

THE CHA IN THE CITY



*Pastoral scene - View of Black Creek Village Historic Site next to York University, venue of the Annual Meeting of the CHA beginning May 29, 2006.
Photo courtesy of City of Toronto Media Services*

*Paysage rural - Vue du site historique Black Creek Village, endroit voisinant le lieu de la réunion annuelle de la S.H.C., qui débute le 29 mai 2006.
Photo : gracieuseté du Service des médias de la ville de Toronto*

The last time York University welcomed the “Learneds” was 1969, and at that point the institution was perched on the distant edge of urban life next to functioning farms. Thirty-seven years later the urban frontier has moved far further out into the Ontario farmland, and the university is now surrounded by dense housing developments and is only a quick ten-minute bus ride to the subway. It seemed appropriate, then, for the CHA to take up this year’s Congress theme of “The City.”

The particular city that has moved out to engulf York has also changed profoundly over those four decades, and ranks as one of the most multicultural cities in the world. The urban experience of thousands of Toronto’s residents extends back to cities in so many other parts of the world that this year’s CHA Program Committee also decided it would be appropriate to expand the focus to “Global Histories.”

Canada’s historians from many fields share the Committee’s excitement about this theme. The response to the Call for Papers for this year’s CHA meeting has been overwhelming, with the result that the program will offer a remarkably rich

intellectual feast focusing on a huge diversity of topics in the history of cities, as well as other subjects.

The Program Committee hopes that the electronic pre-distribution of papers will facilitate more vigorous discussion in the many sessions planned, especially in the new “Forums” designed to require those attending to read the papers for one session in advance.

The city and region of metro Toronto offer a multitude of historical counterattractions to catch the fancy of historians. Two of them have been integrated into the program - the Native Canadian Centre in downtown Toronto and Black Creek Pioneer Village right next to the York campus.

Besides the newly refurbished Royal Ontario Museum and some specialized centres like the Bata Shoe Museum, there are also numerous historic houses from various eras - Colborne Lodge (in beautiful High Park), Mackenzie House (the rebel’s home), the Grange (home to Goldwin Smith among others), Gibson House, Campbell House, Spadina House (with lovely gardens), the over-the-top mansion Casa Loma, and several more. Toronto’s military past is on display at Fort York, some of its industrial life at Tormorden Mills and the Distillery District (formerly the Gooderham and Worts complex), its educational experience in the inner-city Enoch Turner Schoolhouse and suburban Zion Schoolhouse, and its architectural glories in places like the Old City Hall, Osgoode Hall, St Lawrence Hall, and the Design Exchange.

Of course, the best way to discover Toronto’s history is to wander its streets. Visitors who want some help can google their way to a number of walking tours.

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