HISTORY COMES ALIVE AT MONTREAL
Summer Teachers' Institute

BY Walter Baslyk

THIS PAST JULY, LOWER CANADA COLLEGE IN MONTREAL HOSTED THE FIRST SIX-DAY BILINGUAL SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING THE HISTORY OF CANADA IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS. FROM JULY 8 TO 14 MORE THAN SIXTY ENTHUSIASTIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS GATHERED FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING A DOZEN FROM QUEBEC. THE IDEA FOR THE INSTITUTE GREW OUT OF AN INVITATION IN JANUARY 2000 FROM DR. TOM AXWORTHY OF HISTORICA FOUNDATION TO SUBMIT FRESH IDEAS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. THAT INVITATION GENERATED A FORMAL PROPOSAL FROM DR. P. W. BENNETT, HEADMASTER AT LOWER CANADA COLLEGE, TO CREATE A NEW SUMMER INSTITUTE TAILORED TO MEET THE NEEDS AND APPEAL TO THE INTERESTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS. IT CAME TO FRUITION IN JULY 2001 AS ONE OF TWO NATIONAL TEACHERS' INSTITUTES SPONSORED BY HISTORICA FOUNDATION – THE OTHER BEING THE HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS HELD THIS PAST YEAR IN KAMLOOPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA AND COORDINATED BY JOHN FIELDING OF QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY.

The Summer 2001 ITHC programme, "Exploring Our Identities" stirred much interest and had an immediate impact on the participants. Over the six-day period, teachers and presenters were able to explore new perspectives and ideas in historical interpretation, pedagogy and curriculum. The seminars on content, story telling, new technologies, teaching strategies and new historical research were certainly helpful. History teachers observed and experienced exemplary teaching practices presented by educators recognized through the Governor General's Awards for Teaching Excellence, and sampled the best new history resources, including the latest resources from Historica and the National Film Board. A St. Lawrence Discovery Tour to Quebec City allowed teachers to see the impact and effective use of role-playing on the Plains of Abraham. In Trois Rivières, teachers were struck by the novelty of *Le musée de classe*, where student inquiry and involvement was encouraged through the permanent presence of artifacts in the classroom. Workshops on the use of computers in the classroom allowed participants to see that the computer's ability to collect and evaluate data has done much to change the direction of historical study and has added a new dimension to history teaching as well.

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Likewise, the Institute provided a forum for Canadian historians and film producers who have contributed a tremendous amount to the understanding and interpretation of Canadian History and who, through their actions, have done much to engage us in the historical process. The insight and passion for the History of Canada by individuals such as Mark Starowicz (Producer, CBCs *Canada: A People's History*); Jacques Lacoursière (History professor, Laval University and researcher, scriptwriter and host of *Épopée en Amérique*); Dr. Desmond Morton (McGill Institute for the Study of Canada); Dr. Jack Granatstein (author of *Who Killed Canadian History?*), was evident to all and inspired lively debate and discussion on the part of the participants.



"Sir John A. Macdonald" by Thomas Harsburgh / National Archives of Canada / C97288

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CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Historica's Summer Institutes point the way, but a great deal still needs to be done in order to ensure effective teaching in the 21st century. On-line Internet historical archives need to be created to offer teachers and students access to new kinds of materials and new perspectives on historical events. Teaching with electronic primary sources (photos, films, pamphlets, oral histories and political cartoons) needs to be further developed and encouraged as it opens up the classroom to new and challenging viewpoints on history. Research has shown that in order for students to achieve a broader and deeper knowledge of history, students must be involved and engaged. What is important is what we do with history, and teachers need to get their students to use historical evidence, documents and primary sources. Active learning is the key and students need to be part of that process so that they learn from and with the teacher. Ultimately, using these resources to advance a more dynamic, inquiry-based approach to history teaching and learning will require creative teachers to collaborate with each other and to share resources, lesson plans, teaching approaches and assessment methods. The reward will be better-educated students who have an excitement about learning history and a knowledge base to think constructively about themselves and their place in the world.

The Montreal Institute aims to be a catalyst for further innovations in the teaching of Canada's history. Among the proposed spin-off programmes are "Great Moments" in teaching Canadian History – a series of short videotape and CD format programmes that would feature leading Canadian History teachers in action, a Canadian History Speakers Series that would focus on current issues and controversies in Canadian History, a Video Textbook that would provide teachers with easy access to primary documents, as well as visual images and maps.

Plans are already underway for Historica's Summer 2002 Institute in Montreal. It will again be held in Montreal at Lower Canada College from July 7 – 13, 2002 and organized around the theme "Frontiers and Borderlands in Canada's History." We will aim to further interchange and to foster partnerships among teachers of Canadian History, in French-speaking as well as English-speaking communities. An open invitation will be issued in the new year for interested and talented teachers who are committed to learning more about Canadian History, exploring different teaching strategies and practices, and sharing their passion for the subject with the current generation of students.

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