
The Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société Historique du Canada on the Eve of Its Centennial

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Abstract

This article traces the history of the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* and its contribution to research dissemination, the building of a scholarly community, and services to authors. Housed at Carleton University since 1999, the *JCHA* is supported by SSRHC's Aid to Scholarly Publications program.

Keywords

JCHA, Canadian Historical Association, history

Résumé

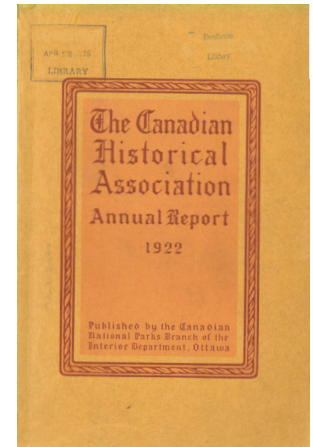
L'article retrace l'histoire de la *Revue de la Société historique du Canada* et sa contribution à la diffusion de la recherche, le développement de la communauté savante et les services aux auteurs depuis quatre-vingt quinze ans.

Mots clés

RSHC, Société historique du Canada, histoire

Introduction

The *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société Historique du Canada* (*JCHA / RSCH*) has been published continuously for almost a century. Throughout its history, the journal's consistent objective has been to publish the best article-length works of original historical scholarship arising from the annual



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conference of the Canadian Historical Association / Société Historique du Canada (CHA / SHC). As the official journal of the CHA, the *JCHA* seeks innovative contributions that “open new avenues of research, place a familiar subject in a new perspective, or use innovative methodology or theory that could interest those engaged in historical and interdisciplinary research” (Érudit, 2017b). The board of the *JCHA* seeks out and publishes articles in all fields of history, in French and in English, and representing all approaches to the discipline. Given the journal’s structures and mandate, the articles published represent an ongoing commentary on the state of the discipline of history as practised in Canada over the past ninety-five years.

The history of the *JCHA* mirrors the development of the Canadian Historical Association itself. The CHA is a successor organization to the Historical Landmarks Association (HLA), founded in 1907. The official reason for the foundation of the HLA was to aid in preparations for the Québec Tercentenary of 1908; however, the federal government’s attempted sale of historically significant Montréal properties in 1905 played a strong role in convincing the HLA’s founders that a concerted effort to preserve the Dominion’s architectural heritage was needed (Wright, 2003). The HLA quickly broadened its scope and, commencing in 1915, began to publish its own annual report (Long, 1954). The association had by 1919 succeeded in arousing public interest in its task to such an extent that the federal government established the Historic Sites and Monuments Board; by 1921, the board and other Dominion and provincial government agencies had made the HLA obsolete. Historians nonetheless perceived a need for a Canadian historical society of wider scope and appeal than the HLA. As a result, on May 18, 1922, at its sixteenth annual meeting, the Historic Landmarks Association of Canada renamed itself the Canadian Historical Association.

As the name suggests, the new association would be clearly a professional body for historians rather than an association of preservationists. The CHA was also intended to transcend two other important limitations of the HLA. First, the HLA was staunchly Anglophone. Fewer than six percent of its members were Francophones, and its name was never even translated into French. In contrast, the new CHA had the ambition to be a bilingual association, “bringing into more perfect harmony the two great races that constitutes [sic] the Canadian people” (Burpee, 1922, p. 7), as the association’s first president put it. Similarly, the HLA had been an association of enthusiasts motivated by romantic patriotism, standing apart from the rapidly professionalizing discipline of academic history (Wright, 2003). The CHA’s founders, on the other hand, saw the new association as an academic, critical, and professional body. And finally, the CHA would reflect the state of the historical discipline writ large rather than creating a “narrowly nationalist” society, which might imply that “Canada or the Association is lacking in workers in the broad field of historical science” (Preston, 1952, p. v). Instead, inaugural CHA President Lawrence Burpee sought “to encourage historical research in every field, here and elsewhere, ancient as well as modern, and [to place] the broadest possible definition on history” (Burpee, 1928, p. 10). The goals of bilingualism, professionalism, and internationalism have been achieved slowly and unevenly, to be sure; for example, the CHA’s name was translated into French only in 1952, and the “besetting sin of national history” (Burt, 1950, p. 1) proved difficult to transcend. However, the presence of these aspirations at the birth of the CHA is an indicator of its

longstanding ambition to be a truly inclusive and professional body; these commitments would also shape the association's journal.

The CHA quickly grew to become the premier and largest association for historians practising in Canada. Its constitution committed it to “encourage research and public interest in history; to promote the preservation of historical sites and buildings, documents, relic, and other significant heirlooms of the past; [and] to publish historical studies and documents as circumstances may permit” (Wright, 2003, p. 5). From an initial membership of 339, the association's membership has hovered around 1,000 for the last ten years or so, after having peaked at around 1,500 in the mid-1970s when enrollment in Canadian universities exploded. Most individual members are academic historians, but the CHA's membership also includes archivists, museum professionals, librarians, popular historians, kindergarten to grade 12 teachers, and interested members of the public. University and public libraries and academic departments make up the largest contingent of institutional members.

The CHA's publications were at first limited to the journal, but have expanded over time to include others. In 1953, the CHA began producing a series of historical booklets by eminent Canadian authors; initially aimed at high school students and popular audiences (Wright, 2003), the latter series had published 64 volumes by 2005, when the program was suspended. In 1975, the association began to publish its *Bulletin*, a magazine-style publication comprising announcements, association business, obituaries, and short, accessible articles dealing with various aspects of the historical profession. Initially published four times a year (1975–1992 inclusively), the *Bulletin* is now sent to its members thrice yearly. As other CHA publications have been introduced, the annual journal has become more closely focused on the publication of high-quality articles representing original research; however, the journal has retained its openness to submissions in any field of history and to theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological essays.

The *JCHA* has nonetheless undergone significant changes since its inception, not least in its title. For its first four decades, the journal was known simply as *Report of the Annual Meeting*. In 1966, it was renamed *Historical Papers*, a title the journal bore until the current name came into use in 1990. The journal's content features have also changed over the course of its history. In its early years, the publication included association business (such as financial documents and minutes) along with scholarly articles and research notes. Through the course of the 1920s, the journal reflected the professionalization of the CHA's annual conference and the diminishing influence of the HLA, with more and more articles dedicated to historical analyses and fewer to heritage preservation. The length and number of scholarly articles in each volume also increased over the 1920s.

Despite the CHA's ambition to avoid parochialism, the journal's initial focus was solidly Canadian. During the first twenty years of its publication, *Report of the Annual Meeting* published only four articles on non-Canadian topics. The postwar period saw dramatic changes in focus, however, beginning with the 1946 volume, which featured two medieval and early modern essays. The following year, the journal's flagship article

was a lengthy discussion of “Some Recent Views of the Italian Renaissance,” by Kenneth M. Setton. While it took a few years for the new topic breadth to become consistent, by the mid- to late 1950s the journal was publishing non-Canadian articles in every issue. Indeed, in 1957 the *majority* of the annual volume’s articles focused on non-Canadian topics (Canadian Historical Association). By the late 1960s, a substantial non-Canadian section could be found in the second half of each volume.

It would be tempting to attribute the growth of non-Canadian topics in the 1950s to the increased prominence of Canada on the global stage, including Lester B. Pearson’s Nobel Peace Prize of 1957. Whatever the case, the journal was always engaged with political affairs and the relationship between scholar and state – though always within the parameters typical at the time of both the association and the broader Canadian polity. Indeed, in the early years, political figures sometimes contributed to the association and its journal, though always within the reigning liberal-conservative establishment ethos that characterized the CHA / SCH, as well as the state. In 1931, having just left the chancellorship of McGill University (and a term as president of the CHA), former prime minister Robert Borden published a 30-page article on “The Problem of an Efficient Civil Service,” based on his presidential address of the same name (Borden, 1931). Sitting politicians also occasionally published in the journal; in 1954, then-Minister of External Affairs Lester Pearson contributed “Some Thoughts on Canadian External Relations” (Pearson, 1954). Few if any sitting politicians have published in the journal since the 1950s. As the 1960s progressed, the journal evolved to reflect the changes within professional history, and particularly the move from political to social history. The Canadian Committee for Labour History, a subgroup approved by the CHA in 1972, was one clear indicator of this shift, as was the 1975 foundation of the Canadian Committee for Women’s History. The growth of women’s participation in academic history was one of the most significant changes in the CHA during this period, and the association slowly became a mixed-gender organization, though its leadership was slower to integrate. (While the CHA elected its first female president, Hilda Neatby, in 1962, there were only two other female presidents before 1990.) Women’s and gender history nonetheless became an increasingly important component of each year’s conference and thus of the journal. Indeed, it can be argued that the journal was at the vanguard of change within the CHA, at least to judge from the 1971 volume of the journal, which prominently features articles on women’s history and the history of the family (*Érudit*). Women’s and gender history, labour history, and, more recently, the history of sexuality have been strongly represented in the journal over the past forty years.

While content and approaches have evolved along with the historical discipline, other aspects of the journal have exhibited remarkable continuity. The CHA’s origins as an association concerned with what we now call “public history”¹ have been honoured throughout the journal’s history. To be sure, as the journal’s focus on high-quality historical articles grew, some other features diminished in formality and frequency. For the first forty years of the journal’s publication, for example, every volume included a contribution on “Some Historic and Prehistoric Sites of Canada.” While the regular feature was eliminated in the early 1960s, articles on archives, memory, and sources for the writing of history have continued to be a key component of the journal. Digital

history methods and initiatives, for example, have been featured regularly in recent volumes.

Issues dedicated either partially or wholly to the anniversaries of significant events have been another consistent feature of the *JCHA*. In 1934, for example, the journal published several articles to mark the quatercentenary of Jacques Cartier's first voyage and assess its legacy. The 1927 volume included essays contemplating the anniversary of Confederation, a theme repeated in the 1967 centennial volume. The journal's 2017 volume will include a special issue dedicated to the 150th anniversary of the Canadian federation. Together, the 1927, 1967, and 2017 volumes provide insight into the shifting commitments, methods, and understandings of academic historians in Canada – and into the changes in Canadian culture over the past ninety years.

The CHA's aspiration to bilingualism has also persisted (and increased) through the journal's history. In virtually every year of the journal's publication, articles in French have been included. Looking at the entire run of the journal, the number of French articles published in any given year ranges between 0 and 30 percent, with both of these extremes represented in only a few unusual years. For much of the twentieth century, a typical volume contained one to three articles in French, often representing a relatively small group of Francophone historians who regularly attended the CHA's annual conference (Wright, 2003). As a result, despite the CHA's desire to be truly bilingual, the journal's articles in French have not necessarily been representative of the scope of the discipline as practised in Québec. This is particularly true given that articles published in French in the twentieth century were less likely to focus on non-Canadian topics than articles in English; the first French-language article wholly focused on a non-Canadian theme appeared in 1973. Continuing to increase the presence and diversity of French-language contributions has been a consistent (and largely successful) commitment of recent editorial teams.

As a publication of Canada's association for professional historians, the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* has grown apace with its parent body. From the 1970s on, the length of journal issues has grown to the point where, in the early years of this century, the journal's size had become unwieldy. As a result, since 2006, the *JCHA* has produced two issues per year, one in print and online and the other online only. This has permitted an increase in the length and number of articles published. For example, in 2005, 13 articles were published in the annual volume's single issue. In 2006, 19 articles were published across the two numbers of the annual volume. This number has increased slightly over the past decade to approximately 21 articles per volume, split between two issues. Nonetheless, each issue remains distinctive; the print issue has generally been dedicated to Canadian topics and advanced research projects, while the online issue has published non-Canadian, transnational, methodological, and theoretical contributions. The dedication of one annual issue of the *JCHA* to non-Canadian themes since 2006 has enhanced the CHA's commitment to being an association inclusive of all historians, no matter their regional or chronological specializations.

In addition to permitting the expansion of the journal's offerings at relatively low cost, the online edition has offered other advantages to the association, editors, and authors.

One of the distinctive and attractive features of the *JCHA* is its rapid production schedule. Though challenging for editorial teams and peer reviewers, the requirement to produce two issues of the journal within a year of the annual conference has produced an enviable submission-to-publication time. In turn, this rigorous schedule has proved attractive to authors, permitting the journal to continue to attract submissions of the highest quality. The online edition permits particularly speedy publication; in addition, it accommodates lengthy, highly illustrated, and multimedia presentations that would be difficult to encompass in a printed journal.

Because of its lengthy history, its relationship with the CHA, and the quality of its articles, the *JCHA* has long been a journal to which most research libraries in Canada, and many internationally, have subscribed. As the journal has adapted to the changing technological environment, however, its distribution has increased significantly. Both issues of the annual volume are able to reach a large audience through Érudit, a nonprofit organization and consortium founded in 1998 and comprising the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and Université du Québec à Montréal. Érudit distributes scholarly journals in digital format, offering access to more than 200,000 scholarly and cultural publications in the humanities and social sciences, creation and arts, and natural sciences and medicine. Érudit is a signatory to agreements with Primo Central, WorldCat, Summon, Scopus, WOS, Google Scholar, Francis, BASE, OAIster, JournalTOCS, DOAJ, Repère, Persée, and other global digital players, and is thus able to distribute the *JCHA* broadly and in formats optimized for online distribution and permanence. More than 1,000 institutions in 35 countries have purchased title or package subscriptions with the consortium. The journal's partnership with Érudit has been highly successful, and certainly helps account for the *JCHA*'s increased distribution in recent years. Since 1999, the journal has been housed in the Department of History at Carleton University in Ottawa. While editorial teams change, Carleton provides a stable base to ensure the journal's sustainability and consistency. Carleton also provides access to qualified staff, each year providing a doctoral student intern to work with the *JCHA*'s editorial team throughout the year. Carleton's history department views the internship as a unique training opportunity for graduate students.

While Carleton University houses the *JCHA*, it remains a publication of the Canadian Historical Association, and the CHA retains the primary role in the administration of the journal. The association's council selects and appoints the co-editors of the journal and the editorial board. A group of three co-editors serves staggered three-year terms. At least one of the three editors is a Francophone, serving as French-language editor for the journal; the other two are generally Anglophones. At least one of the co-editors is a non-Canadian specialist. The co-editors are volunteers who receive a \$500 honorarium per annum. The primary role of the co-editors is to attend the annual conference, solicit particularly strong papers, receive submissions from the open call, select manuscripts for peer review, select appropriate peer reviewers, and assess articles for inclusion after peer review is complete. The journal prides itself on the high quality of its peer-review process and on providing significant feedback to authors. As a result, the reputation of the *JCHA* is high, ensuring its continuing ability to attract quality submissions. Along with the speed of production, the journal's well-regarded peer-review process has proved attractive to historians at all stages of their careers. The

journal's longstanding stature and appeal can be seen from its contributor list (Érudit, 2017a), which throughout the journal's history has counted the most eminent practitioners of Canadian history, particularly in English Canada, but increasingly in Québec as the twentieth century progressed. Many of the premier practitioners of Canadian history have not only published in the journal, but have served as editors; the most recent generation of editors includes scholars such as Dominique Marshall, Wendy Mitchinson, Adele Perry, Carolyn Podruchny, and Joan Sangster among others. Professor Marshall served for over a decade (1993–2005).

As peer review is completed, the co-editors (in consultation with the board) make their final decisions on acceptance or rejection. Thereafter, the editors make recommendations for revision and oversee the completion of each year's issues. Over the past five years, the co-editors have also organized panels at the annual conference. Two of these bring eminent panelists together to comment on the monographs that won the previous year's Macdonald and Ferguson prizes for contributions to Canadian and non-Canadian history respectively. Other panels are organized on topics of interest more generally, with particular attention to transnational or non-Canadian themes in keeping with the broad, inclusive vision of the CHA's founders.

The Council of the CHA in consultation with the co-editors chooses the journal's editorial board. Twelve board members serve staggered three-year terms. As with the co-editors, board members are selected to ensure that the board contains a breadth of content expertise and linguistic competence in both French and English. Board members provide review after peer review is complete, particularly when the result of peer review is ambiguous. Members of the board also serve on a jury that selects the best article published in each volume.

As noted above, the editors and board are fortunate to enjoy the services of dedicated doctoral interns from Carleton University, who serve as editorial assistants and then as managing editors of the journal. The staggering of terms (with overlap between outgoing managing editors and the editorial assistants who will replace them) has proved a godsend for the continuity and professionalism of the journal. Staff members are also contracted for shorter terms; in 2006, at the request of journal editors Wendy Mitchinson and Dominique Marshall, the CHA provided funding to hire a professional copy editor for each volume.

Since 1993, the *JCHA* has relied on the financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSRHC) through its Aid to Scholarly Publications program. Further revenue is derived from subscriptions offered to the members of the CHA and to most research institutions in Canada and many internationally. Access Copyright and permissions to reprint or copy are additional revenue streams. Scholarly journals in Canada cannot thrive on sales revenues alone, whether associations, university presses, or commercial aggregators publish them. In this regard, SSRHC funding has been instrumental in ensuring the *JCHA*'s continued existence.

At the same time, the world of scholarly journal publishing is evolving rapidly and with concomitant challenges. The *JCHA*, similar to other scholarly journals in Canada, has

had to adapt to a changing (and sometimes challenging) landscape. For instance, the SSHRC's requirement that journals be available online led the *JCHA* to enter into an agreement to have its journal available on Érudit's platform starting in 2005, and to publish a second issue of the journal in 2006. Because SSHRC is one of the three agencies governed by the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy requirements adopted in 2015, the *JCHA* has made changes in order to remain eligible for SSHRC funding; this has meant lowering the journal's moving wall to 12 months beginning in February 2017. The Canadian Historical Association is in full support of measures that allow "the results of research to have the greatest possible impact ... based on the idea that the products of research (i.e., full-text publications and research data) should be available to the user free of charge and without restrictions" (Canada, 2015, n.p.). However, the CHA believes that SSHRC's Aid to Scholarly Journals program should reflect the potential loss of revenues caused by open access (OA) to ensure that Canadian journals continue to be properly funded not only to survive but also to succeed on the world stage.

The Canadian Historical Association is the only organization representing the interests of *all* historians in Canada. While the CHA has always been, and will always remain, the premier organization for those who research, write, and teach Canadian history, it has made considerable progress in recent years to be more inclusive of historians practising in fields other than Canadian history. The CHA's council now regularly includes historians of many areas of the globe. As discussed above, the number of transnational and non-Canadian articles presented at the CHA's annual meeting and published in the journal has steadily increased. The dedication of a specific annual non-Canadian issue in 2006 exemplified this transition. However, since the second issue was published only online, this occasionally created a sense among non-Canadianists that publication in the online version constituted a relegation of sorts. To address this concern and in a further evolution of the journal's commitment to inclusion and breadth, the *JCHA* editors have recently decided to eliminate the distinction between Canadian and non-Canadian content in the two issues. Rather, articles will be selected for publication in either issue – one in print and online and the second online only – regardless of subject. This change in policy is a clear indication that the journal editors and the CHA consider all historical research conducted in Canada to be on equal footing.

Reflecting on the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société Historique du Canada* as its 2022 centenary approaches, one can trace not only its consistent dedication to the core principles enunciated at the CHA's founding, but also the constant evolution of those principles as the historical profession and Canadian society have changed. Today, as Canada renews its commitment to investing in science, the *JCHA* can be expected not only to continue its tradition of quality historical scholarship, but to prosper in an increasingly globalized, complex, and digital intellectual and economic environment.

Note

1. "Public history" is generally defined as professional historical work conducted outside academia (see Kelley, 1978).

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