

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES SITE WINS BERTON AWARD

The University of Victoria-based *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* website is the 2008 winner of the Pierre Berton Award, presented by Canada's National History Society for outstanding work in popularizing Canadian history. It's the latest honour for the popular project that invites students to 'solve' mysteries plucked from Canada's rich history while developing their research skills.

Launched in 1997 with one mystery, the 1868 murder of black settler William Robinson on Saltspring Island, the website ultimately grew to a dozen bilingual mysteries. They span the country in their origins: from the quest for the actual location of the first Viking settlement on the East Coast to the mysterious death of Doukhobor leader Peter Verigin in BC's Kootenay region.



The project's three historian co-directors — John Lutz (UVic), Ruth Sandwell (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) and Peter Gossage (Université de Sherbrooke) — also span the country. They were honoured at a gala ceremony in Toronto.

“We set out to make Canadian history more accessible, more popular and more fun and this award is a hint that we have succeeded,” says Lutz. “The Pierre Berton award is an amazing honour for the one hundred plus members of the Mysteries team and our many partners — it's like the Pulitzer Prize in our field.”

Unsolved Mysteries invites students to sift online through archival photographs, maps, news articles, court testimony



Credit Linda Onofrechuk.

Mysteries Project co-directors Ruth Sandwell, Peter Gossage, and John Lutz with Peter Berton who awarded the Pierre Berton prize named for his father (John Lutz is currently one of two Bulletin columnists for “History on the Web” and a former Bulletin editor).

and other materials to come to their own conclusion about the mysteries posed by the website. In the process students learn that prevailing attitudes towards race, religion and social structure often influence how justice is served or history is preserved. They also discover that Canadian history is exciting, lively and engaging.

While the project is designed for high school and university students (“Mysteryquest” assignments for younger students were introduced in 2006), the website is also popular with the public. The co-directors frequently receive suggestions, clues and documents from amateur historians of all ages. The website receives 200,000 unique visitors from 50 countries each year. *Unsolved Mysteries* at www.canadianmysteries.ca was made possible with the support of the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Canadian Culture Online Strategy. Learn more about the Berton Award, named for the renowned late Canadian historian Pierre Berton, at www.historysociety.ca/pba.asp.

Unsolved Mysteries photos and images available for download at <http://www.canadianmysteries.org/staff/mediainfo.html>.