Young, egocentric, and historically unschooled, she said, this generation, much like the first American writers after 1783, concentrated on their own time and place. However, as they aged they lost some of their literary self-absorption, took up the search for roots and causes, and, especially in the worrisome 1990s, began to obsess about history. Atwood closed her Bronfman lecture with an allusion to an incident in the Italian film *Il Postino* (*The Postman*) in which the poet Pablo Neruda upbraids the male protagonist for stealing one of his poems to woo his love. The postman replies that poems don't belong to the poet. They belong, said the love-struck one, to those who need them. Similarly, concluded Margaret Atwood, history does not belong to the past. Rather, she said, it belongs to us in the present, to us who interpret it. History – and, presumably, the historical novel – belongs to us who *need* it.¹⁰

Surely an accumulation of evidence that ranges from Radio-Canada television to Royal Commissions to reforming defence ministers to eminent writers puts the lie to any suggestion that history, like the Cheshire Cat, is fading at the present time. On the contrary, it seemed, at times history was omnipresent. Not only did one of the biggest and most expensive royal commissions of this century employ Clio to make its case and undergird its recommendations, but prize-winning novelists both practised and praised historical accounts. Why,

8 Guy Vanderhaeghe, *The Englishman's Boy* (Toronto, 1996), frontispiece. Creighton first formulated his aphorism as: “‘I think that an historian's chief interest is in character and in circumstance.’” *University of Toronto Graduate* (Summer 1968): 39. See also John S. Moir, ed. *Character and Circumstance: Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton* (Toronto, 1970), frontispiece.

9 Peter Mansbridge Speech Notes, First Annual Lecture in Canadian Studies, Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B., 12 February 1997; <http://www.tv.cb.ca/national/about/pmspsch2.html> *The National Online*.

10 Personal observation, Ottawa, 21 November 1996.

Donald Creighton, creator of the aphorism that history was concerned with character and circumstance, was even featured on a Canadian postal stamp in the autumn of 1996. Did this not mean that an accurate assessment of the status and role of the historical profession was to be found not in Lewis Carroll but in the words of the Abbé Groulx? Surely these data demonstrate, not that history is fading, but, rather that the past is that which is "de plus vivant; le passé, c'est ce qu'il y a de plus présent."¹¹ Is history not the most living of things? Is it not that which is most present in our national life?

Well, no. Every one of those signs of the supposed vitality of history has another facet, evidence that history in fact is not alive and well. In some cases, the craft of history is ignored in the pursuit of other objectives. Or, secondly, the superficial fascination with the past is occurring without much involvement of the historians, traditionally the keepers of that particular flame. (Perhaps Caboto and *The Matthew* might be declared honorable exceptions to this generalisation, for at least the pedagogical aspects of the Cabot 500 observances have enjoyed the guidance of well-trained historians.) Moreover, many who purport to speak for the importance of the historical record are among those who have most threatened it. Let me explain what I mean, beginning with reference to some of the incidents I have mentioned as spurious evidence of history's vitality.

As aspects of the recent general election and the 1995 Quebec Referendum both indicate, the treatment that our subject receives in political debate reminds one of nothing so much as a lamp-post. While some people use such a fixture for enlightenment, others, notably drunks, use it for support. So, apparently, it is with our political inebriates. Our colleague, Susan Mann, rightly pointed out the centrality of historical interpretation in the Quebec referendum, but another historian, John A. Dickinson of l'Université de Montréal, speaking as President of the Association for Canadian Studies, was less sanguine:

The Quebec referendum on October 30 was, of course, the central event of the past few months. The alarming ignorance of Canadian and Québec realities that was manifested during the campaign and which continues to dominate much of the current political discourse demonstrates that Canadian Studies must continue to be a vital field in this country. Our political leaders have created a dismal spectacle when trying to address the question of national unity and one sometimes wonders whether they are actually intent on destroying the

11 Lionel A. Groulx, *Directives* (Montreal, 1937), 206. The original, which is found in a 29 June 1937 speech entitled "L'histoire, gardienne des traditions vivantes," is: "L'Histoire, oserais-je dire, et sans aucune intention de paradoxe, c'est ce qu'il y a de plus vivant; le passé, c'est ce qu'il y a de plus présent."

country. As long as misunderstanding can feed on ignorance, our country is threatened.¹²

What Dickinson said of Canadian Studies applies equally or more so to Canadian history.

Similarly depressing has been the reality of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. In spite of the promising talk about the centrality of history in its 1993 *Integrated Research Plan* and the format of the first volume of its Final Report, the aftermath of RCAP has been discouraging for historians. The two scholars, one academic and one private, who were in charge of planning the Commission's series on the history of First Nations – none of which has emerged as yet, by the way – were both anthropologists.¹³ In two academic conferences called to consider the royal commission's findings and recommendations, historians were notable either by their absence or low profile. The advertising brochure for the "Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Union" conference that was held at Carleton University in early December 1996 listed not a single historian among its "confirmed participants," all of whom were political leaders and bureaucrats. Similarly, advance notices for "Forging a New Relationship," the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada's conference on the RCAP report listed but two historians, one of them a retired academic. Nonetheless the organizers promised: "The [RCAP Final] Report will canvass the history of Canadian Aboriginal policy in all its dimensions. It deserves intensive discussion and debate. This major Conference will provide a forum for that debate." But not to any significant extent by trained historians, apparently.

In the public, though away from the partisan political, sphere, history has fared poorly in recent times. Paralleling events in the United States in some respects, the National Gallery of Canada in the autumn of 1995 cancelled a show of fifty-four paintings and drawings on *La Crise d'Octobre Chronology* on the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the October Crisis.¹⁴ A year later, in a fit of political correctness that might have been amusing were it not so petty and silly, the National Capital Commission agreed to remove the statue of a Native pathfinder from the base of a monument to Samuel de Champlain. The problem? The Native guide was kneeling. An NCC spokesperson pointed out that the "sculpture dates back to 1915," and the "interpretation of that time versus the interpretation of these days is different. [sic] We feel," she explained, "it is appropriate to update the monument" by removing the figure of the

12 John A. Dickinson, "President's Note," *Association for Canadian Studies Bulletin* 17 (Winter 1995-96): 5.

13 RCAP, *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, 244 n 68.

14 *Globe and Mail*, 4 October 1995.

Aboriginal man.¹⁵ Presumably, taking the opportunity, not to cover up what is now considered political incorrectness but to use interpretive signage to explain how the status of Aboriginal people in Canada and the attitudes towards them have changed in the past eighty years, was out of the question.

Even more notorious than the censorship of history in museums and monuments is its muffling in the schools. Many members of the CHA/SHC will be familiar with the trenchant complaints of military historian Jack Granatstein, who complained with some justice "We do not study Canada's role in the [second world] war in our schools."¹⁶ Others, particularly in Quebec and Ontario, have criticised the schools for de-emphasizing the study of history.¹⁷ In "Canada's History: Why Do We Know so Little?", the First Annual Lecture in Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University, CBC personality Peter Mansbridge stressed his shock at discovering during the fiftieth anniversary broadcasts on the end of the second war how little Canadians learned of these events in schools; similarly, a survey by a York University instructor of first-year students revealed an appalling ignorance of Canadian political history.¹⁸ Mansbridge noted what others in the popular media had also realized: "So you see, there is no shortage of Canadian history. And the stereotype is dead wrong. Our history is NOT dull. But we are dull-witted when it comes to learning about it. We cheat ourselves. We cheat our children. We cheat our country."

Such considerations lead naturally and directly to the world of arts and entertainment. First, the good news. In Quebec, Jacques Lacoursière, once an academic historian in Trois-Rivières, has enjoyed a lengthy career as writer and

15 Ibid., 2 October 1996.

16 J.L. Granatstein, "We do not study Canada's role in the war in our schools," *ibid.*, 1 July 1996.

17 Micheline Lachance, "L'école: zéro en histoire," *L'Actualité*, 1 mars 1996, pp. 33-8. I am grateful to Donald B. Smith, who brought this item to my attention. See the column on Bob Davis's *Whatever happened to high-school history?* (Toronto, 1995) by Randall Denley, "Students lose identity, and more, with demise of high-school history," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 December 1995. See, too, Anne Metikosh, "Links in a chain or learning outcomes?" *Globe and Mail*, 3 April 1997: "Unfortunately, the emphasis in the schools now is directed away from the study of the past and focused on the technological future. You might argue, what's wrong with that? Who the prime minister was at the turn of the century is irrelevant. What matters now – what will get [my daughter] Susie a job now – is understanding how to boot up a computer and surf the Net for the latest techno-gab. I have to admit that, to a degree, that is true. But Susie's education should not just be coming up with something new; it should also be about learning something old. Part of the process of education is teaching Susie that she is related to people who are not her parents or her siblings; that she is also related to explorers and fur traders, to runaway slaves and to Loyalists and to rebels. That she is connected to some continuous flow of ideas of which she is the beneficiary. Susie is not an end product. She is only the most recent link in the chain. That is a lesson only history can teach, and one it would benefit us all to learn."

18 Joanne Harris Burgess, "Low Marks for Canadian History," *Globe and Mail*, 4 January 1997; re Mansbridge, see above n 9.

producer of historical documentaries on television, a historical quiz show on radio, and the popular *Notre histoire: Québec-Canada*, which appeared first as numbers of a magazine and later was brought out as a bound volume that was recognised by Canada's National History Society with its Pierre Berton Award in November 1996.¹⁹ Both in Quebec and the rest of the country, McClelland and Stewart and the CRB Foundation have begun to produce comic book versions of the Heritage Minutes, for which CRB Foundation has been noted for several years. Before sneering at the fact that the first of these comics, *The Halifax Explosion*, will be distributed by McDonald's Restaurants of Canada, take note that the printing for the first number was 1,000,000 copies, 750,000 in English and 250,000 in French.²⁰

But, of course, the treatment that history and historical subjects receive in the popular media, as noted earlier, is hardly unproblematic. Much electronic ink has been spilled detailing and decrying the inaccuracies in televised programs or series on historical themes. The Lyddie who appeared on CBC television unfortunately went to Cornwall to work in a cotton mill in the 1860s, more than a decade before the National Policy and Macdonald's Montreal-based industrialist-friends turned the Loyalist village into a factory town.²¹ And *Marguerite Volant's* Quebec of 1763 was a video land where historical realities were mentioned, right enough, but no effort was made to explain card money or letters of credit to the viewer.²² Other criticisms of popularized history, or historically based entertainment, such as *Marguerite Volant* or Radio-Canada's series on Hydro-Québec entitled *Les Bâtisseurs d'eau* concentrated on their tedious or saccharine nature.²³

Is this reading of the rendering of Canadian history in popular entertainment unjustifiably gloomy? Is it not as likely that these historical comic books and television series illustrate that television is giving part of the masses what they want? Do these developments merely confirm Margaret Atwood's borrowed conclusion about the ownership of history and poetry: history belongs to those who need it. Does the fact that entertainment moguls apparently have decided that Canadian viewers need their history in televised and cartoon form

19 *The Beaver*, December 1996-January 1997, 37-8; *ibid.*, April-May 1997, p. 56. Lacoursière also served as the chair of the committee that reviewed and censured the teaching of history in Quebec schools. Lachance, "L'école: zéro en histoire," 34.

20 Val Ross, "Canadian comics serve history well," *Globe and Mail*, 24 January 1997.

21 See the post by David Frank (DFRANK@unb.ca) on H-CANADA, 15 October 1996.

22 Post of Alan McCullough (alan_mccullough@pch.gc.ca) on H-CANADA, 16 October 1996. See also posts of Sylvie Depatie (depatie.sylvie@uqam.ca), 22 October 1996, and Jean-Paul Dupré (jpdupre@clic.net), H-CANADA, 16 and 28 October 1996. Dupré's interim judgment after the fourth instalment of the sumptuous costume drama: "'All dressed up, and nowhere to go'."

23 Post by José Igartua (igartua.jose@uqam.ca) on H-CANADA, 17 October 1996; Ray Conlogue, "Treacle mars Hydro-Québec series," *Globe and Mail*, 13 March 1997.

not suggest that history, rather than fading like the Cheshire Cat, is, as Groulx contended, “de plus vivant; le passé, c’est ce qu’il y a de plus présent”? After all, did Donald Creighton not get commemorated by Canada Post last year? Yes, but Creighton’s forty-five-cent stamp was not struck to honour his contribution as a historian, or even as an academic. “These stamps,” Canada Post informed purchasers, “commemorate five of the nation’s most celebrated authors and their contributions to the growth and development of Canadian literature. The year 1996 marks the 200th anniversary of Thomas Chandler Haliburton’s birth and the 100th anniversary of the birth of Félix-Antoine Savard.”²⁴ As for the Abbé Groulx, French Canada’s counterpart of Creighton, his contribution was marked in a curious way, too. The B’nai Brith’s League for Human Rights in November 1996 asked the Montreal Urban Community to change the name of the Lionel Groulx *Métro* station to honour Cardinal Paul-Emile Léger instead.²⁵ In short, the superficial signs of our discipline’s prominence and popularity are not in fact evidence of our high standing.

Two issues of public policy that have affected historical researchers in general and the CHA/SHC in particular since the summer of 1996 reveal painfully the waning of history as an organised discipline in Canada. The origins of these measures differed: one emanated from a committee of the three federal granting agencies that are supposed to support research in this country; the other was the product of legislative gestation of long duration. Though their origins differed, the early phases of both controversies illustrated that in the minds of both the granting councils and the federal politicians and bureaucrats historians were for all practical purposes invisible. Like the Cheshire Cat, it seems, we had faded away. One hopes we still were grinning. These two issues were the Tri-Council Code of Conduct for Research Involving Humans and Bill C-32, copyright legislation.

In the latter part of June 1996, Greg Kealey, at the time Co-President of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada, alerted subscribers to the discussion list H-CANADA that researchers should be paying attention to a new research protocol that was under active consideration. When historical researchers got their hands on the document, a lengthy draft dated March 1996, they discovered that it had enormous potential impact on the kind of investigations they do. After all, there are very few historians, of Canada or any other territory, who do research that does not ‘involve’ humans. The March 1996 draft Code of Conduct for Research Involving Humans – which quickly became known briefly as the “Code of Conduct” – would have tied historical researchers’

24 Text inside book of ten “Writers/Ecrivains” stamps, Canada Post, October 1996. Besides Creighton, Haliburton, and Savard, the series honoured Margaret Laurence and Gabrielle Roy.

25 “Jewish group offended by name of subway station,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 21 November 1996.

hands in a variety of ways. It required those of them who were university-based researchers to subject their research projects to a Kafkaesque review by ethics boards, on which a historian might not be sitting, from whose decision there was no meaningful appeal, and which was equipped with sweeping powers to make critical judgments about the appropriateness and value of the work that the researcher wanted to carry out. The Code of Conduct also contained requirements concerning biographical work and research on collectivities that seemed likely to convey control of the product of research to the biographical subject or the ill-defined leadership of the collectivities that had been the object of research. These and other aspects of the Code of Conduct struck historians who began to look at it seriously in the last weeks of June 1996 as ill-conceived and threatening to historical inquiry in Canada.

What was worse in some respects than the substance of the Code was the process by which the March 1996 draft had been produced and by which that draft was to be reviewed and put into final, enforceable form. The document had been inspired by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council of Canada, the Medical Research Council, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, whose officers had decided that a unified, all-embracing protocol was desirable for all research funded by any of the granting agencies, or, in rare but increasing cases, by tri-council funding arrangements. The March 1996 draft, the second such incarnation in fact, was the direct product of a committee known as the Working Group on Ethics, which had been struck by the three councils. Inquiring historical minds that wanted to know in June 1996 how an abomination such as the March draft had been produced could start with this Working Group, on which not a single historian sat. The inquiring historian could then turn to the March 1996 draft and examine the list of people who had responded to an earlier draft. Again, historians were significant by their absence. Finally, to complete the historian's discomfiture, the Working Group required all and sundry to respond to the March draft by early July 1996. When historians objected that this was too little time, especially given the fact that they had been ignorant of the existence of the March draft until June, they were informed by the SSHRCC officer responsible for liaison with the Working Group that their organisation, the CHA/SHC, had been provided with a copy. That this, in fact, was not the case appeared to move the SSHRCC not a bit.

In spite of this inauspicious beginning, historians and others were able to influence and modify the process of considering and revising the draft Code of Conduct. Although the CHA/SHC was told at first that its demand for a longer period to consider the draft and a slower pace of revision would not be granted, by September the Working Group and its principals in the granting councils had relented and allowed more time for groups to file briefs and a more extended period during which the Working Group could deal with revisions. Critically

important in persuading SSHRCC and others of the necessity to alter the revision process was close cooperation with other groups such as L'Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française, Canadian Association of University Teachers, and the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada. By the early autumn, the councils had agreed to expand the working group by three, including our colleague Chad Gaffield, who was soon to become President of HSSFC. As the expanded Working Group proceeded with their revision using the longer period they had been allowed because of researchers' complaints, they agreed to submit another draft of the Code early in 1997 to another set of reviewers, among whom were two historians: Joanne Burgess of IHAF, and Bill Bruneau, an educational historian who was also President of the Canadian Association of University Teachers in 1996-97.

While the work of these three historians greatly reduced the problems the Code manifested by the spring of 1997, difficulties remained. In any event, what was revealing in the process leading up to the change of direction in the autumn of 1996 was that granting councils could even think it appropriate to tackle the project of drawing up a code of conduct for research involving humans without direct contributions by historians. Yet, that was precisely what had happened. If there were any doubt that this omission signified a grave decline in the visibility and influence of historians, what would transpire in the campaigns surrounding copyright legislation from the autumn of 1996 until the spring of 1997 should have removed it.

Bill C-32 was regarded by its proponents, the federal cabinet of Jean Chrétien and Sheila Copps, as phase two of "copyright reform." That it was the second step in a journey that had begun during the prime ministry of Brian Mulroney with legislation that significantly extended creators' rights was historically accurate. That Bill C-32 would reform in the sense of ameliorating problems in or improving the quality of copyright regulation was much more debatable – especially in the eyes of historians. When phase two had begun, it was assumed that this stage would address the interests and needs of users of copyright material, but by the spring and summer of 1996 the government was talking about its legislation in terms that stressed balance and a reasonable compromise between the interests of consumers of copyright material and the rights of copyright holders. Indeed, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada endorsed Bill C-32 as a workable compromise between these interest groups in the summer of 1996.

Historians begged to differ, especially about two aspects of Bill C-32. The first was the duration of copyright in works of deceased creators, and the second was the failure to provide an exemption to permit the making of a single copy of copyright material for research. In a sense it was unreasonable and ungrateful of us to complain about the first point because the fifty-year period of posthumous copyright that the draft bill contained was an improvement over

what had existed earlier. Under Canadian copyright law, such as it was, copyright in unpublished works lasted in perpetuity, so that the author's rights in material in an archives theoretically lasted forever. (In reality, of course, archivists, librarians, and researchers acted as though copyright protection did not survive the creator's demise.) However, it was the likelihood that archivists and librarians would become more circumspect about making single copies of those of their unpublished documents that still enjoyed copyright protection for researchers in a post-Bill C-32 world that worried archivists and researchers. As with the Tri-Council Code of Conduct, with the copyright legislation in the summer and autumn of 1996 historians had to be concerned, had to become involved in the debates about it, had to become visible in the contest over their terms and impact.

The problem with copyright legislation was the same as historians had faced over the draft research protocol: those who were making crucial decisions acted as though historians were invisible. The CHA/SHC, like many other organisations and interested individuals, filed a brief on Bill C-32 with the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage that was to consider the legislation in the autumn. Like other interested organisations, the CHA/SHC asked the Committee to allow it to appear to make the case for limited posthumous copyright and an exemption for making a single copy of copyright material for research purposes. Although the National Archives of Canada and a consortium of archivists' organisations were invited to appear before the Heritage Committee, the CHA/SHC was not. Furthermore, when the CHA/SHC protested, it was told politely that the Committee's time was limited and historians could not be accommodated.

What ensued in the copyright battle was somewhat reminiscent of activities concerning the draft Code of Conduct. Historians were able to make common cause with some of the same bodies with which they had cooperated on the research protocol, especially the IHAF and HSSFC, to lobby for the changes that archival researchers considered essential. In addition, the CHA/SHC was able, in cooperation with representatives of archival and genealogical organisations and making extensive use of e-mail and several discussion lists on the internet, to bring pressure to bear on the Heritage Committee. The first fruit of this cooperative lobbying was a change of heart by the Committee. The CHA/SHC was invited to appear as a witness on Bill C-32, and at its appearance it received a respectful and sympathetic hearing from many Committee members. Furthermore, during the late autumn and winter of 1996-97, this coalition of groups lobbied Committee members, selected Members of Parliament, and key cabinet ministers in favour of provisions that would permit limited photocopying of unpublished, copyright documents for research purposes. The version of Bill C-32 that cleared third reading in the House of Commons in March 1997 had a clause on research copying that was at least tolerable.

The experience of representatives of historical researchers with the Senate phase of this legislative battle was less reassuring. Again, the same cooperative lobbying by archivists, genealogists, and historians helped to ensure that the provisions of greatest concern to archival researchers remained intact. However, historians continued to see evidence that they were not a high-priority group to legislators. When the Transport and Communications Committee of the Senate arranged for hurried hearings on the measure in mid-April, historians were not invited to appear, though archivists were. Thus, while historians felt relieved when Bill C-32 received third reading in the Senate and royal assent just prior to the dissolution of Parliament for a general election in late April 1997, that relief was tempered by the knowledge that Senators and bureaucrats had not regarded them as visible blips on their political radar. (Proclamation of the new Act was frustratingly delayed in the spring of 1997, raising again the possibility that researchers' meagre gain might yet be snatched from them.)

One of the lessons – the negative conclusion – of these contests over a research protocol and copyright legislation is that no matter how prevalent a concern with history seems to be, historians as a group and their discipline tend to be invisible. Margaret Atwood might have told an audience at the University of Ottawa on 21 November how important the historical novel had become in English-speaking Canada, but she also insisted that our subject “belongs” to “those who need it” more than to people like us. Moreover, when Atwood appeared before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage on 20 November 1996 and argued that photocopying authors' work is “theft,”²⁶ her words carried a lot more weight, especially with the Heritage Minister, than did those of the representatives of the CHA/SHC who had appeared the day before her. As these campaigns over critically important policy matters show, historians are becoming invisible as a corporate group in this country. There is no reason to cheer the superficial signs of history's importance, because it is largely non-historians who are producing the artifacts that enjoy popularity. History seems to be everywhere, but the historian is becoming invisible.

How should historians respond? With a grin, of course. But, beyond that, how ought historians as a community and corporate interest to react to the evidence of their dimming visibility and waning influence that is all around in 1997? First, it is important to stress that historians should not try to claim any sort of exclusive or proprietary title over anything that is called “history.” The objection our discipline has with the invisibility of historians does not arise from some lost monopoly. We never had, nor do we want to assert a right to any absolute and exclusive control of the subject and its use in public discussions.

26 *Ottawa Citizen*, 22 November 1996 (“Authors can't afford ‘theft’, Atwood says”).

Journalists, lawyers, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists – indeed, anyone with the requisite knowledge and talents – should continue to be regarded as legitimate and credible wielders of Clio's insights. What we seek is not fewer voices claiming to talk about history, but the re-assertion of the historian's voice, which is rapidly becoming inaudible.

Nor is there any need to narrow down the kind of history that we do and on which we comment in order to reclaim our central role in public discussions and commentaries. The advances made in the many areas of social history over the last quarter-century or so can be and are every bit as relevant to issues on which historians as a group should pronounce. It is, for example, only a short time ago that two of our colleagues in Canadian social history brought their knowledge of the history of child-rearing and family-maintenance to bear on discussions in Ontario about the possibility of reducing public support for day-care facilities.²⁷ And in 1996 a colleague who specialises in the history of rural society used his knowledge of nineteenth-century social and political movements to comment upon and evaluate historically the political movement that calls itself the "Reform Party."²⁸ It is no more desirable than it is possible for the historical profession to turn its back on the impressive expansion of research interests and questions that have so greatly enriched our understanding of Canadian and other societies since 1970.

Equally, this plea for a more assertive role and voice for historians in public discussions is not aimed solely at historians of Canada. Just as there are issues beyond Canada's borders on which Canada's historians should be commenting, there also are lessons and insights to be gained beyond our shores that we need to apply to domestic issues and challenges. To cite only one example, students of the history of Native issues in Canada have a great deal to learn from the history and historiography of similar matters in the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. What we fading historians need is not more exclusive rights to comment or only traditional approaches or strictly parochial expertise. The full range of the historical profession in this country can, should, and must speak up.

In fact, far from being a call to exclusivity and parochialism, this is a message in favour of branching out and making alliances with other specialties and disciplines. If major policy events of 1996-97 at times suggested that historians are invisible while history is everywhere, they also spelled out other lessons for

27 Bettina Bradbury and Molly Ladd Taylor, "Who looked after the children? What history does not teach us," *Globe and Mail*, 23 November 1995. See also Kathleen O'Hara (Issues Network), "Social program slashes forget past," *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, 16 December 1995. Thanks are due to Bettina Bradbury, who provided the first citation.

28 Alan Greer, "Smile when you use the word 'reform,' stranger," *Globe and Mail*, 6 September 1996.

us. First is the value of cooperation and alliance with colleagues in other societies and in different specialties with common interests. We historians found that we made progress on the Tri-Council Code of Conduct and Bill C-32 only when we were able to cooperate with colleagues in L'Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française, the Association of Canadian Archivists, and the myriad of genealogical societies. We were able to collaborate on issues because we shared concerns, problems, interests, and objectives with those other groups. And because we all saw and acted on that commonality, we all had more influence than separately we could have.

Secondly, the events of the past year show clearly the importance of historians of all sorts working cooperatively. Our efforts were supported, particularly on the copyright issue, by many individuals who do not think of themselves as professional or specialist historians. Similarly, the interventions of graduate students at a large number of universities were very influential, particularly on Bill C-32. Members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage were visibly interested when the delegation from the Canadian Historical Association/Société historique du Canada explained at length how and why some of the clauses in the bill would fall with especial financial severity on students. Committee members were interested in no small part because they had heard directly from many of those students. Our campaigns on the research protocol and copyright legislation serve to remind us as an organisation that, not only it is the 'right' thing to develop policies that benefit non-specialists, students, and historians working outside the universities and colleges, but it is in the interest of academic specialist historians to do so, too. The CHA/SHC has been working to improve its relations with local historical societies, the heritage movement, students, and public historians.²⁹ Events of the past twelve-months suggest strongly that this is an expedient as well as proper thing to be doing.

Finally, the other lesson of our recent policy experiences is that new media are absolutely critical to the success of our endeavours. Our organisation was alerted to the problematic nature of the March 1996 draft Code of Conduct on the internet; in turn, we were able to use the discussion lists, internet contacts, and e-mail addresses of parliamentarians to disseminate our message and put pressure on the politicians. As a community of researchers and students of history we should continue to make heavy use of these means to stay abreast of issues, to inform one another about problems and opportunities, and also to get our views before the general public. Besides the internet itself, there are also the worldwide web and the potential use of other electronic media such as CD-ROMs. There is already a fair bit of this happening, of course. Colleagues at the

29 See, for example, Judith Fingard, "CHA Outreach," *CHA Bulletin* 23 (Spring 1997): 9; *ibid.* 8, "Consultants' Corner/Le Coin des Experts."

University of Victoria have erected a set of web pages for university students and school teachers that both serve the clientele and enhance the image of the creators of the web pages.³⁰ A nation-wide network of historians, with the centre of operations at the University of Alberta, is developing a CD-ROM textbook for post-secondary Canadian history.³¹ And the CHA/SHC itself, though it cannot yet boast its own home page, is attempting to mount an ambitious program of web pages through the federal Department of Industry and Commerce's SchoolNet project. These and other projects are examples of the kinds of initiatives in which historians will have to be engaged if they are going to re-establish themselves in a prominent role in the dissemination and use of their subject.

If the problem is that we historians have been becoming invisible while our subject continues to be relevant and contested, then the solution is to be more assertive and innovative in putting our discipline once more at the centre of the citizenry's consideration of history. Without making spurious and illegitimate claims to monopoly control, eschewing any nostalgic desire to go back to doing only the kind of history that was the norm down to the late 1960s, and reaching out to potential allies with whom we share interests, historians need consciously to make themselves as prominent and influential as their discipline. The means to pursue this goal are alliances with other organisations, closer attention to students and public historians, and greater use of new media of communications to get our message more quickly, directly, and forcefully before a public that seems hungry for our history but ignorant of us and our contributions. In Alice's *Wonderland*, nothing but the grin was to be seen once the Cheshire Cat faded for the last time, but with luck our efforts to reverse the fading of the historian to invisibility will turn out differently.

30 The web pages, which were created by Lorne Hammond and John Lutz, are found at <http://web.Uvic.ca/hrd/history.learn-teach/index.html>. See the post by Lutz (jlutz@uvic.ca) and Hammond (lhammond@uvic.ca) on H-CANADA, 15 October 1996. A story on the pages appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, 23 April 1997. I am indebted to Donald Wright, who brought the *Globe and Mail* item to my attention.

31 The principals behind this project are Rod Macleod, Chris Hackett, and Bob Hesketh of the University of Alberta. See Chris Hackett's post on H-TEACH, reposted on H-CANADA on 30 January 1997. Also noteworthy is the CD-ROM *Making History*, an interactive disk on Riel and the Northwest Rebellion. See Association for Canadian Studies *Bulletin*, 17 (Winter 1995-96): 31.