



Report on Active History CHA Committee 1812 Event

Introduction

At the 2011 Active History CHA Committee business meeting, the idea of organizing a workshop or session to be held during the CHA's 2012 annual meeting in Waterloo was discussed. Over the following summer, a group of volunteers eventually agreed that such an effort should focus on the coming bicentennial of the War of 1812, both because of its timeliness, and also because Kitchener-Waterloo was a region connected to the war. Government announcements of significant investments in commemorative activities, heritage infrastructure spending and new educational tools all focused on the war, providing an important political context in which committee members felt historians should be heard.

It seemed clear that a discussion of the politics of commemorative activities would be of local and academic interest. The committee decided to organize a mini-conference, along with a public event held off campus, for the CHA annual meeting. The conference theme: "The War of 1812: Whose War Was It, Anyway?" was meant to trigger discussion and reflection about the war and its legacies, as well as opening up discussion around neglected legacies and communities.



Planning and Organization

After agreeing on a theme, the committee solicited submissions for presentations and panels. A call for submissions was sent out via the Active History listserve, posted on the H-Canada site, publicized on the Active History web site and sent out to university history departments for distribution. After receiving a number of submissions, the committee agreed to co-sponsor a panel submission centred on the commemoration of the war with the Canadian Public History Group. The committee also created three panels for an afternoon mini-conference. During this process, the committee approached the CHA's organizing committee to propose a partnership, where the mini-conference would be included in the conference programme, and some travel funding would be extended to participants. The CHA agreed to include the mini-conference in the programme, and to extend travel bursaries to graduate students participating in the event.

In late November, the committee also applied for a small project grant from The History Education Network (THEN/HiER) to cover some of the travel and facility costs for the event. During discussions surrounding the application, it was suggested that the keynote event should be a roundtable discussion, and the committee set out to contact potential participants. Under this format, an application for \$2,700 was approved by THEN/HiER. The funding agreement with THEN/HiER provided funding for food, rental of the library auditorium, per diem, travel and accommodation costs for the keynote event participants as well as honoraria. Another funding application, this time to the Waterloo



Region Heritage Foundation, was unsuccessful, so the committee was unable to offer funding support for participants in the afternoon sessions.

Promotion

The committee used multiple platforms to promote and disseminate the event. In the weeks leading up to Congress, participants were invited to write short pieces touching on their research to be published on the ActiveHistory.ca site. Throughout the month of May, these postings generated interest in the topics discussed, with Jamie Swift and Ian McKay's posting on the politics of commemoration proving particularly popular, both in terms of the online hits it generated and in the discussion it spurred in social media. Notices of the day's events were also posted on the H-Canada site, distributed on the Active History listserv, the Canadian Studies Network listserv and sent out to university and college departments in the Kitchener Waterloo region. Local historical associations, museums, heritage institutions and archives were also contacted and asked to display posters about the event and distribute the programme on their own listserves. Press releases summarizing the event were also sent to Kitchener-Waterloo media; this resulted in a short front page piece promoting the event in the *Waterloo Record* the day before the event.

Event Summary

The afternoon sessions, held on campus at the University of Waterloo averaged between 10-30 attendees, with the session on augmented reality games having the largest audience. Given that it was the afternoon of the last day of the annual meeting, this



should be considered a good turnout. The evening event, held at the downtown branch of the Waterloo Public Library, was very well attended (the room was full with some having to stand, so roughly 80 people). Though the session ended up being cut short because of time constraints, it generated some lively discussion on the politics of commemoration, history education, and the legacy of the war.

Conclusion

The 1812 mini-conference added timely and locale-centred content to the Canadian Historical Association's Annual meeting. This, we believe, should be a key component of the Active History Committee's participation in the annual meeting; contributing panels, content and forums for discussing topics that engage with contemporary political and social issues that concern the host community and a broader audience. The evening keynote event, with its large turnout and animated discussion after the panel about history education and the politics of commemoration, should be deemed a great success in this regard and is a format that should be repeated in future years, should the committee choose to organize another event. The event would not have been possible without the funding support of the THEN/HiER and the logistical support of the CHA, and the committee wishes to extend their appreciation to both these organizations for their support.

1812 mini-conference organizing committee:

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