History of the Canadian Peoples

Volume 1 | Beginnings to 1867

Sixth Edition

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The first edition of the two-volume text *History of the Canadian Peoples* was published in 1993. Our objective was to write a survey of Canadian history that incorporated new research in Canadian social history and included developments in the lives of all Canadians, not just the rich and powerful. The stories of Aboriginal peoples, women, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and regions outside of the St Lawrence–Great Lakes heartland shared centre stage with the stories of European explorers and colonial politicians and warriors. While it was enthusiastically endorsed, our text and many of the writings upon which it was based drew criticism from some historians who lamented the demise of a cohesive narrative of the nation's history. Five editions later, we continue to draw upon an ever-expanding literature on Canada's social, political, and cultural history that is constantly introducing new themes and new challenges for an understanding of the past of today's Canada and its various peoples and regions.

*History of the Canadian Peoples* attempts to introduce readers to the complexity of the past—the conflicts and failures, as well as the common goals and successes that make Canada what it is today. We also want to expose students to the way history is constructed, using endnotes to document some of our sources and calling attention to conflicting interpretations of the past. By focusing on economic, political, social, and cultural themes, we hope to provide a balanced view of conditions that faced Canadians in the past. We, of course, recognize the limits of a national framework in assigning significance to events, but we stand firm in our conviction that a critical examination of the past helps to develop a historical consciousness and sense of human agency that serves us well in our efforts to shape the future.

Volume 1 is divided into four chronological sections. In Part I, “Beginnings,” we focus on the geography that helped to shape the experience of Canadians, the early history of Aboriginal peoples, and their interaction with Europeans before 1663. Part II, “France in America, 1663–1763,” explores the efforts of France—often in competition with Great Britain—to establish a North American Empire, while Part III, “British North America, 1763–1821,” focuses on the establishment of British colonies across the territories of today’s Canada. Part IV, “Maturing Colonial Societies, 1815–1867,” takes the story of British North America to the point where commercial and social development led to Confederation.

In constructing and revising this text, we maintain the pedagogical features found in previous editions. “Historiographical Debates” alert readers to differing interpretations of key events in Canadian history. Other features, “More to the Story,” “Biography,” and “Voices from the Past” supplement our narrative. A timeline appears at the beginning of each chapter to place events in chronological perspective, and maps and illustrations give visual support to the written word.

In this edition, we welcome a third member to our writing team: Donald Fyson, a historian of Quebec, is an equal partner with Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel, the authors of the five earlier editions, and has contributed to every chapter of this edition of the book and all facets of its production.

Before tackling the sixth editions of *History of the Canadian Peoples*, the three of us prepared a third edition of the one-volume counterpart to “HCP,” which now has the title, *Canada: A History*. The sixth edition of *History of the Canadian Peoples* largely follows the organizational principles of *Canada: A History* but with expanded coverage of major events and themes.

Margaret Conrad, Alvin Finkel, Donald Fyson

**NEW TO THE SIXTH EDITION**

- More coverage is given to pre-contact First Nations and to the diversity of these populations.
- “Part I: Beginnings” is rewritten to present an overview of Canadian geography and link it to the rest of the text, especially Canada’s environmental history.
“Part II: France in America” contains more coverage of First Nations during this period and of the impact of settlement on First Nations.

New colour images draw students into visual representations for each time period.

Full-colour maps prepared especially for the sixth edition help students understand the geographical context of Canadian history, showing them key places, political divisions, and events. The maps were prepared by Philippe Desaulniers and Émile Lapierre-Pintal of the Centre interuniversitaire d’études québécoises at Université Laval; our thanks to them and to the CIEQ. The sources used to create the maps are indicated in the Companion Website.

Offering a dynamic online experience, the Companion Website provides primary source documents and a comprehensive list of selected readings for each chapter.

STUDENT SUPPLEMENTS

The Companion Website provides an engaging online experience that personalizes learning. For History of the Canadian Peoples, students can access the following materials by visiting http://pearsoncanada.ca/conrad.

Selected Readings—We provide the most comprehensive reading list to accompany a survey history course that any Canadian history text has presented to date. While each chapter in the book provides a short list of especially helpful readings, the “Selected Readings” list in the Companion Website offers an extensive set of readings for almost any essay topic or topic of personal interest.

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NOTE ON STYLE

Throughout the text, we have generally italicized non-English words and phrases (but not the names of institutions or Aboriginal groups) only when they do not appear in either of the major dictionaries in English, that is Oxford and Webster. We have limited capitalization to the full formal names of institutions, but not capitalizing when we use short forms such as “the church” or “the commission.” For dates that precede 0 on the Gregorian calendar, we use the initials “BCE” which refer to Before the Common Era rather than BC, which is short for Before Christ.
INTRODUCTION

In 1829, Shanawdithit, the last surviving Beothuk on the island of Newfoundland, died of tuberculosis. Thirty-eight years later, three British North American colonies united to form the Dominion of Canada. The second of these two events has always had a central place in Canadian history textbooks. The first, until recently, has been ignored. For students of history, it is important to understand why the focus of historical analysis changes and what factors influence historians in their approaches to their craft.

WHAT IS HISTORY?

Simply stated, history is the study of the past, but the past is a slippery concept. In non-literate societies, people passed oral traditions from one generation to the next, with each generation fashioning the story to meet the needs of the time. When writing was invented, history became fixed in texts. The story of the past was often revised, but earlier texts could be used to show how interpretations changed over time. Although ordinary people continued to tell their stories, they were considered less important than “official” written histories that reflected the interests of the most powerful members of society. Some of the official texts, such as the Bible and the Koran, were deemed to be divinely inspired and therefore less subject to revision than the accounts of mere mortals.

In the nineteenth century, history became an academic discipline in Europe and North America. Scholars in universities began to collect primary historical documents, compare texts, develop standards of accuracy, and train students to become professional historians. At first, professional historians focused on political and military events that chronicled the evolution of empires and nation-states. Gradually, they broadened their scope to include economic, social, cultural, and environmental developments.

At the same time that professional historians were honing their craft, the production of history continued outside the academy. Oral transmission of historical knowledge flourished, especially in families and small communities, and enthusiastic amateur historians often proved as adept as their academic counterparts in finding, assessing, and interpreting historical sources. As literacy increased, the public interest in history grew, leading to the founding of local history societies, the publication of popular history books, and the commemoration of historical events. Meanwhile, governments at all levels tried to sustain historical memory for civic purposes by building monuments, museums, and historic sites and by encouraging the teaching of Canadian history in the nation’s schools.

In the twenty-first century, historians have many tools in their kit bag to help them understand the past. To fill the gaps in written documents, they draw upon other disciplines (including archaeology, anthropology, demography, and geography) to answer their questions. Oral traditions and the findings of archaeological excavations, for example, have enabled historians to explore the lives of the silent majority in past times. When personal computers became widely available in the 1970s, historians were able to process more efficiently large amounts of information found in such sources as censuses, immigration lists, and church registers. The science of demography, which analyzes population trends and draws upon vast quantities of data, has proven particularly useful in helping historians trace changes in family size, migration patterns, and life-cycle choices.

Writing history is a creative process. Even identical twins would not produce the same narrative when presented with the same set of historical sources to analyze. This truth has led some critics to conclude that history is just another branch of fiction, but this is not the case. Good historians, like good lawyers, must base their conclusions on solid evidence.
Whether they articulate it or not, historians are also influenced in their selection and interpretation of evidence by theories that help them to shape their thinking on the past. Scholars who study minorities, women, and the working class, for example, bring insights from multicultural studies, feminism, and Marxism to their analyses. The current scholarly preoccupation with the study of historical consciousness, historical memory, and public uses of the past suggests that we are entering a new phase in our understanding of history, one that not only acknowledges the limits to the truth-seeking goals of historical inquiry but that also addresses, sometimes in unsettling ways, the role that history plays in shaping present identities and imagining future goals.

In short, history is a dynamic and evolving discipline. Debates rage, methods come and go, new sources are discovered, and different conclusions are drawn from the same body of evidence. We want students who use this text not only to learn about developments in Canada’s past but also to gain some understanding of how history is written. At the beginning of and at various points throughout each chapter, we cite from primary sources that historians use. We also discuss historiography—that is, reflections on historical interpretation—in sections entitled “A Historiographical Debate.”

Ultimately, our goal in this textbook is to create a synthesis that helps readers to develop a clearer understanding of how the past unfolded in Canada. There is, we maintain, nothing inevitable about historical processes. At times in this text, the limitations on an individual’s behaviour may appear to suggest that many, perhaps most, of our ancestors were hopeless victims of forces beyond their control. A closer reading reveals that people sought in various ways to transcend the limits placed on their lives. Social struggles of every sort changed, or at least sought to change, the course of history. As you read this book, we hope that you will gain a greater appreciation of how earlier generations of people in what is now called Canada responded to their environment and shaped their own history.

Contemporary political movements that are changing the face of Canada are also forcing historians to think about the words they use. A half-century ago, most textbooks referred to people with black skin as Negros. In the 1960s, the term was replaced by Black and more recently by African Canadian. Similarly, the words used to describe Aboriginal peoples have changed in recent years. Savages was quickly dropped from textbooks in the 1960s. Although the misnomer Indian has particular applications that seem as yet unavoidable, the Constitution, 1982, uses the terms First Nations, Inuit, and Métis to describe the three major branches of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples.

Women, too, have insisted on being described in more respectful terms. Feminists have objected strongly to the use of the word girl when adult women are being discussed, and dismiss lady as condescending or elitist. Because man was adequate for the male of the species, woman, they argued, was the most appropriate term, although some radical feminists prefer a different spelling, such as wywyn. Only the most hide-bound of scholars still insist that the word man can be used to describe the entire human species.

Many scholars complained loudly about being asked to abandon words long established in their vocabularies. A few even argued that “political correctness” restricted freedom of speech. We do not hold such views. Since English is a living language and changes over time, we see no reason why it should not continue to reflect the new consciousness of groups in Canadian society. In our view, “politically conscious” more accurately describes attempts by groups to name their own experience.

Language, of course, is not only about naming things; it is also about power. Attempts by oppressed groups to find new words to fit their experiences should be seen in the context of their struggles for empowerment. In this text, we attempt to keep up with the changing times while bearing in mind that people in the past used a different terminology. We are also aware that in the future we may revise the words we use, as groups continue to reinvent their identities. Even the word Canada has changed its meaning over the past 500 years, and it is our job as historians to shed light on the way this term came to be applied, for a time at least, to all the people living on the northern half of the North American continent.