INTERVIEW WITH THE HONOURABLE BEVERLEY J. ODA

Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women

1) How important is it for the people of Canada to have knowledge of the country's history?

Canada's history is the foundation of our nation. It forms the base of our decisions and influences our views of our country and the world. By recognizing and understanding our past we are guided as we move into the future.

As Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, I have seen how Canadians value our history and how it permeates everything we do as a government.

Our Government knows it is important for Canadians to have a strong sense of our history. Canada's history of being founded though the union of two founding communities gives us the richness of a bilingual, diverse people working as Canadians, as immigrants, together with the Aboriginal peoples.

2) What are the most important reasons for people possessing knowledge of history?

The most important reason for knowing our history is that it is a source of pride for all Canadians.

Canada is known and envied throughout the world as a diverse and welcoming country. Our history as a bilingual and multicultural nation, rooted in the values of all its people, gives us cause to celebrate our unique heritage. We welcome immigrants from around the globe, and strive to include them in our society, and to appreciate and accept their contributions to Canadian life. I believe the quality of life we enjoy today as Canadians can be traced to the significant contributions made by Canadians of all cultural backgrounds throughout our history.

Another important reason for people to know and understand our country's history is so that we can learn from our past. It was philosopher George Santayana who said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Canada has evolved through periods of social evolution, and has grown and matured as a result. There have been historical incidents in our past that are not reflective of the Canada we know today. It is through the knowledge and understanding of our history that we will be able to prevent such incidents in our future.

3) What are the biggest obstacles to improving knowledge of the country's history?

Certainly one of biggest challenges – and opportunities – that we face is making history easy to understand and fun to learn. We need to impart historical knowledge to Canadians in a way that makes sense in their own lives, and in a way that is accessible. When history is distant or remote, it isn't absorbed into our collective conscience.

In today's world there have been many changes to how Canadians access news, information and education, and many demands for their time. We need to present our history in new and interesting ways, to make our history relevant to our daily lives. We need to use new technologies, such as the internet, to ensure the past becomes a part of our future.

4) How can your Department effectively contribute to improving knowledge of Canada's history?

Canadian Heritage plays an important role in the cultural and civic lives of Canadians. Through our mandate, we strive to ensure Canadians can express and share their diverse cultural experiences with each other and the world. We also work to ensure Canadians live in an inclusive society built on cross-cultural understanding and citizen participation.

My portfolio spans areas of Canada's linguistic, artistic, and cultural heritage. We will continue to work toward improving and preserving our history. I am also responsible to Parliament for Canada's national museums, and for Library and Archives Canada, which has the mandate to acquire and preserve Canada's documentary heritage in all its forms. It also provides Canadians with easy, one-stop access to the texts, photographs and other documents that reflect their cultural, social and political development.

5) In the job market, what are the advantages of knowing the country's history?

Not only for the job market, but also for life in general, having knowledge of history helps us to make good decisions. Understanding where we come from is the first step in planning for a successful future.

Many careers require knowledge of the social, economic, and political developments in the history of our country. But more importantly, history can also inspire us. Canadian success stories in business, medicine, technology, and the arts provide our youth with proof that hard work and creativity can have a lasting impact on their lives, and even the course of history.

6) What do you think are the most important events that have marked the country's history?

This is a difficult question. There are so many important events from which to choose!

From the beginning of our history, we have shown a remarkable ability to work together. The Charlottetown Conference, in 1864, while originally called to discuss Maritime union, ended in an agreement to discuss the broader union of all British colonies. The next conference, held in Quebec, led to the Confederation of our country in 1867. This resulted in the *British North America Act* being passed by the British Parliament and coming into effect on July 1st, 1867, our first Canada Day.

All of these events, made possible by our forefathers working together, despite their linguistic and religious differences, formed the basis by which our country was shaped. We continue to work together, not only as English and French, but as people from all nations and all languages, for the betterment of our union.

Also of importance to Canada's history, although from much more recent history, is the passing of the *Canada Act*, 1982 by the British Parliament. Under this law, Britain relinquished constitutional and legislative authority over Canada and patriated our constitution. It was the last step in our becoming a completely independent nation.

We continue to work together and the success of this young country is due to the strong ties economically, politically and culturally we hold with both Britain and France while extending our reach to countries around the globe which share Canadian values.

7) Is there an event in Canada's history that personally influenced your vision of the country?

A Canadian of Japanese heritage, I was born in Thunder Bay at a time when Canadians of Japanese origin had been interned or displaced from the West. I saw first hand the effect this had on the lives of my family and my community.

I realized that people's behaviour and opinions are influenced by their ethnicity, and by the ways in which they are treated. As a country and a people, Canadians are tolerant and inclusive.

As the Prime Minister said when he apologized for the Head Tax imposed on Chinese immigrants, "We have the collective responsibility to build a country based firmly on the notion of equality of opportunity, regardless of one's race or ethnic origin." Canada's New Government believes it is important for all Canadians to understand our history, including the more difficult periods.