

MINUTES of the Public History Group Business Meeting

Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, University of British Columbia, June 3, 2008

Prepared by Barry Cottam, INAC

Nineteen people attended. The meeting was chaired by Danielle Hamelin of Parks Canada, Historical Services Branch. Agenda items consisted of:

- 1. Adoption of agenda**
- 2. Discussion of relationship with CHA and proposed constitution (N. Neatby)**
- 3. Report of CHA Ad-hoc Committee on Public History (L. Dick)**
- 4. Electronic mailing list (P. Litt, in absentia)**
- 5. Proposed website (J.-P. Morin)**
- 6. Nominations for executive positions**

Following (1) adoption of the agenda, (2) Nicole Neatby gave a brief presentation on the PHG's relationship with the CHA and the group's proposed constitution. It was quickly realized that the group would not have time to discuss the constitution, which many had not had the opportunity to review, so this was postponed, although the topic came up in a general way later in the meeting (see below under 'Other Business'). Nicole then raised the question, based on discussions on the ListServ and website, whether the PHG should be a member of the CHA. Reasons for maintaining this affiliation include being able to use the CHA's infrastructure for communications, conference planning, etc. One challenge was gaining representation on the CHA Council.

(3) Lyle Dick spoke to this question in his presentation of the Report of the CHA Ad Hoc Committee on Public History. This report included five recommendations to the CHA Council (CHAC), including steps to increase the involvement of public historians on the CHAC and the Program Committee, the development of criteria for evaluating submissions in public history for the annual conference, and having the PHG identify, through the Chair of Affiliated Committees, services the CHA could offer to public historians. For its part, the CHA has indicated its willingness to take steps to enhance the status of Public History within the CHA. The CHAC approved the five recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee, which has become a permanent committee to the CHAC with Lyle Dick, Nicole Neatby, Margaret Conrad and Betsey Jameson as members.

The recommendations also included establishing a public history prize. Owing to the absence of those working on this initiative, D. Neufeld and C. Campbell, it was decided to explore this over the coming year and place it on the agenda of the 2009 business meeting.

Craig Heron spoke of the many models of business groups within the CHA, from those that barely exist from year to year to those with large and active memberships. The CHA "benefits enormously" from these groups and the CHA is happy to see the PHG being revived. Margaret Conrad noted the experience of the archivists, who hived off as a separate group in 1975 after years of affiliation with the CHA; thus, deciding to remain affiliated now and 'incubating' as a group does not preclude the possibility of becoming a separate group should the PHG move in that direction in future. She stated that public and academic historians need to work together to engage the public in ways of seeing the past.

Motion: that the PHG remain affiliated with the CHA; moved by Alexandria Mosquin, seconded by Del Muise. Approved unanimously.

4. Electronic mailing list (ListServ). Paul Litt, who maintains the listserv through Carleton University, was unable to attend. Until an electronic sign-up is available, individuals need to contact Paul directly at paul_litt@carleton.ca to be put on the list. The group recognized that the listserv is a good way to communicate but that it needs broader representation.

5. The PHG website is currently on the private web page of Jean-Pierre Morin. The CHA is willing to host it and the site will be transferred to the CHA website sometime this summer. The site currently has a thread-based message board and limited content. It is possible to sign up online. Comments and suggestions are sought on future content, the role of the website as an outreach tool as well as external links.

Other Business:

Discussion of items (3) and (4) led to questions regarding what constitutes membership of the PHG. It was noted that there is a difference between being a member and being on the listserv, that a definition of membership would depend in part on a definition of the term 'public history,' that the American PH group had a definition but this would need to be modified.

A question was raised regarding the state of the constitution. Nicole explained that it was a preliminary draft that had received comments, but these were not yet incorporated. Various suggestions were made about the constitution:

- that it be simplified to its essential core, leaving issues for future discussion
- could go ahead with an online vote on the constitution but to do this through the CHA Bulletin would require a copy being submitted by mid-June
- other CHA groups work with very loose structures so this need not be a concern

Questions regarding how and when the constitution might be ratified were raised. There was also some discussion of membership fees and how these might be structured, as well as support for public historians who were not attached to institutions that could assist with costs of travel, etc.

6. Nominations for executive positions

An executive as such was not established. However, as noted in the motion below, a steering committee was appointed.

Motion: that a steering committee be appointed, of those already involved in the process, for laying the groundwork for dealing at the 2009 Congress with issues raised in this meeting. Moved by Jean Manore and seconded by Gwynn Jones. Approved.

Six people were nominated to the committee: Lyle Dick, Nicole Neatby, Jean-Pierre Morin, Del Muisse, Danielle Hamelin and Meg Stanley.

The steering committee should promote sessions to the CHA Program Committee, as requested by John Walsh, Chair of the Carleton CHA Annual Meeting Program Committee. Jean-Pierre Morin offered to liaise with John on this.