



The Historical Society of Alberta

Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Executive Summary

The brief will address the need for the Government of Canada to create a tax-incentive program to assist with the preservation of our heritage by way of publications of historic interest; public programs to educate Canadians about the importance of preserving our history; school programs to bring history alive to students to ensure preservation of our heritage; historic festivals promoting the diverse background of all Canadians with a view to understanding and integrating same into our heritage; continuation of the Historical Fairs to engage our youth in historical projects to preserve, protect and promote our history; and, heritage building preservation.

(1) Who are We?

The Historical Society of Alberta has been making a positive contribution to this province since its founding on March 15, 1907, when the Alberta Legislature passed the Historical Society of Alberta Act. Its first president was Alexander C. Rutherford, premier of the province, who also founded the University of Alberta. The objective of the Society is to encourage the study, preservation and protection of the history of Alberta and Canada. Over the past century, through various initiatives, publications and programs, the Society and its four Chapters have played a critical role in the promotion, protection and preservation of the history of Alberta.

(2) What is the problem?

Canada's future lies with the next generation but how will we know where we are if we don't understand where we've been? The Historical Society of Alberta believes that it is

imperative that we engage the general public, especially our youth, in becoming actively involved in learning about our past. We need to move from beyond textbooks in classrooms to active participation in the community. We need to explore a variety of ways to bring our stories, our history, to life. We need to make history come alive.

The Historical Society of Alberta networks regularly with other provincial and national organizations and societies, and therefore supports many of the issues of these groups. For example, we support the notion as outlined by the Canadian National Historical Society in an article in the *Beaver* (February/March 2008):

“We absolutely need to make more investments in history education for all Canadians... There’s just as much work to be done outside our schools, and it cannot wait until this next generation of students reaches the age when they are the leaders and decision-makers. We need to invest in history, with a comprehensive strategy that ensures the lessons learned in school have meaning after the last exam is marked We need more collaboration and coordination to build historical literacy at home and at school so that the lessons of history will resound with generations still to come.”

With this in mind, through the work of countless volunteers in our four Chapters, a variety of initiatives abound in most Alberta major communities. Volunteers for the Historical Society of Alberta have logged over 25,000 volunteers hours annually for over 30 years. Their initiatives have had far-reaching effects in the community, while continually operating with a shortage of funding. They include the following activities:

- publications, from newsletters and magazines to books for research and general historic interest
- public programs, including special tours, events, speakers, workshops, displays and other activities geared to the general public
- school programs, featuring guest speakers, special visitors and a new initiative in Edmonton, the Queen Alexandra History Centre. The History Centre provides hands-on school programs (dramatic presentations, artifact discoveries, stories and games) that bring history alive to students in the district. Funding to open similar centres across Canada would fulfill such active learning across the nation, where students could re-live the stories of their community’s past.
- Historic Festivals, which promote tours, activities, arts presentations, museum projects and other community involvement. The Festivals are well attended in each community in which they are offered (statistics are available upon request). They provide learning about our past in an exciting and “hands-on” experience that results in enhancing the passion of the public’s desire to hear their history.

- regional school fairs (Histor!ca), which is a national initiative conducted at local levels. In its determination to preserve, protect and promote our history through the active engagement of our youth in their historical projects, the Historical Society of Alberta has agreed to supply volunteers and available funding to regional Histor!ca fairs over the next five years.
- heritage building preservation, which the Historical Society of Alberta demonstrates by example. For instance, (a) the Society office is in the Historic Lancaster Building in Calgary and (b) the move to protect Lougheed House in Calgary was initiated by a committee from the Society. This initiative was eventually successful in the designation of Lougheed House as a National Historic Site.

While all the programs and activities of the Historical Society of Alberta produce noble efforts, they are far short of the reality – more funding than the Society can provide is needed in each of the communities hosting the projects. How sad it is that, while The Historical Society of Alberta has the will and determination of many volunteers to carry out our projects throughout the province, we fall short due to insufficient funding.

(3) How can the Federal Government help?

The Historical Society of Alberta believes that the shortfall in funding can be alleviated to a great extent by a simple procedure and that is to create a tax-incentive program.

- a) A tax-incentive program would help researchers struggling to write the stories of our past, and the organizations such as ours that struggle to publish as many as possible in order that the stories are heard. How else to spread the stories of our forefathers – how else to save their stories from oblivion? Indeed, how else do our children learn the stories?
- b) A tax-incentive program would help individuals, groups and other organizations wishing to support programs such as community historical fairs and the national Histor!ca school fairs. Their monetary contributions could be recognized by tax incentives. When one donates to universities or buys a sports team, tax incentives seem to abound. Cannot this continue in the field of promoting historical programs or events?
- c) A tax-incentive program would help those who wish to save our built heritage, the physical manifestations of our history. For example, the implementation of the following incentives would support our built heritage:
 - tax credits for corporations for the rehabilitation of heritage buildings
 - funds for non-profit groups in their efforts to assist in the preservation of historic places

(4) Conclusion

Perhaps the best conclusion is to return to the report from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance issued in December, 2006:

“CANADA: COMPETING TO WIN
Report of the Standing Committee on Finance

Brian Pallister, M.P.
Chair

DECEMBER 2006 THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
has the honour to present its

EIGHTH REPORT

In accordance with its mandate under Standing Order 83.1, the Committee has studied proposals on the budgetary policy of the government and has agreed to report the following:”

In particular, we need to restate one of the report’s recommendations:

“RECOMMENDATION 23

The federal government review the range of federal measures and programs that support and encourage the preservation and restoration of heritage buildings.

The review, which should be completed no later than 30 April 2007, should focus on the eligibility of not-for-profit organizations, public agencies and private individuals for the measures and programs.”

The position of the Historical Society of Alberta is that we entreat the Federal Finance Committee to encourage the preservation, promotion and protection of our historical past by providing financial assistance such as tax incentives to those individuals or groups who support the above referenced historical endeavours.

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