Document generated on 04/18/2024 9:18 a.m.

Historical Papers
Communications historiques

Presidential Address*

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Volume 2, Number 1, 1967

Ottawa 1967

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030664ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/030664ar

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (print)
1712-9109 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Saunders, R. M. (1967). Presidential Address*. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, *2*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.7202/030664ar

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS *

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One hundred years ago the passing of the British North America Act set the seal of final accomplishment upon the long and difficult negotiations of the Fathers of Confederation. Then was the new nation of Canada brought to birth. Four years later in 1871, with the joining of British Columbia, the new nation reached in truth *A Mari Usque Ad Mare*. What was this nation whose shores are washed by the waters of three oceans? What, indeed, is a nation?

A nation is above all a community of people living together over such a period of time that common interests and experiences, common feelings and sympathies, loves and fears all merge into a body of mutual understanding and desired association. It is fundamentally a state of mind and feeling, one that is more felt than described, more lived than written about. Without this living together the concept of a nation could scarcely arise, without it the national feeling which is the lifeblood of the nation would never flow. Without a continued living together the concept and the feeling would die. Yet this means, surely, that time and the common experiences that accumulate over a long period of time are the real basis upon which a nation rests; but time, and the story of a people living together in time, are the substance of history. A nation is, therefore, more than anything else a venture in history.

In consequence, those who treat of its history, its historians, have necessarily a special relationship, indeed, a special obligation to the nation in which they study and teach, live and have their being. They are by virtue of their profession the discoverers, the recorders, and the keepers of the national experience, of the record of the living together, of the memories that are the ultimate source of national feeling and identity. "History is", as Allan Nevins has so aptly said, "the sextant and compass of state which, tossed by wind and current, would be lost in confusion if they could not fix their position ..." [1] In fact, what the historian writes and says, what he records and teaches, will inevitably have a profound effect upon the thinking and feeling of the generations on the march, for it is a well-known truth that one cannot write or teach history without making history. Whether the historian wants it so or not he is cast in the role of guide and mentor to the nation.

* *The Historian and the Nation*, read before the Canadian Historical Association, Ottawa, June 8, 1967.

[1] A. Nevins, *Gateway to History* (New York, 1938), p. 3.

The names of those historians who have openly and eagerly accepted this role in the past are amongst the most distinguished in many nations: Lord Macaulay in England, Jules Michelet in France, George Bancroft in the United States. To them and to countless others it has seemed not merely a duty or an obligation but an inspired purpose to serve the nation. So it was to him who in Canada wrote, "Que les Canadiens soient fidèles à eux-mêmes; qu'ils soient sages et persévérants . . . ." [2]

François-Xavier Garneau wrote these lines nearly thirty years before Confederation. He was thinking not of the yet unconceived Dominion but of *la nation canadienne,* that community which had already lived two centuries on the banks of the St. Lawrence and which he was prepared to serve as historian-guide. That he did so with success needs no demonstration here and now. One has only to scan the pages written by his successors throughout the years, from the Abbé Ferland, Thomas Chapais, and Canon Groulx on to his present emulators. If today there is a vigorous, self-conscious, up-pressing *nation canadienne* within the Canada that stretches from sea to sea it owes much, very much, to the persistent and successful leadership of its *historiens nationaux.* They have done for the French *nation* in Canada what their spiritual forefather, Jules Michelet, did for France; they have articulated the concept of a nation.

The nation, however, whose centenary we are celebrating this year is something more than *la nation canadienne* that was defined and has been so ably defended by Garneau and his successors; something greater, indeed, than any of the components that have gone to make it up. When under the historic name of Canada the founding peoples agreed to come together for the creation of a new state they were laying the foundations of a country whose continent-wide extent was soon to encompass a wealth of resources and varieties of dwelling space quite beyond those possessed by any of the original members of the Confederation. To this richness and diversity of lands and resources was quickly to be added an equally rich variety of peoples, many peoples, who would learn to live together in this broad new land. Canada was to be truly more than a new state, it was to be a new nation. The many peoples who came to inhabit this varied country would by successfully living together, generation after generation, become all together, Canadians.

The consciousness of what it means to live together in any community, in any nation, will be passed on to each succeeding generation in many different ways, but there can be no doubt that one of the most critical ways is through the schools. The importance of the educational system of any nation to that nation's common life and especially to its people's understanding of their own nation and their place in it needs no proof more than the historical record of what has been done here

[2] F.-X. Garneau, *Histoire du Canada* (8th ed., Montreal, 1946), IX, 151.

and elsewhere. The case for Canada in this regard was stated some forty years ago by the Honorary President of this Association, the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, one-time member of the History Department of the University of Toronto, who wrote in 1926:

> In a country with so scattered a population as ours and a vast frontier exposed to alien influences the task of creating a truly national feeling must inevitably be arduous, but this is the undertaking to which our educational systems must address themselves for by true education alone will the problem be solved. To our schools we must look for the Good Canadian.[3]

Within the Canadian schools the teachers of no subject have been more conscious of this need and purpose than those of history. It was this feeling that caused a Dominion-wide competition to be sponsored jointly by teachers' associations and provincial governments in 1893-1895 for the writing of a history book that would satisfy the needs of the Dominion and not unduly stress provincial differences. The book which emerged as the choice of the committee in charge of the competition was W.H.P. Clement's, *The History of the Dominion of Canada.* This book was published in 1897 and was authorized as a textbook in New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, and British Columbia. The Preface of this book contains a significant statement of purpose, written by the secretary of the selection committee. In this it is pointed out that while substantial attention is given to facts of provincial importance the main aim has been "to direct the mind of the reader to the federation of the provinces under the British North America Act of 1867, and in this way unite the various currents of provincial history into the broader channel of the Dominion." That there was a certain "community of interests" amongst the provinces even before Confederation is noted but it is emphatically pointed out that the important fact is that

> now, since they are happily united under one system of government, they share more intimately in a common destiny. To that union of interests, as well as of the patriotic sentiments and aspirations of all Canadians, attention is thoughtfully directed, with a view to impress upon our future citizens that we not only have a united country but are a united people. It is to be hoped that the story of our Dominion, which in the following pages we believe is simply and faithfully told, will help to convey a fair and inspiring impression of the grandeur and importance of the heritage committed to us as Canadians and as citizens of the British Empire....[4]

Granted the differences in provincial emphases and, in particular, the special position of *la nation canadienne,* the spirit that breathes in Patterson's preface of 1897 has prevailed throughout most of Canada

[3] V. Massey in C. N. Cochrane and W. S. Wallace, *This Canada of Ours* (National Council of Education, 1926), p. 11.

[4] W. Patterson in W. H. P. Clement, *The History of the Dominion of Canada* (Toronto, 1897), pp. v-vi.

ever since. The British Empire of that Jubilee year has given way to the British Commonwealth, the Dominion of Canada to Canada the nation, but through it all the basic emphasis maintained by the teachers of history in most Canadian schools has remained remarkably consistent from decade to decade and from book to book. In a later generation it has, perhaps, been best expressed in that textbook written by a former President of the Canadian Historical Association, Professor George W. Brown, and which is entitled significantly, *Building the Canadian Nation,* a book which has for twenty-five years been widely used in Canadian schools. Of the aim of his work Professor Brown has this to say:

> The panorama of Canada's history has many threads, but no simple easily discerned pattern. Every province, every section, every community has its own history, deserving of careful and appreciative study. Nevertheless, the fact that Canada exists today is proof that there is a Canadian history which is greater than the sum of these particular histories. It is with this deep conviction that this book has been written. If it fulfils even in a small degree the aspiration which lay behind it its purpose will have been served.[5]

If the education of the "good Canadian" and service to the Canadian nation have been unwavering aims of those who wrote the textbooks and for those who taught history in the schools of Canada we find that a similar spirit has prevailed during this past century amongst authors and scholars who have devoted themselves to treatments of Canadian history designed for a more general and a more mature reading public. Again we have only to turn to the works of many of the former Presidents of this Association. We will find this spirit in the pages of Thomas Chapais and George M. Wrong, of Chester Martin and Mgr. Arthur Maheux, of Donald Creighton and W. L. Morton. In 1941 we heard Gustave Lanctot tell us that good history books "...pourront aider à édifier... une connaissance exacte et un orgueil moral du passé, qui devraient aussi contribuer à renforcer le lien de l'unité nationale."[6] Once more in 1952 Jean Bruchési told us that the moment had come to give history, especially the history of Canada, "le caractère qui lui permettra de contribuer à l'avancement de l'unité nationale."[7] And in the Preface of our present Vice-President's fine study, *Canada — A Story of Challenge,* we are informed that "the book's main theme... is the emergence of a Canadian nation... the product of long and enduring efforts to build a community in the northern half of the North American continent separate from the United States."[8] But perhaps the whole matter has been stated most precisely and emphatically by Pro-

[5] G. W. Brown, *Building the Canadian Nation* (Toronto, 1942), p. xv.
[6] G. Lanctot, "Les Historiens d'Hier et l'Histoire d'Aujourd'hui," *Annual Report of the Canadian Historical Association* (1941), p. 14.
[7] J. Bruchési, "L'Enseignement de l'Histoire du Canada," *Annual Report of the Canadian Historical Association* (1952), p. 8.
[8] J. M. S. Careless, *Canada, A Story of Challenge* (Toronto, 1959), p. v.

fessor A. R. M. Lower in the Preface to his well-known book, *From Colony to Nation,* where he writes:

> The author hopes that a careful reading of his pages will help Canadians to some of that self-knowledge so necessary if they are to take their rightful place in the world, and still more, if they are to be a happy people, at peace with themselves. If he has not succeeded in this task, then someone else must take it up, for it is imperative. It may be performed by the statesman, by the novelist or the poet, or it may be performed by the historian. Certainly on no-one is the duty of revealing to the people reasons for the faith that is in them more directly laid than on the historian, for by its history a people lives. This book is an attempt to discharge that duty. [9]

It is evident that the historians of Canada have steadily manifested a strong sense of obligation to their nation. And, I think it is fair to say, this is in their view more than a personal obligation. It is a duty that the discipline and profession of history to which they belong and which they likewise serve owes to the nation, to Canada.

Nevertheless, in spite of such persistent emphases in the schools and amongst the historians of Canada it is also true that in the ranks of the historical profession generally many queries have arisen during the century past, queries about the aims which historians should legitimately pursue and about the legitimacy of this particular aim, the serving of a nation. These questions have arisen chiefly for three reasons: the appearance and development of the idea that history should be regarded only as a science, the growth of belief in the relativity of all ideas and, especially in the post-war generation, a mounting fear of nationalism.

The idea that the discipline of history must be regarded as a science emerged in the nineteenth century when so many other subjects, notably those concerned with the study of society, were seeking to open the door to truth and certainty with that key, the scientific method, which was being used with such telling effect by the natural sciences. This effort rose to fever pitch under the impact of the great intellectual struggle over Darwinism. In the midst of this conflict Professor J. A. Bury in 1902, at the close of his Inaugural Address as Regius Professor of History at Cambridge University, pronounced his famous and oft-quoted dictum that history is "... simply a science, no less and no more." [10]

In issuing this pronunciamento Bury was taking sides in a fierce academic battle. He was making a declaration of independence for himself and for his profession against all efforts to use religion or any other external frame of reference in the field of history. At the same time he was expressing a sincere conviction that the way of science is the

[9] A. R. M. Lower, *From Colony to Nation* (Toronto, 1947), p. xiii.
[10] J. B. Bury, "The Science of History," in F. Stern, *The Varieties of History,* (New York, 1956), p. 223.

only road to truth. Bury was speaking, it must be remembered, not only for himself but for a growing body of professional opinion. What he said found ready response; indeed, his affirmation became the maxim and the guideline for a considerable part, if not the majority of the historians of the Western world during the next generation. Like the chemist or the physicist in his laboratory, like the geologist studying fossils or probing the processes of sedimentation, the historian was called upon, impartially and impersonally, to discover and to assemble the facts, and then to let the facts speak for themselves. Thus would appear the objective truth of his story without interference or distortion by person or religion or nation or any other outside influence whatsoever.

This is an austere ideal and one not without nobility. With such a working principle as their guide an increasing number of historians piled up an ever-mounting mass of factual knowledge; indeed, the body of historical information became so great that, as in other fields, the only way of coping with it was through greater and greater specialization. As the specialists burrowed into their fact-yielding quarries and as the far corners of the world began to give way to the search and research of historians not only did the mountain of knowledge rise higher and higher but the delvers in the historical pits felt that they were getting nearer and nearer to the truth. In one sense — the accumulation of new knowledge — no doubt they were right, but unfortunately one thing was being repeatedly overlooked. Through all this busy search there developed a steadily intensifying centrifugal tendency, as historians dug deeper into the past and pushed their efforts farther from home. The world of specialized, scientific history tended to fly apart, to disintegrate. A growing realization of this tendency in recent years has produced a flow of tension amongst historians, students, and staff alike. Where, they ask, is the common bond that holds us all together? Where and what is the truth that supposedly comes when facts, scientifically appropriated, speak for themselves? Is history after all a science?

Indeed, the somewhat simple idea that scientifically pursued history would naturally result in a body of commonly acceptable and accepted knowledge was quickly to receive a rude shock from the findings of the scientists themselves, especially from the psychologists. At almost the same time that Professor Bury was uttering his famous words they were beginning to show how easy and how normal it is for persons to see the same events, even those in which they have participated, and to regard the same facts in many different ways. When this concept was applied to the study of history, in particular to the writings of historians, it was quickly patent that historians were no less liable than other men to this failing. For instance, one of the most distinguished of historiographers, Professor Herbert Butterfield, recently Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, has pointed out as a striking example of what

can happen in this respect that the authors who wrote on the origins of the Seven Years' War in the *Cambridge Modern History* produced such varying interpretations of the facts that they could scarcely be considered to be on speaking terms with each other.[11] The view that history might, in fact, be a subjective, personal subject, not a science dealing with objective truth, was given one of its most brilliant expressions when a president of the American Historical Association, Professor Carl Becker, delivered his presidential address in 1934, under the title of, "Everyman His Own Historian." With this salvo the idea of history as a journey into personal relativism reached its apogee and a clash between those historians who persisted in seeing history as objectively scientific and those who regarded it as subjectively relativistic was on. It is with us still.

What is of chief concern to us on this occasion is that both in the cool, impersonal detachment of the scientific historian and in the warm, personal disjunction of the subjectivist there has been a tendency for the view of the nation, of any connection between history and the nation, to become dim, even in some cases to be lost. If with the arrival and development of the Second World War views of such a connection were revivified and re-sharpened they were countered, particularly in the younger generation, at the end of and after the war by a revulsion against the extremes of nationalism which had been so horribly demonstrated in so many countries before and during the war and which did not cease in the world when the war was ended. Since in this mid-twentieth century no nation lives unto itself, the revulsion which arose in so many places and in so many other nations found expression too in Canada, in the ranks of historians as well as amongst the public in general.

Was this so unnatural? Are historians not people like other people? Indeed, the one fact that emerges most certainly from our consideration of our fellow historians, rising clearly above the noisy conflict over whether history is science or art, objective or subjective, is that we are all very human. Yes, it has now become evident that the historian is something more than a thinking machine; he is a human being. And the history which he studies is a humane subject; it is about persons, by persons, for persons, it is the living record of humanity. If it reflects the weaknesses and failures of humans it equally throws light on the richness and glory of humanity too. In its pages we may read the story of human fears and loves and hopes; we see there also the portrayal of human need, not least of all the cry for guidance. It rings in the question we noted above, what is it that binds us all together? Whatever answer is made to that question by the historian — and he cannot avoid making one — he should realize that it will be heard and weighed;

[11] H. Butterfield, *Man on His Past* (Cambridge, 1955), Chapter V.

yes, and even acted upon. We must remember that the historian by virtue of the nature of his subject and his profession, by his very humanity is faced now as ever with this responsibility.

It is, then, to the members of the historical profession in this country, the group represented by this Association and the ones who have to face this obligation, that these remarks are addressed. Moreover, we must remember that this profession does not begin and stop at the gates of universities for it includes all who teach and write and do research in history from the lowest grades of the public schools on up through high school and collegiate to university and graduate school. It includes librarians, archivists, museum experts, and all others, inside or outside of institutions, who labour professionally in the field of history. It is upon this group as a whole that the responsibility rests as well as upon every individual in it. It is to this group that the question, What is it that binds us all together ?, is presented.

And the answer? It is, surely, clear enough. We are here together tonight because of history and Canada, not for history alone but for history and this nation together. We are members of a community as well as of a profession and a scholarly discipline. No matter how far our interests may radiate into the far corners of the past and of the earth we are at home in one place, in one society and nation, in Canada.

Let us, then, never forget that a nation is a venture in history, that through an understanding of its history it knows itself, finds confidence to be true to itself, and guidance for the future. That there are risks in endeavouring to be a nation no-one will deny. And to all of us the hateful extremes of nationalism are abhorrent. But, granted these things, where are we to find better understanding of our risks and our dangers and of our proper aims and hopes than in the soundest portrayal that historians can provide of the path which we and our fathers and our fathers' fathers throughout time have trod and of the place which now we have reached? Surely, if we cannot answer the questions: Who are we? Where have we come from? Where are we at? we shall never be able to ask, let alone answer, that other question, Where are we going? Then, in truth, we would be facing risk and danger. These questions, moreover, are basic to any people's understanding of and faith in themselves. They are valid in any country, in Britain, France, the United States, and certainly in Canada. And in each country it is a primary obligation of historians to see that each new generation finds appropriate answers to these questions, for we, the historians, are the guardians of the record.

In Canada this means, I believe, that the teaching of history from its beginnings in the schools on to the universities should be securely anchored in the study of the history of this nation and of its many

interwoven historical roots in and connections with the Western world — English, French, American, and all the rest. On this basis we can contribute our part, our essential part, to the self-knowledge and self-confidence of each new generation of Canadians. On this basis and on it alone can we hope to have them find intelligently their place, Canada's place, in this so rapidly changing and perplexing world. On this basis we can securely rest the far-reaching and deep-probing ramifications of scholarly research and so take our part in the vanguard of historical knowledge and discovery.

Hereby we recognize anew the bond which holds us all together and we recommit ourselves to the playing of our proper role in this nation. To this role it was that Thomas Chapais alluded when, in countering the criticisms levelled against Garneau's *Histoire du Canada* by members of the "new critical school of history", he wrote,

> Les tenants rigoureux de la nouvelle école critique en histoire lui reprocheront peut-être ce qui précisément constitue l'un des charmes les plus puissants auprès des compatriotes de l'auteur. Ils l'accuseront d'être avant tout une histoire patriotique, or, suivant eux, le patriotisme n'a pas de place dans l'histoire. L'histoire est une science et rien d'autre. L'histoire est une science sans aucun doute. Elle doit se conformer aux données scientifiques, c'est-à-dire à la vérité établie et prouvée par les documents incontestables, par les autorités, par les sources. Mais ce devoir accompli, rien ne condamne à être impassible. L'historien a un cœur et aucune loi ne l'oblige à empêcher ce cœur de battre. Il a une patrie, et cette patrie, à quel titre viendrait-on lui interdire de l'aimer de toutes les énergies de son âme ? Sans doute le patriotisme ne doit pas suborner le jugement, ni fausser l'équité ni supprimer l'impartialité chez l'écrivain d'histoire. La justice et la vérité doivent être son inflexible loi. Mais sont-elles incompatibles avec l'amour de sa race et de son pays ? Nous ne saurions l'admettre. [12]

In this spirit I would call upon you, the historians of Canada, to fulfil your obligation to this nation, to Canada in its entirety, as well in the second century of Canada's nationhood as — nay, even better than you and your predecessors have done in the century past. If that be done this nation will be stronger, richer in spirit and able to play a greater and more decisive role in the world than ever before.

[12] T. Chapais, "L'Histoire de Garneau," in *Semaine d'Histoire du Canada: Compte rendu et mémoires* (Montreal, 1926), p. 29.