

New York History

Historical News and Views From The Empire State

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Strengthening NY's Historical Enterprise: Canadian Models

By Bruce Dearstyne



Several recent posts here at *New York History* remind us of the incredible richness and diversity of New York's history and the outstanding programs and organizations that are responsible for it. But others demonstrate the need for more resources, visibility and coordination.

Our history-minded neighbor to the north, Canada, provides some useful examples of innovation, cooperative

ventures, advocacy, and programs that draw educators and students into history. Of course, Canada is a nation, not a state. But our population is more than half the size of theirs, so there is a basis for comparing our history programs with theirs.

Five examples:

1. [Canada's History](#) has a mission to “make the discovery of our nation's past relevant, engaging, empowering and accessible to all Canadians.” It has an online history discovery page, publishes *Canada's History* magazine; *Kayak: Canada's History Magazine for Kids* (“blows open the door to our Canadian past with stories, comics, games and more” and with its own section on the website, just for young people), book reviews, and more. There is a lot of information for educators: sections on young historians, writing history, lesson plans, heritage fairs, even a “writing centre” with advice on writing history. How do they do it? They have 50,000 individual members plus 17 corporate, bank, foundation and government sponsors plus three anonymous corporate donors.

2. The [History Education Network](#) is “the first pan-Canadian organization devoted to promoting—and improving—history teaching and learning by bringing together the multiple and varied constituencies involved in history education: academic historians; public historians in museums, archives and historic sites; practicing teachers; researchers based in faculties of education; and curriculum policy makers.” It has links to teaching resources, including [curriculum documents](#) for each of the provinces, information on research, and a lot more. What about resources? The Network is a true cooperative venture with 36 partners.

3. The [Historica Dominion Institute](#) emphasizes the connection between Canadian history and citizenship. It has sponsored multiple programs: Heritage Minutes, Encounters with Canada, The Memory Project: Stories of the Second World War, 101 Things Canadians Should Know about Canada,” the Canadian Citizenship Challenge, commemoration of the War of 1812, a speakers' bureau. “Black History in Canada: Educator's Guide,” multiple programs for teachers, and, notably, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. It acts as an advocate for the teaching of Canadian history in the schools and sponsors a youth forum, *Encounters With Canada*. The Institute was formed in 2009 through the merger of the Historical Foundation of Canada (whose mission was “to help all Canadians come to know the fascinating stories that make our country unique” and the Dominion Institute (with a mission “to connect in meaningful ways with the country's history, shared citizenship and democratic institutions and values.”) Their funding sources are not specified but their [Board of Directors](#) includes prominent Canadians from business, government, and the media.

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4. The Center for the Study of Historical Consciousness at the University of British Columbia hosts the multi-sponsored [Historical Thinking Concepts](#) project which focuses on teaching students not only the content of history but how to apply historical analysis and perspective. The project has identified six key concepts and linked them to examples, documents, and other resources: (1) establish historical significance; (2) use primary source evidence; (3) identify continuity and change; (4) analyze cause and consequence; (5) take historical perspectives; and (6) understand ethical dimensions of history. (These concepts were discussed in an [earlier post](#) here.

5. Finally, a new book, Penney Clark, ed., *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada*, multi-authored, focuses on how to think about and teach history at all educational levels, from kindergarden through graduate school. It reflects the sort of conversation we need here in New York about historical education for young people.

Of course, the Canadian programs are not models that can just be replicated here in New York. Furthermore, Canada has some of the same resource issues that we do – for instance, services at their combined national library and archives program, Library and Archives Canada, are [threatened by government budget cuts](#). But they are useful programs to consider as we continue to discuss strengthening the historical enterprise in New York State.

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