

## Report of the Annual Meeting Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

# The Canadian Historical Association, the Canadian Historical Review, and Local History: A Symposium

Hilda Neatby, J. B. Conacher, R. A. Preston, Honorius Provost and Lewis H. Thomas

Volume 31, Number 1, 1952

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300329ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/300329ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0317-0594 (print)

1712-9095 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this document

Neatby, H., Conacher, J. B., Preston, R. A., Provost, H. & Thomas, L. H. (1952). The Canadian Historical Association, the Canadian Historical Review, and Local History: A Symposium. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 31(1), 46–65. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300329ar>

All rights reserved © The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada, 1952

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**é**rudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, THE  
CANADIAN HISTORICAL REVIEW, AND LOCAL  
HISTORY: A SYMPOSIUM

COL. C. P. STACEY, the Chairman, stated that there has been some dissatisfaction in the Canadian Historical Association about its relations with local history and local history societies, and that this symposium was included in the programme to stimulate a discussion on the subject for the guidance of the Council in the development of a constructive programme.

MISS HILDA NEATBY, of the University of Saskatchewan (for the Local History Committee of the C.H.A.)

Local history is a relative term. From the viewpoint of a national association chiefly concerned with the broad issues of national history, it means not only the history of somebody's village or school district, county or municipality. It must mean also provincial and regional history. Even in this very broad sense local history has not, I suggest, been sufficiently related to national history. Historically speaking, all Canada is divided into two parts: Central Canada, most of whose inhabitants live south of the 49th parallel; and the fringes, east, north, and west, those fringes which were garnered in by Central Canada for reasons perfectly well known to everyone.

In each part some attention has been paid to local history in the narrowest sense. In Central Canada only has provincial and regional history received full attention. It is well known that the inhabitants of this area, that is, Central Canada, are not completely homogeneous. Much of our national history has in fact been written to explain the occasional frictions resulting from this important fact. In comparison therefore with the extent of the work done on the regionalism of the Centre, the regional history of the fringe areas has, I believe, received relatively little attention. This is unfortunate. Regional history obviously has essential contributions to make to an understanding of national history. Moreover public interest in local and regional history, if properly developed and exploited, could be used as a means of support for the national association: support, that is, in the practical and sordid sense as well as in matters intellectual and cultural. These two matters: (1) the importance of regional history in relation to national history, and (2) the support which should accrue to the national association from active local and regional societies, are the ones that I should like to introduce as a preliminary to the morning's discussion.

The Massey Commission was frequently reminded throughout the fringe areas, and even at the centre, that national history has its roots in regional and local history. This statement needs little elaboration. Economic, social and sociological generalizations must rest on a knowledge of regional and local history; and sometimes the detailed history of very small areas may throw light on matters of national interest. It may be answered, of course, that the scholar who pursues

broad national trends in a scholarly way will be led naturally to an examination of such material as he needs it. This answer is not quite adequate. The principle of disinterested scholarship operates here. Our scattered regions will not yield all their truth about our national history unless they are studied from their own viewpoint, and for their own sake.

For example, only through such a disinterested pursuit of regional and provincial history can we bring to light illuminating parallels and contrasts, many of which no doubt still lie buried. Some of these have already been studied. We have learned much of such parallels and contrasts between the American Middle West and the Canadian prairies. Some work has also been done on the life of various groups in Canada in relation to their ethnographic background. We have not perhaps so fully exploited the possibilities of parallel developments between various Canadian regions and provinces, and this may cause a serious loss of sympathy and understanding. The Ontario Historical Society in its brief to the Massey Commission, after speaking of the recent developments in local history in England and the United States, dealt with this matter. "In Canada no work similar has been attempted—at least on any directed and coordinated basis; yet our need of a national consciousness is greater because of geographical barriers and great racial division, and also because since 1867 the economic progress of our various provinces has been so unequal as to produce definite interprovincial antagonisms." To take an example from another field, the school texts of my youth implied, if they did not positively state, that the stupidity and ignorance displayed in Britain's dealings with the original Canadian provinces was inexplicable. But Canadians from the prairie portion of the fringe, looking at their history with regional eyes, and observing the somewhat limited knowledge and intelligence displayed by Central Canada as a colonial power, do not find even the British stupidity entirely inexplicable. The historical parallel enables them to contemplate the performances of both colonial powers with a certain philosophic detachment.

It is unnecessary to labour this point. Various works with special bearing on economic history, on sociological developments, and on politics have thrown much incidental light on regional and local history, as well as on national history. It seems reasonable to suppose that the converse would hold true. Work done from the regional viewpoint might well correct or clarify many currently accepted generalizations. This should hold true in the field of general national history as well as in particular interpretations of our economic and social development.

In short, it may be argued that in Canada, so far, half our history has been local history in the broadest sense. The other half often appears to consist of mysterious and possibly unholy transactions between the provincial capitals and Ottawa. Canada leaped into nationhood and even into a brisk participation in international affairs at a time when vast areas of the country were still at the pioneer stage, and relatively inaccessible from the centre. In such circumstances to be ignorant and careless of local and regional history is to renounce all hope of a true understanding of national history.

Turning away from this rather impersonal approach, it must be remembered that history is written and read by people. It will cease to be written when it is no longer read. As the commercial and professional value of historical studies is rated so very low, the preservation of national history must depend on maintaining the voluntary interest and support of the general public. I do not know how far that interest has been maintained in the past by formal instruction at school. It is clear, however, if present curriculum trends continue, that history will become a purely extra-curricular activity, or that at best academic instruction in "pure" history will be confined to the local scene. (Je parle ici des cours d'études de ma province et des autres provinces de langue anglaise. Je crois bien qu'ici dans le Québec on est beaucoup plus civilisé.) It may be necessary to build on the existing foundation, and experience seems to show that, in Canada at least, many who care for no other kind of history can be interested in the history of their locality or of their region.

Even if the historical enthusiasm of most of them begins and ends with local history, it may still serve more than one useful purpose. The Massey Commission heard much from local and from national bodies of the wastage of the historical sources through the deliberate or careless destruction of documents. Ultimately collection and preservation of these must be a responsibility of public authorities, but meanwhile destruction will go on until the public is sufficiently interested and informed to put a stop to it. If only one in ten thousand of the potential enthusiasts for local history has it in his power to save important material, the work of local historical societies is still of national importance. And in the subsequent preservation of the material the help of the same agencies can be enlisted. The British Columbia Historical Association, speaking of the want of adequate provincial archives, urged the Massey Commission to make representations to provincial authorities on the matter. Such representations were deemed outside the terms of reference of a federal commission. They would, however, come properly and forcefully from local regional and national societies working simultaneously and in cooperation. The Canadian Historical Association in its brief, and in its oral testimony before the Commission, spoke at length on the importance of finding and saving historical manuscripts. There is no evidence that the Association has recognized officially to what an extent this preservation must depend on purely local societies, and on the interest of people with little academic knowledge of history.

Moreover, such societies, properly directed, should be able to develop in their members powers of appreciation and of criticism in historical matters, powers which will operate in any field of history. Recently two articles appeared in a national magazine on events of importance in our national history, and also in the regional history of the prairies. Written by one who professed to be a local authority they contained, along with many misleading statements, a quite unwarranted slur on a well-known national statesman of the nineteenth century. That the articles passed with little or no comment is not creditable, I think, to our interest either in national or in local history. If we had on the prairies an active regional society such abuses of our history would be much less likely to occur.

Finally, one can always hope that the interest aroused in local history will carry on to a broader field, and that local and regional societies may not only preserve historical materials and provide a critical spirit among their members, but that they may nourish future historians, and furnish the existing ones with discriminating readers. This attitude is perhaps too optimistic. Yet it is probably not too much to say that any general appreciation of, and support for, Canadian national history must come through local and regional activities.

The word "support" leads me to the practical and sordid part of the discussion to which I have already referred. The Canadian Historical Association in its present need of funds, must presumably seek them at least partly from the contributions of a much larger membership than it now comprises. Its membership should not be (and indeed is not) limited largely to those connected with universities. But, as has been stated, experience seems to show that public interest and support from provincial governments goes to local groups, and must be drawn to the national effort through them. The people and the government of Saskatchewan have shown in a very material way their interest in local history through the North-West Historical Association of some years ago, the Saskatchewan Historical Association, and now through the provincially supported Archives Board. The Provincial Archivist of Saskatchewan is here and is to speak later. The general significance of the facts is that in that province, which is relatively poor, and where one would not expect to find a strong sense of history, there has been generous support from public and private sources for the preservation of historical materials and for the writing of history. It is not unreasonable to suppose that private support at least would extend to the national field if the connection were to be made clear. It is certain that the local groups would welcome and would profit from the interest and cooperation of the national association.

This leads to a final and very important consideration. Much genuine and useful enthusiasm for history may be wasted on local efforts. As all historians know, the pursuit of local history is not without its dangers. It may, by over-emphasis on the trivial, the picturesque, and the pseudo-dramatic, produce the painful type of pedant who has so often been caricatured. Or, by way of reaction it may go to the other extreme and lead to endless and aimless counting and listing, sociological pedantry at its worst. Local history also nourishes the reminiscer. The editors of *Saskatchewan History* for example, know how much tact is required to maintain friendly relations with correspondents who have a natural desire to tell their stories and have them printed, but who lack discrimination in the selection of material, and experience in the verification of facts. And there is the chronic problem of the resentment of pioneers "who were there all the time" when young people who might be their grandchildren venture to question any of their statements. In all these matters local and regional groups could receive valuable help and support from a national association with a constant concern for scholarly standards.

Returning once more for a moment to the work of the Massey Commission, it was interesting to notice that local and regional societies in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario,

Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland had suggestions to make on matters of interest and importance to the national association: preservation of historical materials, training of archivists, preservation and marking of historic sites, and the proper policy to be pursued in relation to historical museums. Manitoba and Ontario spoke definitely of the need for close cooperation between local societies and a national organization, and Ontario had a definite suggestion to make. In the light of these facts it was remarkable that the brief of the Canadian Historical Association made no mention of local history or of the work of local societies, or of the suggestions that they made. In the circumstances this was, no doubt unavoidable. The national brief was presented early in the proceedings. Nevertheless, it would perhaps have been possible to offer to the Commission for transmission to the public through its *Report* and in other ways a clearer picture of the situation and of the needs of the country in relation to the preservation of historical materials, the writing of history and the extension of historical studies had there been closer relations and more informal cooperation between the national group and the local or regional groups of which about a dozen in all presented briefs.

To sum up: It is now being increasingly recognized that local and regional history, apart from their intrinsic interest have most important contributions to make to national historical studies. This is particularly true in Canada. In Canada also, it seems evident that general public interest in national history can most easily be developed through local organizations. There is ample evidence that those engaged in local history need and would welcome closer relations with the national association. I think that all will agree on the desirability of more effective cooperation. It is, I know, the earnest hope of the Local History Committee that this morning's discussion will elicit some practical suggestions on how to secure it.

J. B. CONACHER, of the University of Toronto (for the *Canadian Historical Review*).

The editors of the *Canadian Historical Review* believe that in order to explain the attitude of the *Review* to the subject under discussion they should begin by saying something about the *Review's* general scope and purpose. In the first place it should be mentioned (since it is a matter of some misapprehension) that the *Review* is an English-speaking historical journal, cooperating with the Canadian Historical Association, but published independently by the University of Toronto Press. On the point of language I might add that we are now prepared to publish individual contributions in French, but that we would hesitate, because of editorial difficulties, to undertake too many commitments of that sort. However, since there are several excellent historical journals published in the French language there would seem to be no real problem involved.

Three years ago when the present editors were preparing to take over the management of the *Review*, they joined with their predecessors in drawing up a memorandum that stated: "The *Canadian Historical Review* is a national, historical journal which places its main emphasis on Canadian history but which sees Canada against a

background of Europe and the English-speaking world". This was in keeping with a declaration of policy made in 1944 by Professors Brown and Creighton (the editors at that time) in "An article to mark the completion of the first twenty-five years of the *Canadian Historical Review*". On this occasion they wrote:

The central interest of the *Canadian Historical Review* has been the history of those portions of British North America which ultimately became part of the Dominion of Canada . . . Its policy has been based upon two main principles: first, that Canadian history should be concerned with every important aspect of the life of the nation; and, second, that Canadian history was intimately and vitally bound up in the fortunes of the world as a whole . . . Unquestionably, however, most of the articles which have appeared in the *Canadian Historical Review* have had their main focus in the centre rather than on the periphery, of Canadian history."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>George W. Brown and D. G. Creighton, "Canadian History in retrospect and prospect", *Canadian Historical Review*, XXV, No. 4, pp. 357-75.

In preparing this anniversary article in 1944 the editors had asked a large number of their readers for their opinions about the scope of the Review. To a certain extent the recommendations had tended to cancel each other out. Some felt that it should become a general historical journal ready to publish articles by Canadian historians in any field of history. Others were for restricting it rigidly to the field of Canadian history, but there were wide differences of opinion about the sort of Canadian history that should be encouraged. Advocates of local history competed with others who wanted more intellectual history, more social history, and more military history.

When the present editors took over the *Review* in 1950 they intended (with the concurrence of their predecessors) to broaden its scope somewhat by including rather more articles and reviews on the history of France, Britain and the United States, which might be regarded as pertaining to the background of Canadian history. Members of our Advisory Board, on the other hand, have urged us to restrict ourselves more closely to the Canadian field; but it has been agreed that an exception might be made for young Canadian scholars who submitted articles in these borderline or background fields, and who might not otherwise find an opportunity for publication. That is the situation at present; but I think I may say that the whole matter is still an open question. The *Review* never has closed, and I hope never will close, its doors entirely to articles and reviews on non-Canadian historical subjects. For the time being, however, it is the intention of the Editorial Board to lay the main emphasis on the Canadian field, since it is in the pages of the *Review* that the reading public expect to find articles on Canadian history. Indeed the original title of our journal was *The Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada*.

So much for pressures to expand outwards: today we are more concerned with pressures exerted in the opposite direction. Should the *Canadian Historical Review* be a vehicle for publication of articles in the field of local history in Canada? Here our answer can be made



more clearly, even though it is a mixture of "yes" and "no". "Yes" if the subject can be related significantly to national history. "No" if it is primarily one of local interest, or of anecdotal character and lacking broader historical significance. Many interesting articles in local history could more appropriately be published in a wide variety of other journals such as the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, the Nova Scotia Historical Society *Collections*, *Saskatchewan History*, *Ontario History*, the *Beaver*, the *Canadian Geographical Journal*, the *Atlantic Guardian*, and several French-Canadian journals. Where to draw the line between the two types of local history is of course difficult and must be a matter of editorial judgment. For instance we have recently felt ourselves unable to accept biographical articles on several people whose careers seemed only of local significance and where the interest lay largely in personal matters. On the other hand where a local theme has wider application, where it is a central thread in the history of one of the constituent parts of Canada, or where it provides concrete illustrations of broader themes, then we believe that it comes within our scope.

Occasionally, of course, we print an article that seems to be excluded by our general rule, either because of its exceptional merit or interest, or, to be frank, because we are short of material. As you know scholarly articles only stem from hard work and research and are not to be had merely for the asking.

You may think that what has been said so far suggests a certain coolness on our part towards the study of local history, but we would protest against such an inference. While we may be unable to go as far as some might wish in the matter of printing articles, we are ready to assist in the promotion of local history in other ways. I think that our most valuable contribution lies in the quarterly bibliography of publications relating to Canada, where we devote six separate sections to the six main regional divisions of the country. Here we attempt to list all publications that seem to have any significance for the history of Canada. We would much appreciate it if our readers would bring to our attention any omissions that they may notice. The more important items we try to deal with at greater length in our review section, providing we can obtain copies of the books in question.

Another service which we try to provide, as you know, is the reporting of local historical activities in the "Notes and Comments" section of the *Review*. The information we obtain is so incomplete and disconnected that the section tends to become a mere catalogue of dull facts. Perhaps its chief advantage is that it serves as a rough barometer to indicate the amount of activity in the field generally; but the details recorded are unlikely to be of much significance beyond the localities concerned. It might interest you to know that we have a list of some 101 local societies in Canada (26 of them French-speaking) not to mention several just across the United States border, to whom we send out cards asking for information about their activities. Unfortunately only a small number respond each year and in most cases the information they send is meagre.

We have been criticised for failing to print more information about local historical activities, but I would remind you that we have

no reporters and are entirely dependent on what is sent into us. As a result of this discussion we would be glad to print an open appeal for readers to send us more news of this sort. Such reports should indicate, with some critical discrimination, what sort of work local societies are doing, particularly what genuine contributions are being made to the knowledge of local history. The amount of space, however, that we can devote to the subject is definitely limited by the fact that the printing of the *Review* entails a large annual deficit which is borne by the University of Toronto Press and which forces a fixed restriction on the number of pages in each volume.

In conclusion we would say that while the *Canadian Historical Review* is ready to encourage local history in every way possible, real vitality can only come from local journals and local societies, composed of the people primarily interested in their particular localities, and in which, it might be added, departments of history at various universities should be expected to participate. Where societies are at present weak or non-existent, hope for future development can be drawn from the success of certain notable societies both in Canada and in some of the neighbouring American states.

R. A. PRESTON, of the Royal Military College (for the Editors of the C.H.A. *Report*).

It would be most unprofessional if historians, when discussing a practical question like the interest of their own national association in local history, did not look into the past in order to study their own history. It would be a most unfortunate example for other disciplines and other professions if historians did not find something of value there. The sources for such a study are, of course, the *Annual Reports* and the Minute Books of the association.

The Canadian Historical Association grew out of the Historic Landmarks Association of Canada and came into existence in 1922. Its predecessor may be described as a national organization interested in the location of historical events. Not unnaturally, at the early Annual Meetings of the Association the influence of the parent body was still strong. In the first four years of the Association's history, therefore, twelve out of thirty-one papers at the Annual Meetings, that is to say nearly forty per cent, were about local history topics, not including provincial and regional history. Furthermore, one presentation in these early years (which, incidentally, begins modestly with the words "This is not a paper proper"), was entitled "The Study of Local History". So, in its earliest years the Canadian Historical Association placed great emphasis on local history.

In addition to the papers delivered at the Annual Meeting the *Annual Report* also included the Report of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board which has, as you know, been printed regularly from 1922 to the present by this Association. While the sites with which the board concerns itself have usually a national interest rather than one that is merely local, they nevertheless form an important part of what may properly be regarded as local history. The Report of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board has been one means by which the C.H.A. helped to preserve an interest in local history. Further-

more, visits to places of historical importance in the immediate vicinity of the place where the Association held its meetings may be mentioned at this point as another way in which the Association has maintained some interest in local history.

For many years after 1926, however, except for the continued publication of the Reports about Historic Sites and Monuments, the papers at the Annual Meetings dealt almost exclusively with topics of national, and regional or provincial history. Local history was relatively neglected. Over the whole period of the Society's history the papers given at the Society's Annual Meetings may be classified as follows: National subjects 40%; Miscellaneous (i.e. Mediaeval, European, English, Philosophic, Imperial, American, International, Pedagogic, and unclassifiable) 15%; Regional or Provincial subjects (including some on Provincial history which have also a national interest) 33%; and Local (including some which also had an element of national interest) 12%. Of the latter 12%, however, more than one third were given in the first four years of the Association, i.e. to 1926 and one quarter were given in 1949, 1950, and 1951. Thus during the middle period from 1926-1949 of the Association's history interest in local history was obviously rather slim.

From the Minute Book it appears that an attempt to revive the Association's interest in local history took place about 1936. A whole morning session on the first day was devoted to a Round Table Discussion on local history led by D. C. Harvey and J. J. Talman. "Suggested Topics for discussion" were: 1. The value of local history studies to the writing of more general history; 2. Local history as a field for research by graduate students . . . ; 3. The relation of provincial archives to local history work; 4. Suggested fields of study for local history societies; 5. The present resources of the various provincial archives; 6. How can local historical societies best assist the work of provincial archives?

In that same year 1936 the Association showed its interest in furthering close co-operation between the national Association and local Associations in a very practical way. It reduced the membership fee for local associations from five dollars to three dollars.

On October 24, 1936, the Council of the Association received a letter which had undoubtedly been inspired by the Local History Session. It described a re-organization of the British Columbia Historical Association and told of its work in developing local historical associations throughout the Province. The Council was so impressed by this work that it arranged for a full report of the British Columbia scheme to be presented at the Annual General Meeting in 1937.

The war seems in some curious way to have stimulated further efforts to bring cooperation between the C.H.A. and local historical societies. The 1940 meeting in London developed one practical method of co-ordinating the work of the local and national associations. The London and Middlesex Historical Association sent out to all its members a postcard which cancelled its regular May meeting and invited its members to attend the C.H.A. meetings.

However, at this same meeting in London, it was reported to the C.H.A. that two Canadian local history societies (the Women's Historical Society of Ottawa and the Historical Society of Annapolis

Royal) were members of the American Conference of Historical Societies; and Dr. Brown and Mr. Talman, who had been C.H.A. delegates at a meeting of the Conference in Washington, recommended that the C.H.A. should aid the Conference by furnishing it with lists of all Canadian local Historical Societies and by helping it in any other way deemed feasible. A year later, when the Canadian Historical Association was invited to join the American Conference with the same status as local and state societies, it declined. The moral to be drawn from this episode is that if Canada does not produce a national society to aid local societies they will turn to the United States.

In that same year, 1941, another example of co-operation between the national and local societies occurred as a direct result of the war. The C.H.A. became concerned about the loss of valuable historical records among paper salvage contributed by patriotic citizens to the war effort. The Association, therefore, issued circular letters on the subject to all local historical societies suggesting methods by which the public could be warned not to destroy historical material.

Yet another attempt to co-operate was made in 1944. The Council suggested that local and district societies should be asked to co-operate at the forthcoming meeting in Kingston in 1945. There is no record of the results of this effort, perhaps because the Kingston Society was moribund and the Ontario Society too distant.

The present revival of interest in co-ordinating the efforts of the C.H.A. and local societies dates from 1947 when the General Meeting appointed a "Committee on Local History" which organized a "Conference" as part of the programme of the C.H.A. Meeting in 1948 at Victoria. However, as this Conference took place at the same time as the Council Meeting, there are no records of its activities in the Minutes. Two days later, at the Annual General Meeting of the Association it was reported by the President that the Committee on Local History was an active committee and that its report would be considered by the incoming Council. There is no record of this report, nor does it appear from the records that there was any activity by the local history committee at Halifax in 1949.

At R.M.C. in 1950 the programme again included a session to discuss Local History under the heading "Meeting of the Local History Committee". Once again this was timed to coincide with the Council Meeting. Three days later the Committee on Local History reported to the Council that the term "Committee" had discouraged the attendance of ordinary members of the Association. It recommended the use of the term "section". At the same time it asked for support from the C.H.A. for the Committee's attempt to obtain a grant for the publication of a manual of the aims and objectives of local history groups.

On June 10, 1950, the Council decided that it would be willing to confirm the existence of the Local History Committee when it was able to report that it had completed its membership. Meanwhile its proposals were to be held in abeyance. The Council also referred to the Committee the question of methods of encouraging local societies to affiliate with the C.H.A.

On June 6, 1951, the chairman of the Local History Committee, Mr. W. Ireland, reported that he had been unable to make any progress with the organization of his committee and that he felt that if he were not successful shortly the whole matter should be dropped. Two days later the Council suggested that one session at each annual meeting might well be devoted to local history and that local history societies in the area where the Council met should be invited to co-operate.

That this was a practical way in which the C.H.A. could co-operate with local history societies is suggested by an examination of the programmes at the Annual Meetings. In 1936, the year when interest in local history was revived, there were 2 papers on local history subjects. After that, one paper was read in 1941 and four in 1942. After another interval there was one at Quebec in 1947, one at Vancouver in 1948, three at Halifax in 1949, three at R.M.C. in 1950, and two at McGill in 1951. The Association has thus shown its interest in local history in a very practical way in recent years. Thirty per cent of its papers in the last four years have been on local history, not including provincial and regional history.

However, on these occasions the local history papers appeared in different sessions. It might be preferable to arrange each year for a special section of the programme for papers on local history topics. A small permanent committee on local history could have a hand in drawing up the programme for the Local History Session, could solicit the co-operation of the appropriate local history society or societies, and could foster the continuing connection between the Association and all local history societies throughout Canada. The Local History Committee itself might well undertake, with the authority of the Council, such projects as the publication of the manual for guidance in the study of local history as was suggested in 1950.

One final important lesson from the past is the extraordinary lack of continuity in the activity of the Society with respect to local history. No doubt the rotation of officers is partly responsible for this. A bigger cause is the fact that the Programme Committee is usually a local committee without any continuity. The creation of a Local History Committee to co-operate with the various Programme Committees in organizing an annual session on local history might be a means of partially solving this problem.

HONORIUS PROVOST, ptre, de l'Université Laval (pour la Société historique de Québec).

I—Ce qui se fait aux Etats-Unis

Lorsqu'il y a progrès quelque part dans l'activité humaine, il est sage d'en chercher la raison ou le secret pour tâcher d'en profiter. Voyons ce qui se fait aux États-Unis pour cultiver l'histoire régionale.

Il s'y trouve une grande association nommée l'American Association for State and Local History, dont les membres sont tous en principe des représentants de sociétés historiques régionales, la plupart des sociétés américaines et plusieurs sociétés canadiennes. La Société historique de Québec est affiliée à cette association 1<sup>o</sup>) par souci de faire

figurer les Canadiens français dans ce mouvement organisé et de montrer que nous ne sommes pas désintéressés de la petite histoire, si populaire chez nos voisins du sud. 2<sup>o</sup>) pour recevoir les deux publications de cette association a) un magazine trimestriel de grand luxe, *American Heritage*, publié depuis 1949 sous une forme populaire et devenu presque un "best seller"; ce magazine est distribué à grand tirage et déborde largement les cadres de l'association; on le vend abondamment à l'étalage; b) un bulletin mensuel de 4 pages, *History News*, réservé aux membres de l'association et qui rend compte de certaines expériences dans le domaine de l'histoire régionale, donne les suggestions pour la tenue de musées, d'expositions, pour la conservation des documents, des monuments, des arts traditionnels, etc.

L'American Association for State and Local History tient un congrès de deux jours chaque année, dans différents centres, où l'on s'efforce d'éveiller ou d'aviver l'intérêt pour l'histoire régionale. Ainsi le nombre des sociétés historiques s'accroît sans cesse: sociétés d'États — il nous manque même des sociétés historiques provinciales, au Canada — sociétés purement régionales, sociétés de comtés, de villes, sociétés historiques juvéniles, sociétés historiques relevant de certaines associations économiques, nationales ou religieuses, v.g. l'American Jewish Historical Association. Combien de centaines de sociétés historiques aux États-Unis, pour cultiver un passé auquel notre passé canadien ne le cède ni en richesse ni en ancienneté? Quand l'intérêt du peuple s'intensifie pour un objet, les corps publics et les puissances financières s'en émeuvent plus facilement et accordent leur appui (exemple de Charleston, N. Carolina, cf. *History News*, mars 1952, p. 4).

## II—Etat de choses au Canada

L'Institut d'Histoire de l'Amérique française, de fondation récente, invite les sociétés historiques canadiennes-françaises à devenir ce qu'on appelle des sections de l'Institut. Mais c'est ce dernier qui y gagne un prestige bien mérité, tandis que les sociétés n'en retirent pas encore un profit substantiel; car l'Institut s'adresse surtout aux historiens de métier, s'occupe surtout de la grande histoire académique.

La Canadian Historical Association n'a guère fait mieux, jusqu'à ces dernières années, où l'on a enfin constitué un comité de l'histoire régionale (1947), et où la *Canadian Historical Review* s'est mise à publier des comptes rendus de sociétés historiques. Ils étaient malheureusement trop mesurés, trop superficiels; mais c'est tout de même un effort digne de félicitations et d'encouragement. C'est aux sociétés historiques d'en profiter. Et, ce faisant, il ne serait pas opportun, croyons-nous, de constituer, comme aux États-Unis, un organisme spécial pour grouper les sociétés régionales. Déjà la plupart de celles qui sont actives chez nous, même de langue française, sont affiliées à la Canadian Historical Association. Celle-ci, en déployant encore plus de bonne volonté, y gagnerait plus d'adhésions et plus de prestige. Car, c'est au sein des sociétés régionales que la société centrale peut recruter le plus grand nombre de membres et, par eux, s'attirer la sympathie, la collaboration.

Qu'est-ce que les sociétés historiques locales ou régionales peuvent attendre de la Canadian Historical Association? Voilà la question cruciale.



## III—Formules proposées

La Canadian Historical Association considère comme ses objectifs: d'encourager la recherche historique et l'intérêt du public à l'histoire; de pourvoir à la conservation des sites et des édifices historiques, des documents, des reliques et autres trésors intéressants du passé; enfin, de publier des études et des documents historiques, selon que les circonstances peuvent le permettre. L'association, sans doute, fait déjà honneur à ce programme; mais elle lui imprimerait un élan et un rayonnement beaucoup plus grands, en groupant non plus seulement des historiens, mais des sociétés historiques qui, de plus en plus nombreuses, éprouveraient dans leurs contacts la contagion du zèle, des méthodes et des heureuses réalisations.

1. La première chose à faire, en conséquence, serait d'obtenir l'adhésion de toutes les sociétés historiques existantes, de réveiller celles qui se meurent d'inanition et même d'en faire naître de nouvelles; de les grouper sous l'égide d'un exécutif central, avec des règlements très souples et des conditions très libérales, v.g. l'adhésion gratuite, pour quelques années, aux sociétés moins pourvues. La Canadian Historical Association est déjà un organisme d'envergure nationale et officiellement bilingue. Nous ne voyons donc que du profit pour toutes les sociétés régionales à se grouper sous son égide, sans séparation de races: les objectifs se confondent, les méthodes sont les mêmes, le patrimoine à exploiter est parfois identique; et il y a toujours, dans le grand nombre, le bénéfice de l'émulation et du prestige.

2. Au cours du congrès annuel de l'association, il conviendrait de consacrer une journée ou du moins une séance publique à des thèmes d'histoire régionale, où les sociétés historiques auraient les rôles actifs, par leurs représentants attitrés.

3. Il faudrait obtenir de la *Canadian Historical Review* une extension de la rubrique "Notes and comments" pour faire une place plus large aux activités des sociétés historiques. Il serait même bon de prévoir la publication d'un bulletin circulaire distinct, dans le genre de l'*History News* américain. Et si, plus tard, l'organisation devenait assez forte, les possibilités plus grandes, pourquoi ne pas venir à publier un magazine historique populaire, dans le genre d'*American Heritage*?

4. S'il est vrai que la Canadian Historical Association n'est ni propriétaire ni directrice de la *Canadian Historical Review*, elle l'utilise néanmoins comme son organe et doit avoir son mot à dire à l'oreille des éditeurs. Il faudrait faire valoir le caractère national et bilingue de l'association pour obtenir que les communiqués des sociétés françaises soient publiés en français, et que la revue fasse place de temps à autre à des articles de fond par des auteurs canadiens-français, publiés dans leur langue, de même que plusieurs revues académiques du Québec ne refusent pas systématiquement des articles en anglais dignes de publication.

5. Il reste enfin à demander à la Canadian Historical Association l'assistance matérielle pour la publication d'ouvrages du domaine de l'histoire régionale. On sait dans quelles conditions financières se débattent la plupart des sociétés historiques et bien des initiatives sont paralysées faute de ressources. Les plus grands déboursés des sociétés historiques sont toujours occasionnés par les publications qu'elles veulent réaliser et elles sont souvent empêchées de les réaliser à cause

de leur coût prohibitif. Nous proposons que l'association accorde des subventions indirectes en achetant, au prix du client, une quantité de chaque ouvrage publié sous les auspices des sociétés historiques, celles-là du moins qui n'émargent pas à des fonds publics. La quantité minimum de ces achats pourrait être celle des sociétés ou organismes affiliés à l'association, qui dépassent maintenant la centaine. En distribuant gratuitement les publications à ceux-ci, l'association diffuserait à bon escient l'histoire régionale à travers le pays et jouerait très bien du même coup son rôle d'agent de liaison entre les diverses sociétés historiques.

Mais, où l'association trouverait-elle les fonds qui lui manquent pour exercer cette judicieuse libéralité? Comme il s'agit d'une initiative de portée nationale, en quelque sorte, et dans un domaine qui n'est pas le moindre, il nous semble que l'association serait en droit de demander l'assistance du Conseil canadien des Humanités ou du Conseil canadien des Recherches en Sciences sociales, qui disposent déjà de certains subsides pour des attributions semblables.

Puis, s'il y a lieu de nous appuyer sur les conclusions du fameux Rapport Massey-Lévesque, on y recommande "que soit créé un organisme désigné sous le nom de Conseil canadien pour l'encouragement des arts, lettres, humanités et sciences sociales, en vue de stimuler et d'aider les sociétés bénévoles dont l'activité s'exerce dans ce domaine . . ." (p. 439); et l'on précise "que c'est en grande partie sur les efforts des sociétés bénévoles que reposera l'oeuvre du Conseil; celui-ci trouvera donc sans doute de son intérêt le plus immédiat de leur accorder de modestes subventions pour rendre son propre travail efficace et pratique" (p. 443). La Canadian Historical Association peut donc se le tenir pour dit et, sans vendre la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir tué, se mettre à l'affût du gibier, pour l'attrapper aussitôt qu'il sortira du fourré.

Voilà les suggestions que propose aujourd'hui la Société historique de Québec, à qui on a fait l'honneur de demander l'exposé de son point de vue. Il peut se faire que d'autres avis soient différents. Nous sommes prêts à apporter des modifications ou des précisions, selon qu'il apparaîtra opportun, après un échange d'opinions et avant de formuler des conclusions à l'adresse du Conseil de l'association.

LEWIS H. THOMAS, of the Provincial Archives, Saskatchewan (an independent point of view).

I have been asked to undertake the rather formidable task of presenting a concluding statement which will include some specific suggestions regarding the relationship of the Canadian Historical Association and the *Canadian Historical Review* to local history. I am not personally acquainted with the attitude to local history which has prevailed at previous meetings, either of the Association itself or of its Local History Committee. I have concluded however that the Association believes that it has some responsibility towards local history, and that in turn it can expect to derive some support and assistance from those who are active in this field. It is with these two assumptions in mind that the following comments are offered for your

consideration. I can only hope that my remarks will neither rethrust too much old straw nor consist of suggestions which are beyond the present capacity of the Association to implement.

The first point I would like to make is that local history has three distinct aspects: the first is subject matter, the second is activities or projects, the third is organizations or institutions. The three are inter-related, and each should be given consideration in any assessment of the responsibilities and opportunities of this Association.

The first, subject matter, has been referred to by Miss Neatby. She has stated that local history, particularly regional history, has an important contribution to make to national and general history. She has suggested further that we have not yet explored the possibilities of making significant discoveries by encouraging parallel or comparative studies of institutions, movements or historical processes in different regions, provinces, and even local communities. We must, I think, agree that local history can be as exacting an intellectual discipline as can be found in the field of historiography. But let us not consider local history solely from this highly important but austere point of view. What other branch of historical study gives us a more vivid impression of the hopes, the trials, the prejudices, the pleasures, the frustrations and the achievements of people than does the history of a community if it is written with sympathy, perception and literary grace? What, except for biography, brings us closer to human beings as they really are than local history? We are all nationals, but we are at the same time all citizens; and we cannot say that significance and worth attaches only to our status as nationals.

Apart from these considerations I, for one, believe that one of the main functions of history is to give pleasure to the reader, and this is certainly equally possible whether the subject matter be a locality, a region, a nation or a civilization. If local historians in Canada have not always given pleasure to their readers, they have perhaps not sinned more than writers of national history.

Coming to the second aspect of local history, activities or projects, we find that they include such things as the collection of records, the preservation and servicing of records, the maintenance of museums, the dissemination of information for the instruction and pleasure of the general public and the school population, and the erection of historical markers or monuments. The noteworthy point here is the variety of the activities, which range all the way from the intricacies of the management of government records with which one or two of our provincial archives establishments are concerned, to the art of managing a wealthy patron or a prospective donor of private papers, addressing a women's club, or recording the oral evidence of some distinguished citizen or pioneer.

The range of skills required by these numerous and disparate activities has been tremendously increased in recent years. Some of us are involved with such things as microphotography, tape-recording, film strips, new techniques in printing and publishing, questionnaires, guides, indexes, checklists, records-surveys, displays and exhibits, lamination, fumigation records-storage, etc., etc. The employees of many of our provincial or local institutions must, I am sure, often share my feeling of being a jack-of-all-trades with neither the time nor the energy to become master of one.

The third aspect of local history is the organizations or institutions which carry on the activities which have just been mentioned. They exist in great variety, and the character and quality of work which they do differs considerably from province to province. They include provincial historical societies, district or community historical societies, provincial archives establishments, depositories of church archives, historical museums, municipal archives offices, libraries with manuscript or local history collections, and historical committees attached to almost every type of professional, educational, cultural or other society which exists in Canada. The number of organizations which boast of an "archivist" or an historical committee is, I think, one of the more significant features of recent social development in this country. It is pertinent to remark here that there is very little co-ordination or collaboration between these institutions, even within a province; each operates to a considerable extent in isolation from the others. Interprovincial contacts are certainly even more tenuous.

Having sketched in very broad strokes this picture of local history in its three aspects, the next question is its relationship at the present time to the Canadian Historical Association and the *Canadian Historical Review*. As far as the local History Committee of the Association is concerned, its influence or activity has, I think it is fair to say, not been impressive. It appears that only a few of the members attending the annual meeting have been interested in local history. The deliberations of these few have, no doubt, been useful to themselves, but their ideas and conclusions have not been communicated to the membership at large or to the readers of the *Report* or the *Review*. In a country as large as Canada, where the financial resources of many provincial and local institutions are meager, there are formidable difficulties in the way of increasing the attendance at this meeting of persons interested in local history. But this obstacle would be offset to a considerable extent if the exchange of views and information which presumably takes place in the Local History Committee could be published for the benefit of those who are unable to be present in person. Failing such publication, the usefulness of the Local History Committee to the membership at large and its potentialities as a recruiting agent for the Association are both rather limited.

The *Canadian Historical Review* is at present time performing a very valuable service by its list of "Recent Publications Relating to Canada". By including local history material, this bibliography enables one to discover the amount, if not the quality, of publication which is being undertaken in a particular area. The matter of quality and standards of comparison is something to which I will refer later.

The *Review* in its articles and the Association at some of its annual meetings and in its *Annual Report* have not ignored the subject matter of local history. Three excellent articles in this field were published in the September 1950 issue of the *Review*: "Mid-Victorian Liberalism in Central Canadian Newspapers, 1850-67", "Literary Taste in Central Canada During the Late Nineteenth Century", and "The Development of Philosophy in Central Canada from 1850 to 1900". It is noteworthy, however, that these articles were written for presentation at a regional conference, not of this Association, but of the Humanities Research Council of Canada. Does this not sug-

gest that the Canadian Historical Association might give consideration to sponsoring similar regional conferences at two or three year intervals? Such regional conferences would have at least three advantages; they would stimulate the production of scholarly studies in the field of regional and local history; they would permit many members who have never been to an annual meeting to attend an Association sponsored meeting in their region, and they would be a means of bringing the Association closer to school teachers and the general public and thus increase its membership.

The Association also might consider bringing some of these regional studies together on the programme of its annual meetings, not every year, but at least periodically. This would permit the type of parallel analysis and comparison of subject matter to which we have already referred.

So much for the subject matter of local history. If we broaden our inquiry and ask what the Association and the *Review* have done by way of recognizing activities and organizations, the answer must be, very little. It is true that brief notes on historical societies, archives, and museums are contained in a section at the back of the *Review*. But these are usually not very informative. No reader of the *Review* has ever learned from its pages that the Ontario Historical Society won the 1950-51 award of the American Association for State and Local History "for the outstanding job of any historical society in eastern Canada", or that other awards were given the same year to the Brant Historical Society, the Huronia House Museum, the *London Free Press* and the *Orangeville Banner*. No articles have been published and no reports given at annual meetings dealing with significant projects or institutional developments. Apart from the lack of recognition of significant achievement, no attempt has been made to assist people who are dealing with such matters as historical society organization, records-management, legal questions pertaining to the acquisition and use of private papers, local history in the school curriculum, microfilming, newspaper indexing, sound recording, museum displays, or the preservation of business records. And no means of securing disinterested and constructive criticism of activities and programmes in the local history field is presently possible in Canada.

This brings us to the question of standards of achievement in local history. Assuming that the Association is seriously interested in this matter, would it not be appropriate for it to sponsor a study of the present status of local history organizations and activities in Canada? Even a purely statistical study would be most useful and stimulating. For example, at the present time no statistics are available on such points as the finances and staff of provincial archives institutions to enable one to measure relative standing and progress in this field. And if such a study also dealt with the problem of standards and objectives, it could make a distinguished contribution to the foundation on which Canadian historiography rests.

If I may sum up the situation with respect to local history organizations and activities, it is simply that at the present time those of us who are professionally engaged in this field and who wish to exchange information and ideas with others, can only find such an opportunity by associating ourselves with American organizations,

particularly the American Association for State and Local History and the Society of American Archivists. Moreover it is to these organizations that we owe the only recognition which has been given for such progress as we have been able to make. Workers in the field of local history are not without honour save in their own country. The American Association for State and Local History has its system of awards, to which I have already referred; the Society of American Archivists reviews all publications issued by archives and related institutions in Canada.

Having drawn attention to these American organizations, I do not wish to imply that local historians should make a choice of either cutting our bonds with them or merging our interests completely with them to the exclusion of contacts with our fellow Canadians. Like Canadians generally, we will undoubtedly want to continue to partake of the fruit in our neighbour's garden as well as growing our own, and I believe that the existence of these organizations does not necessarily preclude the development of a Canadian local history programme, constituted and defined not to conflict with but rather to complement the activities of the American Association for State and Local History and the Society of American Archivists. The preliminary step in the development of a Canadian programme would be to investigate the practicability of some or all of the following projects:

1. A statistical and critical study of local history activities and organizations in Canada.

2. A system of annual awards (distinct from those given by the American Association for State and Local History) for distinguished work in the field of local history.

3. Regional meetings of the Association at two or three year intervals combined with a campaign to recruit new members; the programmes of such regional meetings to be devoted in part to regional and local history, and to the problems of historical societies, curators of historical museums, archivists, and teachers of history.

4. A small special quarterly publication devoted to technical problems in the field of local history work, or alternatively the reserving of a section of the *Review* for this purpose.

5. Measures to secure scholarly and significant papers on regional history for presentation at the annual meetings or publication in the *Review*.

I hope I have not left the impression that the relationship of the *Review* and the Association to local historians should partake of the nature of a one-way street. Such is certainly not my conception of the proper relationship. Even if the Association or the *Review* were to perform some of the services to local history which I have indicated, their traditional and basic function would still be to hold high the banner of national, commonwealth and world history. In doing so they would also be serving the interests of local historians by challenging them to relate their subject to the long vistas of time and the whole broad sweep of human experience. Local historians would then feel that they belonged to a larger fellowship of scholarship which, while comprehensive in its interests, was also firmly rooted in the life of the cities, towns and rural areas of Canada.

## DISCUSSION

MR. GEORGE SPRAGGE, Provincial Archivist of Ontario and a past Secretary of the Ontario Historical Society, referred to the flourishing state of historical societies in the United States and to the work of the American Association of State and Local History. He said that state and local societies had their own buildings, libraries, archives, museums and publications. They encouraged children to become interested in history. They acted on the principle that the story of a nation is the story of its parts, that history was a means of developing interest in one's country, and that local history was the obvious place to start. Mr. Spragge said that in Britain an interest in history was a stable element of the national life.

He went on to say that there was a growing interest in local history in Canada, for instance in Ontario, both in school curricula and as a tourist attraction. He indicated as evidence of provincial support the grants made by the Province of Ontario to municipalities which controlled local historical museums.

However, interest in local history must be developed in the locality. How can the Canadian Historical Association help?

He suggested that the Local History Committee should be continued and should be broadened to include in its scope Regional History and Archives Problems: that its members should all be members who had a real interest in local history and should include representatives of affiliated societies. He urged that at Annual Meetings the Local History Session should not conflict with regular sessions or council meetings. However a Local History Session would not serve all the required purposes. The Committee should discuss technical problems and pool information. It should also advise the Council on the stimulation of interest in local history in Canada.

M. CYRILLE DELAGE, ancien surintendant de l'Instruction publique de la province de Québec et président de la Société d'Histoire de Québec, déclare qu'il s'efforce de faire conserver à la population les reliques du passé; l'histoire locale, dit-il, est la pierre de touche du patriotisme. Nous devons faire connaître à nos visiteurs notre histoire locale afin qu'ils nous comprennent mieux. L'unité dépend de l'harmonie entre les deux éléments de langues différentes et particulièrement entre les deux grandes provinces. Les deux civilisations existent au Canada depuis plusieurs siècles. Pour les mieux comprendre nous devons en étudier l'histoire, particulièrement l'histoire régionale.

MR. DONALD MASTERS of Bishop's University said that he remembered the session in 1936 on local history but that nothing had followed it. He was particularly in favour of having one session at each Annual Meeting devoted to local history.

DR. WALTER SAGE of the University of British Columbia, a member of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, said the C.H.A. was supposed to be a national association but that it had a hard core of university teachers. He said it should act as liaison between Provincial Societies. There was a third group at local level, the local society. The C.H.A. should integrate all these into a single whole.



Since 1922 there has been a great growth in mutual understanding but there is a continuing problem in Canada of preserving contact and harmony. He indicated the problem of absorbing vast numbers of "new Canadians".

MISS ORMSBY supported the idea of giving awards for successful work by local historical societies.

MRS. MARGARET ARNETT MACLEOD, a member of the Council of the Champlain Society, said that more emphasis should be placed on the stimulation of the interest of the children. She said that at Newmarket, Ontario, the children had forced the city fathers to attend to the headstones of pioneers and that a book produced and financed by school children in Jasper, Alberta, went all over Canada.

COL. STACEY said that it was obviously the sense of the meeting that the C.H.A. should take an interest in and be responsible for, the co-ordination of the activities of local societies. He said the Council would take this matter into consideration.