

Imagining Gateways Conference Halifax, October 2011



The Imagining Gateways conference was held in October 27th to 29th, 2011 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It was sponsored by The History Education Network (THEN/HiER) and jointly hosted by The History Education Network, the Nova Scotia Social Studies Teachers' Association, Nova Scotia Archives, and the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.

Graduate Student Committee co-Chairs Rose Fine-Meyer and Samantha Cutrara arrived on-site, Wednesday October 26th to finalize venues, transportation, and catering requirements, as well as prepare the registration folders and name tags for participants. The Lord Nelson Hotel was extremely accommodating and supportive in helping us print and photocopy programs, arranging transportation options for the conference duration, and providing us with accommodations that allowed us to meet and work during our stay at the hotel. Halifax was enjoying a wonderful sunny fall day and we were able to take a short walk through the famous Halifax Public Gardens, across from the hotel, to better connect with the places and heritage of Halifax.

The conference began Thursday evening with a welcome event at the Nova Scotia Archives. This event was designed for participants to register, acquire the conference program, and begin to mix, mingle, and discuss ways to expand teaching and learning practice all within an (underused) site of history teaching and learning: the provincial archives. This was a wonderful venue to hold the event and we were met by community liaison Lauren Oostveen who was also able to provide us with "I ♥ Archives" pins to hand out to those in attendance.



Attendees mingled and networked while enjoying local food provided by Certainly Cinnamon and entertainment by local musician and storyteller Ben Caplan. Lois Yorke, Director of Public Services, spoke about the archival holdings at the Nova Scotia Archives, noting that the archives database contained over 100,000 online photos and over 900,000 documents available to the public. Garry Shutlak, Senior Reference Archivist, and Barry Smith provided further information about the collection and led us through the virtual exhibits that showcase the various ways teachers can make use of the collections. The presentation portion of the evening concluded with a display and discussion of Helen Creighton's (1899-1989) personal papers,



sound recordings, and photographs. These storytelling artifacts provide a wonderful window into the life of one of Canada's best-known folklorists, pioneer researcher, collector, and author. In their continued efforts to connect with local teachers, the Nova Scotia Archives appreciated the work of THEN/HiER to bring together educators for this event and we were able connect with Barry Smith the next day at

Lockview Secondary School for the Nova Scotia Social Studies Teachers' Association Conference. The evening concluded with food and conversation at the Lord Nelson Hotel where participants continued discussion of how to bring learning communities together.

Friday morning began with a trip outside of Halifax to Fall River to join the Nova Scotia Social Studies Teachers' Association at Lockview Secondary School for their annual conference, this year's theme being *Back to Basics*. Once we arrived, NSSSTA Committee member Gary Renouf provided us with a table to register our participants and made announcements throughout the morning of our presence and our off-site afternoon session, making us feel welcome and involved with the larger conference. The table also provided us with a space to connect with teachers who were unfamiliar with THEN/HiER and, joined by the Chair of the Francophone Graduate Student Committee Cate Duquette, we were able to showcase our work and the benefits of membership to interested teachers, especially by discussing the possibilities of the Small Projects Grant for collaborative projects.

Our THEN/HiER morning session provided an excellent opportunity for discussion between panelists and the audience. The panel, *Do history/social studies teachers and historians talk? Should they?* included professor and local historian Jim Morrison (Saint Mary's University), researcher Catherine Duquette (Université Laval), local teacher Gary Renouf, and Department of Education Consultant Jennifer Burke, who discussed possibilities for and spaces within which to collaborate and extend practices in engaging students in critical thinking through local history. The diversity of the panelists meant that they were all able to speak to the ways they approached this question, and during the discussion we found ways to connect and intersect with each other. With Nova Scotia teachers in the audience, the conversation was able to extend further into practice. All panelists agreed that the session was an important opportunity for stakeholders who rarely get a chance to talk, to start thinking about ways to stay connected and informed about the others' work.



Following the panel, we joined with the NSSSTA for lunch, where our participants were able to converse with Nova Scotia teachers. THEN representatives handed out THEN/HiER brochures from our table, and took the opportunity to discuss with local teachers the advantages of membership. The Friday afternoon event took place at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 with a tour by Pier 21 historian Steven Schwinghamer, a keynote by Dr. Lisa Chilton (University of Prince Edward Island), and a panel with award winning history teachers and museum representatives on the question of *How can students learn about immigration history outside the classroom? How can teachers make better use of available opportunities?* The theme of the afternoon was *Narratives of Migration* and we hoped that the diverse programming would be able to highlight and extend the ways to conceptualize and tell stories of migration in the classroom.

Steven Schwinghamer began the afternoon by introducing us to the Pier 21 site, the history of the museum, immigration to Canada through Pier 21, and the educational opportunities available there to take history learning outside the classroom.

Participants were then able to discuss the tour by enjoying afternoon refreshments in the "Global Worlds" classroom that Pier 21 provided us with for the afternoon. The staff there, especially Elizabeth Tower and Steven Schwinghamer, were extraordinarily helpful in facilitating this event. They not only set up the room and liaised with the caterers beforehand, they had also advertised the event as a professional development opportunity for



their research and education staff, many of whom were in attendance. Steven also “retweeted” many of our Tweets during the conference and advertised the conference through his Twitter feed before the event.

The classroom portion of the afternoon began with a keynote by Dr. Lisa Chilton. Her talk *Making a Case for Case Studies* used the case study of Jane Hamilton, who had emigrated to Quebec from Ireland in 1849, as a way to look at broader themes in history through the life of one person. In particular, Dr. Chilton provided insight into the challenges faced by single, immigrant women in mid-nineteenth century Canada, using Jane Hamilton’s work at the Quebec Marine and Emigrant Hospital as an example. Dr. Chilton concluded her talk by emphasizing how she teaches the case study of Jane Hamilton to extend ways for her students to think about and activate history. Her emphasis on storytelling and illicit knowledge intrigued the teacher candidates in the audience who inquired how to use these findings in their classrooms.

The keynote was followed by a panel that examined the question of pedagogy, immigration and the local community, by questioning *How can students learn about immigration history outside the classroom? How can teachers make better use of available opportunities?* The panel included Pier 21 Museum Education Manager Elizabeth Tower, Nova Scotia award winning social studies teacher Andrew Stickings, local museum educator Susan Haynes (Ross Farm Museum) and researcher and educator Rose Fine-Meyer (University of Toronto) who discussed opportunities to extend the classroom in history teaching related to narratives of migration. A great discussion followed and delegates stayed late to network. Elizabeth Tower was quite excited to hear about various THEN/HiER initiatives, especially the *Approaching the Past* series. She is interested in taking steps to set up a similar series in Halifax with THEN/HiER Graduate Student Committee member Caitlin Johnson and will follow the Toronto pattern of first creating a board of educators from different communities. Conversations and networking will continue between the Toronto and Halifax communities to ensure its success!

The final event in our conference was a *Big Questions Brunch* at the Lord Nelson Hotel the following morning to provide another opportunity for registrants to pose, and possibly answer, some “big questions” related to collaboration and innovation in history teaching. This proved to be a fitting end to the conference since participants were able to continue the conversations they began the previous day as well as begin some new ones about ways to create and strengthen ties between history educators working in a variety of contexts. Participants ended the brunch by asking about future conferences and Cate Duquette was spoke about the 2012 conference being held in Quebec City. This brunch also led to a site visit and conversation between Samantha Cutrara, Steven Schwinghamer, and international museum professional (and Small Projects Grant recipient) Julie Couture at Pier 21 to discuss ways to support international conversations about interpretation and education at museums.

To extend the conference across space and place, Samantha Cutrara live tweeted throughout the three day event and Canada’s History also scheduled three of our participants to blog about the conference on their website following the conference. Along with pictures and audio and video recordings that will be posted on the website, we also provided an opportunity during the brunch for delegates to write lasting questions and comments, which will be posted on the

THEN/HiER site for other members to read and comment on when they visit the *Imagining Gateways* page.

The conference proved to be a great success as it allowed for conversations between a wide range of history education communities and developed stronger networks for the future. The challenges we faced in organizing the events and in building relationships across the country via phone and email highlight the importance of having local THEN/HiER representation during the planning stages of future conferences. Despite these challenges, we were very pleased with the connections forged to extend THEN/HiER's reach in Nova Scotia. We are also pleased that plans for next year's conference in Quebec City are already under way and links to the planned international history educators conference are already being established. We hope to see everyone in Quebec City next year!