

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



One Hundred Years of History and a Few Solitudes

Benjamin Bryce

Volume 33, Number 1, 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1107091ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1107091ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association / La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (print)

1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Bryce, B. (2023). One Hundred Years of History and a Few Solitudes. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 33(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1107091ar>

Article abstract

This introductory article reflects on the centenary of the journal and explains the goals of this issue that seeks to analyze one hundred years of historiographic developments in more than a thousand articles. It presents insights about how the journal developed, particularly in the early decades, and what remnants of the early decades are still with us.

One Hundred Years of History and a Few Solitudes

BENJAMIN BRYCE

Abstract

This introductory article reflects on the centenary of the journal and explains the goals of this issue that seeks to analyze one hundred years of historiographic developments in more than a thousand articles. It presents insights about how the journal developed, particularly in the early decades, and what remnants of the early decades are still with us.

What can be said about one hundred years of historical writing in the journals of the Canadian Historical Association, as they have evolved from the *Report of the Annual Meeting* | *Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle* (1922-1965, the journal only took on a bilingual name in 1951) to *Historical Papers* | *Communications historiques* (1966-1989) and then to the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* | *Revue de la Société historique du Canada* (1990-present)?

The early decades of the journal reveal a strong interest in uncovering the origins of Canada, and early papers in the journal covered these topics in both English and French. That early interest in looking at the three (maybe four) centuries before the 1920s to understand how Canada came to be is surely a major factor in the creation of a large body of English-language scholarship about Quebec history and a comparably small field of French-language scholarship about Ontario history. As the early decades of this journal show, understanding eighteenth-century history helped Anglophone historians answer questions about their interwar present. Yet nineteenth century Ontario and the Maritimes did not hold the same appeal to Franco-phone historians.

An early example of borderland history became the journal's first non-Canadian topic. Harold Innis published "An Introduction to the Economic History of the Maritimes (including Newfoundland and New England)" in 1931.¹ In 1940, Arthur Ainton produced a short paper titled "Latin-American Frontiers" that discussed Latin America, Spain, and Portugal.² The next paper in that same issue was George F.G. Stanley's "Western Canada and the Frontier Thesis." Combined, the two seem to engage with Herbert Bolton's 1932 presidential

address delivered at the American Historical Association's annual meeting in Toronto titled "The Epic of Greater America."³ The consistent inclusion of Canadian and more-than-Canadian history began in the early 1950s. In 1951, Th.-André Audet published "Origines de l'université dans les institutions médiévales."⁴ By 1955, the journal had four non-Canadian articles.⁵

In working with Lucy Warrington to make the bibliography (Appendix 1 of the online version of this issue) and reading what seven scholars have found in the following articles, I reflect on the historical vestiges that continue to give form to the journal today. The first *Report of the Annual Meeting* was more of an annual report than a scholarly journal. It included a presidential address, a report of the secretary, a report of the treasurer, a report of a delegate to the Annapolis Royal celebration, minutes of the annual meeting, the constitution, six articles that were between three and thirteen pages long, and a list of members and affiliated organizations. The number of papers slowly increased, and the bureaucratic reports lessened. Yet the presidential addresses that we still publish are a direct result of the original tasks of the annual meetings. As late as 1970, the journal published a list of all CHA members.

From 1970 to 1998, the journal published a list of all papers presented at the conference but that did not become articles in the journal. This practice surely harkened back to previous decades of the conference when seemingly all papers presented at the annual meeting were then published in the *Report of the Annual Meeting*. It is also noteworthy that only in the late 1960s did articles come to be what we today would call "article length", with most articles to that point being only six to ten pages. The transition was not abrupt, but the journal of the 1940s and 1950s published conference papers presented at the annual meeting.

Since the 2015 issue, the journal has printed roundtable discussions about the books that won either the CHA Book Prize (formerly the Macdonald Prize) or the Wallace K. Ferguson Prize. The CHA awards both prizes at an annual meeting; the books are then discussed at a roundtable that the journal's editors organize at the following year's annual meeting, and then that roundtable is published in the subsequent journal issue. While an invented tradition, it reflects the organic relationship between the CHA, the meeting, and the journal.

The journal only published one issue per year from 1922 until 2005. Since then, it has published two issues. This model (whether one or two volumes) shows clear vestiges of our origins and is out

of line with other large journals in our field. In 2012, to take one of our biggest years as an example, the journal published 21 articles in two volumes. We plan to have about as many this year, and there are no discussions about becoming a quarterly journal. Instead, we invite people who present papers at the most recent annual meeting (or in the past couple of years) to submit a revised version of their paper for consideration. From then on, the *JCHA* behaves like any other history journal, with editorial decisions and peer review. But how articles come to be submitted to our journal is linked to a system created in 1922.

In what follows, seven scholars respond to a task given to them by the editors in 2021, in preparation for the 2022 annual meeting and the centenary of the Canadian Historical Association. We invited each contributor to write a historiographic piece that reviewed how historians — as seen in articles in the journal — have researched and written about one of seven topics. Remarkably, all seven people we invited accepted and took on the daunting task of providing meaning to 100 years of scholarship published in the journal. Over the next two years, through roundtable discussions and peer review, these articles have grown to their present form.

Our editorial decisions about what topics to solicit are worth mentioning. There were far more topics than we could have possibly chosen, which is the main explanation for why other good topics did not receive a similar spotlight. The seven historiographic essays somewhat represent a century's worth of history as well as reflect many of the topics currently shaping our discipline. We settled on politics, race, Indigeneity, colonialism, Black Canadian history, and women's and gender history as well as the presidential addresses themselves. Those choices reveal something about our current historiographic moment as much as they encapsulate the salient themes of the past century. Women's history was a new field, absent from the journal for its first 50 years, that we chose. Labour history was a new field, absent from the journal for its first 50 years, that we did not choose. Historical landmarks were a central feature of the journal (and the CHA) for its first forty years, but we did not include that topic either.

Many other fields similarly got short shrift. Our journal is only five years older than *Agricultural History*, and its main focus has also been a topic of great interest to historians in Canada. Since the 1930s or 1950s, non-Canadian history has been an evolving constant in our journal and at the CHA annual meeting. While France, the United States, and Great Britain are the most common non-Canadian topics

in our journal and at our annual meeting, other parts of Europe, the Caribbean, China, Latin America, and many other places have long been present at the conference. Perhaps then, a historiographic analysis of how the journal has been a big tent — not as big as Canadian history departments themselves — for the writing of history in Canada could have led to other interesting historiographic conclusions that we excluded by choosing to focus on the categories we did.

Another historiographic elephant in the room is French Canada. The very fact that I write this essay in English and introduce seven others in English could be the topic of some future historiographer. The two solitudes, popularized by Hugh MacLennan in a 1945 novel, are alive and well at the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* | *Revue de la Société historique du Canada*. Yet it is a divide that is often bridged. Over the past decade, we have published about one article per year in French. In 1990, the journal published three articles in French, and in 1970, it published two. In 1950, we published three in French; we did the same in 1930. We continue to be a bilingual journal, which welcomes submissions in French and English and importantly translates all abstracts into the other language so that our articles come up in catalogue searches in both languages. But ours is not a balanced bilingualism.

Yet another literary metaphor about solitude might also sum up the one hundred years of this journal. Canada is a recurring history of colonialism; an everyday history of family; of women and men; of public education; of state violence; of war; of emotions; of foreigners; of Euro-centrism; and of myth. In an era of rethinking the colonial foundations and the colonial present of Canada, should we worry about the relationship between two invasive languages on unceded lands? We are the editors of a bilingual journal. Still, our current task is to encourage inquiry into a range of topics that previous generations have silenced in our journal and association. Fostering a more balanced bilingualism feels like a task for another historical moment, when historical research also focused on questions of federalism and French Canada to a greater extent.

My memory from the editors' conversation in 2021 about including Black Canadian history is that I expected discussions of people of African ancestry in Canada to appear in the journal in ways similar to what Allan Downey did find in his essay about Indigenous Peoples and Adele Perry in hers about colonialism for most of the decades of the journal's history: a recurring presence, one filled with pejorative terms

and assumptions about being in the way of national progress. Yet what Claudine Bonner found was just one overwhelming and “glaring silence”. As this exercise and comparison tell us, Indigenous Peoples and colonialism were at the heart of history writing in many decades of our journal and the CHA. The results of those three papers also show that the scholarly decisions of people who presented at the CHA and published in its journals supported a system of white supremacy. In the case of writing about Indigenous peoples and European colonization, the historiographic conversation stressed both the ongoing presence and simultaneous overcoming of Indigenous control of Canada. In the case of Black Canadians (and we could say the same about other people of colour), scholars created a series of editorial and historiographic terms of reference that erased and silenced. In both cases, the journals of the Canadian Historical Association used the power of history to foster a myth of a white, homogeneous settler state.

What follows are seven distinct readings of an overwhelming number of published articles. These authors use different methods and approaches to tackle this historiographic task, a sort of *Exercices de style*. In Raymond Queneau’s wonderful collection, he retells the same story in the same place over and over again (ninety-nine times) but from different viewpoints. In that case, it was the gare Saint-Lazare in Paris, in our case, it is on the terrain that came to be modern Canada.

In his survey of presidential addresses, Donald Wright, himself now CHA president, draws from the wisdom of a recent past president (Penny Bryden) to reflect on the nets we all weave as historians and what we catch in those nets. James Walker examines the evolving uses of race and racism in the pages of the journal to show that, by and large, the journal was in step with the ideas of the time. Tracing the use of “race” in the journal is, to some extent, tracing the understandings of race in Canadian society from the 1920s to the present. Dr. Walker concludes his publishing career 52 years after it began, also in the pages of this journal. Foreshadowing the very approach to writing that he and others have taken in this centenary issue, his 1971 article was titled “The Indian in Canadian Historical Writing.”⁶ As already noted, Claudine Bonner’s paper highlights the overwhelming absence of people of African ancestry in the articles published in the journals of the CHA. While this began to change after about 2000, Bonner shows how this absence is “symptomatic of a systemic anti-Blackness, seen across institutions in Canada.” That very much applies to the journals of the Canadian Historical Association.

Penny Bryden takes on a long-running theme in the journal: political history. From its earliest years, politics was the central interest of the contributors to the journal. Yet, as Bryden shows, political history never went away. The biographical approach of the 1950s and 1960s has long since faded, but the state and its institutions, elections, and ideologies have continued to interest historians in Canada. Lara Campbell tracks the rise of women's history and then gender history and the relationship between the two fields. Debates about the public and private spheres, transnational and postcolonial turns, the discursive construction of gender, and the history of masculinity have all been presented and debated in *Historical Papers* and the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* while finding little space in the *Report of the Annual Meeting* (1922-1965). Yet as Campbell also notes, many rich historiographical developments in these fields remain absent in this journal. Questions about the intersection of gender with race and Indigeneity remain rare in the *JCHA/RSHC* and in contrast to the intersectional analysis that has emerged in the discipline as a whole.

Adele Perry tackles the theme of colonialism in the journal. As a colonial state, all articles about Canada in this journal in some form could come under this umbrella. In fact, as Perry shows, explicit references to colonialism ran through the first half-century of the journal, "often discussed in celebratory terms, paired with the language of white supremacy or a developmental, colony-to-nation framework." And while the second half-century has been marked by more critical analysis, including particularly significant shifts in the past two decades, Perry also shows that change has been uneven, contested, and not always accepted. Allan Downey shows how research about Indigenous Peoples within the colonial boundaries of Canada has been a central focus of the historians in the journal. He notes, "while the journal has offered a dearth of scholarship on people of colour...the zealous study of 'Indians'...is salient." The *JCHA* and the *CHA* were and remain part and parcel of a system of knowledge formation and the control it attempts to exert over Indigenous Peoples.

Combined, the authors of these seven historiographic pieces, alongside the appendix, point to many approaches to historical research in and about Canada. Both representative and part of a much larger field of historical inquiry, the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* is a product of its times, reflective of the moment in which scholars write and the historical questions that people in our past ask about their own pasts. These centenary articles are part of a larger issue of

the *Journal*, one that includes three research articles. Two query state relationships with Indigenous Peoples in Upper Canada and Gaspésie, and one is about Barbadian immigration to Canada in the final third of the twentieth century. These articles further reflect how studies of the past are tied to the present. We present a historiographic moment in 2023, one that asks questions relevant to today of past issues of the journal and — in the case of the three research articles — of the archives all around us.

BENJAMIN BRYCE is an associate professor at the University of British Columbia and editor-in-chief of this journal.

Endnotes

- 1 H. A. Innis, "An Introduction to the Economic History of the Maritimes (including Newfoundland and New England)," *Report of the Annual Meeting* 10 (1931): 85–96.
- 2 Arthur S. Aiton, "Latin-American Frontiers," *Report of the Annual Meeting* 19 (1940): 100–104.
- 3 Herbert E. Bolton, "The Epic of Greater America," President of the Association, 1932, Toronto, December 28, 1933, <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/herbert-e-bolton>.
- 4 Th.-André Audet, "Origines de l'université dans les institutions médiévales," *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle* 30 (1951): 22–25.
- 5 Ezio Cappadocia, "Guglielmo Ferrero and the Writing of History," *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle* 34 (1955): 42–50; Robert A. Spencer, "Farewell to German History? Revisionism Versus Traditionalism," *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle* 34 (1955): 51–61; J. B. Conacher, "The British Party System between the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867," *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle* 34 (1955): 69–78; W. E. Binkley, "Mid-Nineteenth Century Political Parties — United States," *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapport de l'assemblée annuelle* 34 (1955): 79–87.
- 6 James W. St. G. Walker, "The Indian in Canadian Historical Writing," *Historical Papers / Communications historiques* 6 (1971): 21–51.