

## Canadian History Blogging: Reflections at the Intersection of Digital Storytelling, Academic Research, and Public Outreach

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Volume 27, Number 2, 2016

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1040560ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040560ar>

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### Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association / La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0847-4478 (print)

1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Adcock, T., Grant, K., Nation-Knapper, S., Robertson, B. & Slumkoski, C. (2016). Canadian History Blogging: Reflections at the Intersection of Digital Storytelling, Academic Research, and Public Outreach. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 27(2), 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040560ar>

### Article abstract

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## *Abstract*

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## *Résumé*

*Cet article passe en revue l'impact du blogging dans la pratique historique au pays jusqu'à ce jour. S'inspirant de l'expérience tirée de cinq blogs consacrés à l'histoire canadienne gérés en collaboration — ActiveHistory.ca, The Otter~La Loutre, Findings/Trouvailles, l'Acadiensis Blog et Borealia — il explore comment cette activité a transformé la manière dont les historiens canadiens racontent le passé, publient leur recherche, enseignent et se mettent au service de leur institution et de l'ensemble de la communauté. Le blogging a stimulé de nouvelles formes de narration his-*

*torique, incluant les voix issues de groupes marginaux et sous-représentés dans les débats publics relatifs à l'histoire canadienne. Il s'est aussi immiscé dans les cycles de la production savante et dans tous les niveaux de l'enseignement universitaire. Malgré cela, de nombreux défis demeurent présents, notamment la place et à la valeur à accorder au blogging eu égard à l'appréciation des performances du travail universitaire. Or par leur inclination croissante à lire et à produire des blogs historiques, non seulement les Canadiens deviendront eux-mêmes les agents de changement de la pratique historique, au sein comme à l'extérieur des campus universitaires, mais ils récolteront une plus grande satisfaction personnelle à s'engager dans cette nouvelle forme de publication numérique.*

Since the turn of the century, history blogging (or weblogging) has grown in volume and popularity. Emerging and established Canadian historians are increasingly publishing work in collaborative and multi-author blogs.<sup>1</sup> Like peer-reviewed journals, these blogs often focus upon specific geographical, thematic, temporal, or methodological areas of research.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the proliferation of Canadian history blogging in recent years, there has been little collective discussion about how this activity is reshaping the ways in which we research, write, publish, and teach Canadian history.<sup>3</sup> As with other digital historical tools and platforms, blogs are producing innovative forms of scholarly writing and publication and modes of public engagement.<sup>4</sup> As we embark upon this digital turn, we should also assess how blogging, along with other social media technologies, is transforming the historian's craft.<sup>5</sup>

This article surveys the impacts of blogging on Canadian historical practice to date. It focuses upon the five collaborative or multi-author Canadian history blogs with which the authors have editorial affiliations: *ActiveHistory.ca* (Beth Robertson), *The Otter~La Loutre* (Tina Adcock), *Findings/Trouvailles* (Stacy Nation-Knapper, Tina Adcock), the *Acadiensis* blog (Corey Slumkoski), and *Borealia* (Keith Grant). It discusses this activity's relationship to four pillars of the historical profession — storytelling, publication, teaching, and service — and suggests some of the possibilities and pitfalls that have emerged so far from

each of these intersections. We argue that blogging has encouraged new forms of historical storytelling and the inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized voices and perspectives in public discussions of Canadian historical narratives. It is being integrated into cycles of academic publication and undergraduate and graduate classrooms. Yet challenges remain with regard to determining the place and value of blogging within standard paradigms of academic labour.

We are heartened to note blogging's growing traction in the Canadian historical discipline, as symbolized most recently by *ActiveHistory.ca*'s receipt of the Canadian Historical Association's Public History Prize in 2016. Indeed, our decision to publish this article in the CHA's scholarly organ, instead of on our blogs, is a conscious act of outreach to colleagues who may not have had the opportunity to delve very deeply into the Canadian history blogosphere. Historians sometimes turn to interviews, op-eds, and other forms of popular media to disseminate their research beyond the academy. Here, we travel in something like the opposite direction. We provide a snapshot of the present state of Canadian history blogging in a traditional print journal — albeit in an issue published electronically — in order to bring these activities more fully into conversation with other contemporary developments in the Canadian historical profession. We invite readers to follow the hyperlinks in our notes and to join the rich scholarly communities that have congregated around these digital seminar tables, or within these digital common rooms. As more Canadian historians come to read, write for, and edit history blogs, they will not only help shift the practice of Canadian history inside and outside university campuses, but will also experience the pleasures and rewards of this kind of digital historical work for themselves.

### About the Blogs

Each of the five blogs represented here takes a unique approach to, or has a distinct purpose in disseminating Canadian history. One of the earliest multi-author blogs in this field, *ActiveHistory*.

*ca*, has provided a model for subsequent efforts. The founders of *ActiveHistory.ca* were inspired by influential single-author blogs such as the one written by Christopher Moore, as well as international websites such as *History & Policy*.<sup>6</sup> Determined to engage a wider public, they established the blog in 2008, following the conference “Active History: History for the Future” held at Glendon College in September of that year. Although some of the initial people are still involved, the editorial collective, collaborators, and contributors have evolved over time. The co-editors understand “active history” in various ways, as “history that listens and is responsive; history that will make a tangible difference in people’s lives; history that makes an intervention and is transformative to both practitioners and communities.”<sup>7</sup> *ActiveHistory.ca* develops this notion of active history through blogging. Whether providing informed commentary on current events from a historical perspective, illuminating community-based research practices, or reflecting on public engagement, the website provides a platform for academics, public historians, archivists, museum professionals, and civil servants to engage in the potential of historical thinking.<sup>8</sup>

*The Otter~La Loutre*, originally named *Nature’s Chroniclers*, is the blog of the Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE). It began as a communication hub for participants in NiCHE’s 7-year Strategic Clusters grant (2007–2014) from SSHRC. From the website’s inception in 2007, Alan MacEachern, Adam Crymble, and Jim Clifford invited Canadian environmental historians to submit posts suitable for academic and non-academic audiences. At first, some of the material published online was reprinted in a separate digital newsletter that was sent to interested parties several times each year.<sup>9</sup> Joshua MacFadyen oversaw *The Otter~La Loutre’s* transition to a fully Web-based environment, and expanded its remit to include features such as a regular book review section and additional French-language content. Since 2014, NiCHE’s website and blog have been run by an editorial collective of eight scholars, four of whom work closely with *The Otter~La Loutre*. Although the blog chiefly represents and serves the Canadian environ-

mental historical community, it also reaches out to Canadian historians whose research and teaching concern broader relationships between Canadians and their environments in the past. Its readership extends past national borders, too. NiCHE's blog, website, and Facebook and Twitter feeds together comprise an important hub for environmental historians in North America, since there is no equivalent digital presence among American environmental historians. Digital environmental historians from around the world also follow NiCHE's social media accounts and read *The Otter~La Loutre*.

Douglas Hunter and Patrice Dutil founded *Findings/Trouvailles* in the fall of 2013 to further The Champlain Society's mission of increasing "public awareness of, and accessibility to, Canada's rich store of historical records."<sup>10</sup> The blog continues the Society's tradition of publishing historical "finds," but does so in a digital format that complements the Society's characteristic red-bound editions. Monthly posts focus on a specific textual, audiovisual, or material primary source, illuminating the content and context of this "find" and explaining how it enhances present understandings of Canadian history. The original *Findings/Trouvailles* editorial committee included Hunter, Dutil, Stacy Nation-Knapper, and Tina Adcock; it has since expanded to include eight editors. Early contributors to *Findings/Trouvailles* included members of the editorial committee and of the Society. The roll-call of authors is now more diverse, and the editors especially encourage early-career scholars to publish research finds in an accessible format that openly promotes enthusiasm for historical research.

The *Acadiensis* blog was launched in 2015 to place the journal *Acadiensis* at the forefront of digitally-engaged scholarly periodicals. Although digitized back issues of *Acadiensis* had long been available on the journal's website, the website was redesigned and expanded in 2014. Journal co-editors John Reid and Sasha Mullally turned increasingly toward social media as a form of publication, outreach, and promotion. They set up the *Acadiensis* blog, a Facebook page, and Twitter feed for the journal, and recruited Corey Slumkoski to oversee these elements as the journal's first Digital Communications Editor. At the time this paper

was submitted for publication, the blog had published approximately 90 posts on a weekly schedule. New content is generally published every Monday, and most Thursdays feature a “throw-back” piece wherein a link is posted to an article from *Acadiensis*’ archives relevant to current events. For example, during the Fort McMurray fire of May 2016, as many displaced Maritimers returned home, the blog featured Patricia Thornton’s important 1985 article about outmigration from the Maritimes.<sup>11</sup>

*Borealia* is a collaborative blog on early Canadian history, broadly construed. It is a forum for historians of northern North America until approximately the end of the nineteenth century, encompassing Indigenous, French, British, and early Canadian national history. When Denis McKim and Keith Grant launched the blog in 2015, these related subfields were often diffused among several specialized conferences and journals. They wanted to create an online space to bring those various subfields together under an “early Canadian” banner for collaboration and cross-fertilization, and to introduce this work to an interested general readership. *Borealia* invites contributions from professional historians working in academic, public, and alt-academic settings and advanced graduate students. To date, over 40 historians, representing many career stages, have written for the blog. *Borealia* has also developed into a forum for transnational conversations, especially between early Canadianists and early Americanists. What began as an accident of the editors’ personal networks and research interests has become an intentional editorial stance of seeking to put early “Canada” in continental, Atlantic, and global contexts. With half of the blog’s readers and a third of its contributors located in the United States, *Borealia*’s editors now encourage essays that straddle the border and check nationalistic assumptions in the historiography of early North America.

### Blogging and Storytelling

Canadian digital historians have used the nimbleness, flexibility, and accessibility of blogging platforms to experiment with narrative form and tell complex, yet engaging stories *en plein air*



to more-than-academic audiences.<sup>12</sup> Blogging has also created space for voices traditionally underrepresented in, or excluded from Canadian history narratives and their contemporary narration. It is already transforming and democratizing the field, although it retains the potential to reproduce existing structural inequities in the Canadian academy.

Bloggers often tell stories about Canada's past that are smaller in scope, though not necessarily less significant than those found in conventional venues of publication. Most posts on collaborative or multi-author blogs are 750–1,500 words long. The blog post's brevity makes it an ideal form in which to engage with a single item or argument in depth: to explore a fascinating source culled from a journal article or book chapter, to linger over a methodological or historiographical problem, or to develop a stray thematic thread from a larger research project. Within the Canadian history blogosphere, *Findings/Trouvailles* provides a unique venue for this kind of micronarrative. Each post discusses and analyzes a source, but dispenses with the larger analytical apparatus that surrounds such sources in long-form historical narratives. By highlighting the thrill of the "find," *Finding/Trouvailles* posts also reveal the affective dimension of historical research, or the excitement of unearthing jewels in the archives. Such experiences are rarely discussed in academic publications, but can help attract non-academic readers to history blogs even as they educate them about this often-obscured facet of professional historical work.

While blog posts are nimble in scope, blogging platforms are equally nimble in their flexibility and celerity of publication. Unlike the print medium, blogs can integrate non-textual and digitized sources easily. An image or video clip can become the centrepiece of a post, or can be used to supplement arguments advanced concurrently in traditional print venues.<sup>13</sup> *ActiveHistory.ca* has also experimented with "exhibits" that link blogging to less text-based conceptions of storytelling.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, collaborative and multi-author Canadian history blogs favour a condensed process of peer review. Posts undergo at least one round of editorial intervention and subsequent revision prior to



publication, but are usually not sent out for external peer review. Blogs can therefore publish topical content quickly, enabling historians to provide expert, near real-time commentary on current events. Within several days of the 2015 federal election, the *Acadiensis* blog featured a Maritime-centred analysis of the results, written by a well-known political scientist. Publishing a similar piece in a peer-reviewed journal such as *Acadiensis* would have taken much longer — perhaps over a year — and would have resulted in a piece far less timely. Even a non-refereed research note in the print journal would have taken some time to see the light of day, owing to *Acadiensis*' set biannual publication schedule.

For these and other reasons, blogs are an ideal vehicle for communicating Canadian historical research to academics who do not specialize in this field, as well as students and members of the public. Most Canadian history blogs are intentionally oriented toward a hybrid audience of academic and non-academic readers. They enable historians to conduct conversations in public that are meant to be overheard. They are written in a more academic manner than popular history magazines, though like them, they strive for readable narrative and engaging style. As the editors at *Borealia* like to tell their contributors, if the blog were a restaurant, it would be casual fine dining: professional, energetic, and accessible.

While all of the blogs discussed here fit this characterization, they employ different strategies to create such an ambience. *Findings/Trouvailles*' editorial committee calls for submissions that are “informed, but not necessarily scholarly.”<sup>15</sup> This encourages authors to write in a less formal, and often less formulaic manner that conveys what the editors hope will be a contagious enthusiasm for historical research. It also makes the products of that research more digestible to readers unfamiliar with the conventions of academic history-writing. While *Findings/Trouvailles* privileges enthusiastic storytelling, *ActiveHistory.ca* challenges contributors to communicate complex historical ideas to a broader public. The editors maintain a deep commitment to theory and critical analysis, while eschewing jargon that

might alienate those working beyond specific scholarly fields or academic institutions. *ActiveHistory.ca*'s posts speak to, but do not underestimate their readership. The blog's editors have also reached out to members of underrepresented and marginalized groups in the Canadian historical profession and Canadian society, offering them the space and freedom to tell stories that often stray from and usefully challenge the kinds of Canadian historical narratives dominant in the public sphere. Indeed, the Canadian history blogs discussed herein are now striving to tell more inclusive histories, with respect to language, race, gender, and stage of career.

Although the Canadian history blogosphere, like the profession writ large, is largely English-speaking, some blogs have actively recruited francophone writers, sought out editors fluent in French, and published French-language content. Undoubtedly the most successful has been *HistoireEngagée.ca*, *ActiveHistory.ca*'s French-language sister site. Like *ActiveHistory.ca*, *HistoireEngagée.ca* endeavours to publish accessible, jargon-free posts that place contemporary issues and debates in Canada and Québec and on the world stage into dialogue with historical knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Although the two blogs operate independently, they maintain a close relationship. They periodically translate and share content, and their editors are striving to make this happen more regularly.<sup>17</sup> *Findings/Trouvailles* and *Borealia* have each published a handful of French-language pieces, and have simultaneously produced English translations to increase such posts' uptake. *The Otter~La Loutre*'s experience demonstrates that sustaining bilingual publishing practices can be difficult over time, however. NiCHE once had a French-Canada coordinator who ensured the regular publication of French-language content on *The Otter~La Loutre* and on the now-defunct French-language blog *Qu'est-ce qui se passe*. They also sourced French-language content from elsewhere, and wrote English- and French-language posts about ongoing environmental historical research in Québec and French Canada. Unfortunately, *The Otter~La Loutre*'s last French-language editor stepped down in 2014, and the number of posts written in French has diminished accordingly.

In recent years, Indigenous scholars such as Chelsea Vowel, Erica Violet Lee, and Zoe Todd have maintained influential personal blogs where they regularly debunk longstanding myths about Indigenous peoples and cultures and counter neocolonial renditions of Canadian history.<sup>18</sup> Such conversations also happen on collaborative and multi-author blogs, where they often challenge editors' and readers' ideas about how Canadian history should be told, who should do the telling, and what forms that telling should take. One concrete outcome of such discussions was *ActiveHistory.ca*'s theme week dedicated to Indigenous history, which Gwich'in scholar Crystal Fraser guest-edited in January 2016.<sup>19</sup> This theme week has become one of the blog's most widely-read examples of this genre. Contributing authors did much more than insert Indigenous stories into existing Canadian historical narratives. As Adam Gaudry noted, a simple "add and stir" approach is neither sufficient nor unproblematic.<sup>20</sup> Contributors played with and contested Eurocentric notions of history's disciplinary boundaries, its accredited authors, and appropriate methods of conveying its knowledge. Their perspectives on colonialism, dispossession, clean water on reserves, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and other pressing topics demonstrate the potential of often-marginalized voices to intervene in and shift public and academic conversations about representations of the past.

*ActiveHistory.ca* has become increasingly invested in communicating the histories of those underrepresented in such dialogues, including refugees, African Canadians, people with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities. In so doing, its editors consciously join others who present blogging as a viable means of drawing together academic, community, and embodied identities to make space for marginalized peoples within online public spheres.<sup>21</sup> Yet *ActiveHistory.ca*'s editors remain all too aware of the inherent challenges of representing diverse voices and perspectives. They strive, if at times imperfectly, to seek out a range of scholarship, to make space for alternative and divergent ways of knowing and writing about the past, and to welcome and respond to productive critiques of their efforts in this vein.

Arguably, this set of best inclusive practices is especially necessary in subfields such as environmental history that remain older, whiter, and more masculine than is perhaps now the norm in the Canadian historical profession. To give just one example, *The Otter~La Loutre* and *Borealia*'s joint series on early Canadian environmental history included an introductory post with suggested readings on this topic.<sup>22</sup> The paucity of women authors on that reading list led to some productive and generous dialogue, both in the comments beneath the post and on Twitter, about gender and authorship in the subfields of early Canadian history and Canadian environmental history.<sup>23</sup> Like the editors of *ActiveHistory.ca*, those of *Borealia* and *The Otter~La Loutre* actively encourage multiple voices and approaches, but sometimes fall short of the mark, owing to structural reasons, personal myopia, or contingent circumstances. Happily, mistakes can engender useful conversations and renew editors' aspirational commitment to equitable representation on their blogs.

Finally, the place of non-tenure-track, alt-academic, and post-academic scholars in Canadian history blogging merits consideration. Blogging is one means by which these often exemplary writers and researchers can continue to intervene in scholarly debates and thereby participate in scholarly communities, to everyone's benefit. However, blogging is usually unpaid labour; as with many aspects of the academic economy, bloggers are paid in kind rather than coin. Editors should think especially carefully before asking non-tenure-track scholars, or those transitioning out of the academy, to work on the same terms as tenure-track or tenured scholars. As Melissa Gregg has argued, blogging may provide a means for emerging authors to contribute to what seems to be a radical democratization of knowledge in the Web 2.0 world. But they often only do so when precariously paid — if at all — and thoroughly overworked.<sup>24</sup> Some simply cannot afford to do so. When the editors of *Findings/Trouvailles* recently approached a post-academic scholar about writing a post, they replied, quite reasonably, that they no longer wrote for venues that did not pay them. As in the case of other underrepresented or marginalized scholars, we should make our blogs welcoming

places for such contributors, and should not hesitate to approach them. But we must remain mindful of such issues when we do so. While Canadian history blogging has produced more flexible, responsive, and inclusive modes of storytelling in front of larger and more heterogeneous audiences, it is imbricated with existing academic structures of power and privilege and may work to entrench, rather than subvert present inequities, despite blog editors' best intentions.

### Blogging and Publishing

No simple answer exists to the question of how academic history blogging relates to traditional print publishing. Blogs can complement scholarly publishing in several ways, but the medium is also pushing scholarly publication toward a more open-access model. Academic blogging can be situated at several points on what book historian Robert Darnton terms the "communications circuit."<sup>25</sup> Darnton's diagram maps the relationship between authors, publishers, consumers, and readers, highlighting the social production of knowledge. Historians currently use blogging to gain feedback in the early stages of writing and framing a project, to draw attention to book or journal publications, and to connect with readers throughout the research cycle. We agree with Julia Martin and Brian Hughes' definition of blogging as a form of publication that grants "scholars and researchers a more accessible avenue of discourse than peer-reviewed journals."<sup>26</sup>

Blogging can help writers in the pre-publication stages of historical communication. Writing to engage a broad public readership can help scholars become better writers and more effective communicators.<sup>27</sup> The format also provides historians with an opportunity to try out ideas, write a preliminary analysis of a research find, solicit sources, or initiate an informed conversation with readers on the direction of a project, using the comments sections of blogs or linked social media accounts. We also know of contributors who have been approached by university presses about book contracts on the basis of well-written blog posts outlining their research project.

In the new hybrid ecology of scholarly publication, blogging, along with other forms of social media, plays a vital role in the circulation of traditional print publications.<sup>28</sup> Canadian history blogs have developed various strategies to draw attention to new conventionally-published scholarship. At *Borealia*, Keith Grant curates a twice-yearly preview of new books in early Canadian history. Similarly, at *The Otter~La Loutre*, Alan MacEachern posts an annual “Booklook” featuring new monographs in environmental history, and other editors have written similar collaborative posts about new journal articles.<sup>29</sup> Every month, *The Otter~La Loutre*’s social media editor Jessica DeWitt selects the five best scholarly or popular articles about environmental history published online in the past month, and prepares a combined blog post and video interview with *Otter* editor-in-chief Sean Kheraj called “#EnvHist Worth Reading.”<sup>30</sup> Inspired by and often in collaboration with *The Otter~La Loutre*, *Active-History.ca* has published pieces that highlight ten publications meant to help contextualize a pressing contemporary issue. Some of these posts have focused on the Idle No More Movement, debates over vaccinations, or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s impact on the practice of history.<sup>31</sup>

Several Canadian history blogs also publish author interviews, book reviews, and essays on recent historiography, taking advantage of their accelerated editorial process to engage with new monographs and emerging trends in research months (or even years) before major print journals. *Acadiensis*, for example, uses its blog to publish reviews of single books, while the print journal remains committed to longer review essays that assess multiple works. Some reviews therefore appear on the blog long before they would be seen in print. That journals such as *Acadiensis* treat their blog as an extension of the print publication suggests that the role of blogs and social media in the circulation of scholarship should be taken into account alongside traditional citations when measuring scholarly impact.<sup>32</sup>

Blogs associated with print publications not only aid the latter’s circulation, but can also provide an additional layer of online content, as mentioned above.<sup>33</sup> As an initiative of The

Champlain Society, an organization dedicated to publishing scholarly works and editions, *Findings/Trouvailles* occasionally features posts directly related to larger book projects. Sandra Alston's piece on a mid-nineteenth-century "Canadian ball" at Rivière-du-Loup provided a taste of the material in William Ord Mackenzie's journal, a scholarly edition of which appeared under the Champlain Society's imprint later that year.<sup>34</sup> The *Acadiensis* blog encourages scholars to contribute a blog post as a "movie trailer" for their research — a short, pithy piece that captures some of what their study has done, and which links to the longer-form article published in *Acadiensis*. Writing for an academic blog, then, can complement several stages of scholarly communication, from effective writing and intellectual exchanges about research to circulating print publications and enhancing them with digital content. Yet blogs can also push beyond the boundaries of traditional publications.

Blogging is one of the purest forms of open-access publishing, fuelled by an almost unmitigated desire to "engag[e] with a wider community."<sup>35</sup> There are no blackouts, paywalls, or embargos limiting access to blog posts. Recently, SSHRC has encouraged Canadian scholarly journals to make their content more accessible to members of the public, who support research through their tax dollars. This process has often been fraught with difficulties as journals strive to protect the subscription bases upon which their economic viability rests. Free from such financial considerations, Canadian history blogs make their content available as a matter of choice. Many blogs use some variety of Creative Commons licensing to specify how their content can be further distributed. *ActiveHistory.ca*, in particular, has strongly advocated for the free and unfettered provision of rigorous historical scholarship to the general public.<sup>36</sup>

Some of *Findings/Trouvailles'* posts have responded directly to specific requests from different groups to make primary sources openly accessible. Stacy Nation-Knapper wrote a post to honour an Indigenous community's request to make a source available to community members online while further research is conducted into the material's broader significance.<sup>37</sup> Similarly,



Donald McLeod published a post during Toronto's LGBTQ Pride celebration to fulfill community members' queries about a source related to this event and its history.<sup>38</sup> In these ways and others, Canadian history blogging has been a form of community-driven and -supported publication that enhances public access to archival sources and their interpretation by professional historians.<sup>39</sup> As Rohan Maitzen writes, "Blogging — free, accessible, interactive — restores immediacy to scholarly discussion, removes logistical roadblocks to knowledge dissemination, and up-ends the communication/validation hierarchy in favour of the open exchange of ideas. Is that not what academic publishing is actually supposed to accomplish?"<sup>40</sup>

In some cases, the line between blogs and traditional publications is blurring, creating new blended or hybrid genres with the potential to reverse or reconfigure usual trajectories of scholarly publication. *The Otter~La Loutre* has now published close to ten special series of posts on subjects as varied as hydroelectric dams, human-animal relationships, and winter in Canadian history.<sup>41</sup> Some series feature new and emerging research at the intersection of environmental history and another thematic field, including the history of science and technology, labour and working-class history, and the history of gender and sexuality.<sup>42</sup> Over time, *Otter* editors plan to convert some of these series into free e-books to broaden the reach and maintain the accessibility of these posts, which will otherwise become increasingly difficult to locate on the blog as new content is heaped atop old. Likewise, *Borealia* has discussed with a university press the possibility of publishing thematic volumes in both e-book and print formats, similar to those produced in the University of Calgary Press' Canadian History and Environment series.

We believe that enhancing access to historical research, whether published online or offline, can only benefit the profession. Yet we recognize that peer review remains an essential, if sometimes contested, aspect not only of scholarly publication, but also of the processes of hiring, tenure, and promotion, as we explore below. Canadian history blogs have only begun to experiment with peer review. Originally, *ActiveHistory.ca's* "Papers" section invited

longer-form (3,000–4,000 words) research or evidence-based opinion essays, attempting to distinguish these more rigorous “papers” from typical posts. The peer-review process solicited feedback about an essay’s strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for its improvement, but also prioritized accessible writing and a streamlined publishing schedule. Most peer-reviewed essays appeared online within four to six weeks of submission. Over time, however, the line between blog posts and papers began to blur, making this process increasingly unclear and unfair to some authors. For example, editors occasionally ran timely long-form blog posts without peer review, while continuing to require that opinion essays undergo peer review. In the recent revamping of *ActiveHistory.ca*, the Papers section has come to emphasize “features”; it now houses a broader cross-section of resources available on the site. These include blog series, classroom resources, and book reviews, in addition to long-form essays that are no longer peer-reviewed. The decision to reorganize *ActiveHistory.ca* in this way was ultimately intended to clarify the kind of ambiguities detailed above, which, in turn, arise out of blogging’s evolving position within cycles of academic writing and publishing.

The group or multi-author blogs characteristic of contemporary Canadian history blogging fall somewhere between individually-authored blogs and conventional publication venues. They are one form of the “middle ground” that Julia Martin and Brian Hughes call “Small *p* Publishing,” defined as “a space between peer-reviewed discourse and classroom discussion or less-formal academic writing.” Martin and Hughes argue that by “taking the ease of the blogging environment and adding some of the certification provided by traditional publishing, . . . this form of expression can become more professionally useful and incorporate more members of the academic and professional community.”<sup>43</sup> Whether Canada’s collaborative and multi-author history blogs remain a mediating presence in the publishing “middle ground” or move increasingly toward the peer-reviewed end of the spectrum is yet to be seen. Their present relationship to modes of traditional publishing tilts that activity in the direction of broader access, widening the circulation of Canadian historical scholarship.

## Blogging and Teaching

Although twenty-first-century students' "digital nativity" has been rightly critiqued in recent years, when confronted with a topic new to them, most students do naturally turn to Google.<sup>44</sup> Students are intimately familiar with digital genres of writing such as Wikipedia entries, blog posts, and articles on popular journalistic websites and news aggregators. They may not, however, be critical readers of such content, and they may not have had much practice writing in these genres themselves. Engaging with blogs as readers and writers hones and extends digital literacy skills introduced at earlier stages of students' education. It also enables instructors to achieve learning objectives or educational goals common to post-secondary history courses, including those related to participatory learning, critical reading and writing, and the cultivation of civic-mindedness and empathy through exposure to the past.<sup>45</sup> Recently, editors of Canadian history blogs have become aware that their materials are increasingly being used in secondary and post-secondary classrooms, and are beginning to provide pedagogically-useful resources for instructors based at such institutions.

Instructors should not hesitate to assign blog posts as readings in their courses, despite their lack of peer review. We believe that the quality of the piece is far more important than the medium in which it appears. Just because something has appeared on a blog doesn't mean it can't engage and inform students, just as the appearance of a piece in a peer-reviewed journal does not guarantee its admittance to syllabi. When selecting blog posts, the instructor may need to assume some of the professional responsibility normally shouldered by peer reviewers and journal editors. They should consider whether the piece is appropriate for use in their classroom, and may choose to supplement it with readings published in more conventional scholarly venues.

By openly discussing these kinds of judgments and other issues surrounding blog posts in their classrooms, instructors can help students view the information that they read on their screens in a more critical light. In high school, students tend to

encounter digital literacy predominantly in the context of safety. In post-secondary settings, instructors can draw on students' familiarity with blogs to initiate wide-ranging conversations about material published online and how to discern between reliable and less reliable resources found there. Students can then build upon their existing digital literacy skills by engaging in more sophisticated debates about online content, sources, and the methodologies used to produce these. In many cases, these conversations complement those that many history instructors conduct regarding the judicious use of primary and secondary sources in print. They extend students' budding analytical expertise concerning source material into the digital realm.<sup>46</sup>

Reading blog posts can also lead students to cultivate traits that are highly valued in historical and humanistic education, including empathy and civic-mindedness. Posts published on Canadian history blogs can encourage students to reflect critically upon their own experiences as Canadians, and to situate those experiences within larger historical narratives and trajectories. This sharpens their sense of similarity and difference between the lives of past and present-day Canadians, which, in turn, can instill empathetic, inclusive notions of "Canadianness" across time and space. In Tina Adcock's classroom, Ian Mosby's posts about analyzing cookbooks as primary documents, and about his grandmother viewing cooking as drudgery, inspired students to discuss consonant experiences around food, gender, and labour in their own family histories.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, by featuring a lively writing style and content with contemporary relevance, blog posts help combat the elephant in all of our classrooms: the notion that Canadian history is intrinsically boring. Students appreciate it when instructors make an effort to choose interesting readings. Canadian history blogs offer a wealth of fascinating, yet academically rigorous perspectives upon our country's past.

It is equally, if not even more worthwhile for students to produce as well as consume digital pieces of writing.<sup>48</sup> Using academic blogs like those discussed here as their models, assignments that require students to blog aid their cultivation of traditional history-writing skills. Students practice framing an

argument, citing sources appropriately, and situating their arguments in historiographical context, much as they would for a research paper. Yet a blog post teaches students more naturally about style, narrative, and effective public communication than does a traditional essay, especially if the assignment or course has a public history component. Equipping students with the facility to write clearly and well often figures prominently among our course outcomes, but it is a task for which we do not always provide a suitable medium. Beth Robertson, for instance, found value in simulating the blog-writing experience by creating reflective online exercises centred around different kinds of media in which students practiced writing critically-informed pieces for a broader audience. By adopting a mode of writing familiar to them as readers, but which they did not associate with academic learning, students seemed better able to wrestle with complex concepts.

Reading and writing blog posts can also be incorporated into graduate coursework to good effect. Graduate students preparing for comprehensive exams or striving to master particular fields ahead of writing theses can benefit from posts that introduce specific historiographical themes to a general readership, such as those hosted by the early American history blog *The Junto*, or that provide learned discussions of fields.<sup>49</sup> Blog-writing, meanwhile, may prove an even more beneficial exercise in graduate than undergraduate courses. Early-career graduate students can all too easily use the linguistic and structural conventions of academic writing as a convenient crutch upon which to lean. By asking students to communicate academic findings clearly but rigorously for a mixed audience, instructors can help them find their own scholarly voice — an important step in their professional development. Especially when given free rein with respect to topic and approach, graduate students seem to find the experience of blogging simultaneously enjoyable and useful.

As the connection between blogging and teaching strengthens, Canadian history blogs have begun to provide resources for post-secondary instructors. These resources often complement those available on purpose-built historical education websites,

such as that operated by The History Education Network/Histoire et Éducation en Réseau (THEN/HiER).<sup>50</sup> A growing number of teaching resources and education-themed posts have appeared on *ActiveHistory.ca* in recent years.<sup>51</sup> Both *The Otter~La Loutre* specifically and NiCHE's website more generally offer resources for instructors of environmental history. In the mini-series "Portrait of a Country," *Otter* editor Claire Campbell highlights visual resources available online that can be used to teach important themes in Canadian environmental history — the North, wilderness, and so on. In February 2016, *The Otter~La Loutre* published a two-part post on the "greatest hits" of Canadian environmental history, in which editors selected scholarly works published before 1990 that they still found useful in the classroom.<sup>52</sup> NiCHE's website devotes a page to teaching materials, including suggested textbooks and sample syllabi for Canadian and North American environmental history courses.<sup>53</sup> Over at *Borealia*, meanwhile, Kathryn Magee Labelle has provided instructors teaching the pre-Confederation survey with specific biographical content about often-overlooked Indigenous actors.<sup>54</sup>

Although most of our knowledge about blogging and its integration into Canadian history classrooms is anecdotal, more and more post-secondary instructors seem to be including blog posts on their syllabi and experimenting with assignments that incorporate blogging. Some fruits of Canadian history blogging, particularly those published by *Borealia*, are finding their way into high school classrooms as well. The editors of *Borealia* hope to learn more about the pedagogical niche that these posts occupy in such spaces, and to consider how they can intentionally support such uses in ways that respect and reflect the nature of the genre and its present place within the scholarly publishing ecosystem.

### Blogging, Scholarship, and Service

Like scholars in other fields, Canadian historians continue to debate the exact value and place of blogging in academia. Should blogging count as scholarship, or service? As knowledge

creation, or knowledge mobilization? Does blogging ultimately hinder, or help the prospects of early-career academics applying for postdoctoral fellowships and tenure-track positions, and their more senior counterparts applying for tenure and promotion? If blogging can lead to junior scholars' (further) marginalization within academe, more established scholars may wish to reconsider the wisdom and ethics of courting them as authors and editors. We consider blogging to be scholarship as well as service, but acknowledge that its recognition as scholarship depends largely on the culture of the department or university with which one is affiliated, or at which one is seeking to gain employment. Yet more and more scholars are now recognizing established collaborative and multi-author Canadian history blogs as forums for publication as well as knowledge dissemination and public engagement. Blog editors can help make Canadian historians more familiar with and invested in this kind of history-writing. This may, in turn, help to solidify and naturalize blogging's place within disciplinary rhythms of work and its assessment.

Rohan Maitzen has suggested that "academic blogging can and should have an acknowledged place in the overall ecology of scholarship."<sup>55</sup> While we concur with Maitzen in principle, we believe that the more salient question is how to quantify blogging as a form of scholarship, especially given its neophyte status in the academy. There is no consensus regarding how to record blogging in curricula vitae, or how much weight to accord blog posts placed under the heading of publications. The scale of the form makes some scholars pause. Although posts often originate from larger research projects, the time and effort expended in writing a blog post is obviously nowhere near that required to produce a peer-reviewed article or book chapter, let alone a monograph. Moreover, given that blog posts do not undergo formal peer review, some scholars are understandably chary of recognizing them as fully-fledged works of scholarship. Blog posts are perhaps akin to book reviews or op-eds: they count for something, but not for anywhere as much as a more substantive piece of research.



Even as blogging constitutes a form of scholarship, it is also a vector for academic service and public outreach. Blogs disseminate scholarly research far more widely than most peer-reviewed journals or academic monographs. Corey Slumkoski, for example, has enjoyed much greater engagement with the general public through his blog posts and stewardship of the *Acadiensis* blog than through any of his peer-reviewed publications. Blogging may yet become a standard form of service within the historical discipline. As Nancy Janovicek pointed out during the discussion that followed the roundtable on which this article is based, many academics work in publicly-funded institutions or are otherwise supported by public funds. They have a responsibility to convey their research findings to the public that supports them. Academic history blogging thus becomes a “means of accountability” to that audience.<sup>56</sup> It is ironic that this singularly useful means of promoting our discipline to laypeople, including potential history students in an era of declining humanities enrollments, is still not consistently regarded as a meaningful contribution by our academic peers and colleagues.

Given blogging’s tenuous place within academic hierarchies of labour and prestige, we believe that graduate students aspiring to traditional academic careers should carefully consider how to balance this kind of writing with the work of publishing peer-reviewed articles. This point must be made precisely *because* blogging, as a form of publication, can be really alluring. A blog post can be written in days rather than weeks or months. It requires fewer and less fundamental revisions than does a refereed article. The length of time between composition and publication is comparatively short, and writers receive near-instantaneous feedback in the form of comments, likes, and tweets. But blog posts are not substitutes for the kind of scholarly work that hiring committees and tenure and promotion committees expect early-career researchers to produce, and that takes substantial time and labour to do well.<sup>57</sup> Blogging may provide junior scholars with valuable exposure and networking opportunities, but it will not lead to a permanent academic post in and of itself. Early in one’s academic career, the energy and creativity

needed to write blog posts should not hinder or replace the effort required to produce more conventional (and conventionally-rewarded) publications.

Nor will editorial work on blogs necessarily help graduate students, precariously employed scholars, or untenured scholars secure a permanent position or promotion. For example, Corey Slumkoski accepted the editorship of the *Acadiensis* blog not only because it would grant him an active role in the evolving world of digital history, including blogging, but also because it came with an editorial position with *Acadiensis*, that of digital communications editor. He knew that even if his department's Rank, Tenure, and Promotion committee declined to consider his digital editorial work a meaningful contribution to the field, serving on the editorial committee of a prestigious academic journal would carry weight. Faced with the prospect that peers and colleagues may not accord much value to blogging, academics who write for and edit blogs may need to present that work according to conventional understandings of academic labour, since their digital toil will be assessed within such frameworks. Writing posts for a collaborative or multi-author blog can be framed as a form of scholarly impact in one's tenure package, or as a means of knowledge mobilization in a research grant proposal. Editing a thematic blog is best packaged as service to the discipline, particularly if that blog is affiliated with a scholarly society or journal or housed within a university department, centre, or institute.

Caveats aside, a growing number of early-career Canadian historians have derived tangible professional benefits from digital historical scholarship and service, whether through writing for and editing blogs, microblogging on Twitter, or maintaining a visible, thoughtfully-curated online presence on social media or their own independent professional websites. We know of one scholar who was invited to co-edit a peer-reviewed collection, now under contract with the University of British Columbia Press, by a tenured colleague whom they had met only once in person, but who had been impressed by their tweets. Corey Slumkoski and Tina Adcock, along with other blog editors now in tenured or tenure-track positions, confirm that their early-career digital

historical activities set them apart from other job applicants and increased their visibility within academic networks, even if they did not directly produce job offers.<sup>58</sup>

We suggest that blog editors, most of whom are still in the early stages of their own careers, afford (other) early-career researchers the same consideration as untenured or precariously employed scholars. Emerging scholars must engage in an ever-increasing number of tasks simply to be considered viable candidates in highly competitive job markets.<sup>59</sup> Blogging may come to be experienced as yet another requirement imposed upon an overworked and often meagerly compensated segment of academia.<sup>60</sup> Canadian history blogs should open their doors to such scholars, but leave it up to individuals to decide whether or not they wish to cross that threshold. The experience of *Findings/Trouvailles*, which has specifically sought to feature the research of emerging Canadian historians, is instructive. Of 50 posts published over three-and-a-half years, only 18 were written by early-career scholars. Seven were written by early-to mid-career scholars. Because of the many demands on such scholars' time, *Findings/Trouvailles* has had difficulty soliciting posts from the very demographic its editors set out to work with most closely.

Interested early-career academics should have the opportunity not only to write for multi-authored blogs, but to serve as editors, too. When *Findings/Trouvailles* expanded their editorial committee in January 2016, editors made the conscious decision to bring two doctoral candidates, Travis Hay and Abril Liberatori, aboard. Daniel Ross, who joined the editorial collective of *ActiveHistory.ca* as a doctoral candidate but who has since defended, has been an invaluable public outreach coordinator. Not unlike internships with peer-reviewed journals, positions on a blog's editorial board give early-career scholars the opportunity to meet junior and senior scholars hailing from all corners of the country, to encounter scholarly writing of all styles and at all stages of completion, and to make a good first impression through careful and generous editorial work and through courteous professional behaviour more generally.

Given the widespread, if not always accurate perception that blogging is a young scholar's game, history blogging may become the front line of a new "history war" waged between advocates of the digital humanities and scholars of more traditional proclivities. Even the most technophobic scholars now acknowledge the benefits that digital advances have conferred upon the historical discipline. It would be difficult to find a historian today who laments the use of a word processor to write, or who decries the existence of online journals. Yet these things are digital replications of analog aspects of historical practice. Scholars wrote articles and read journals prior to computers and the Internet; these technologies have merely eased and enriched the work of scholars and increased their productivity. Blogging, however, has no analog comparator. Multi-author blogs did not exist in a predigital age. Writing for such a blog might well be many scholars' first foray into digital history, as it is unlikely that they would commence by crunching big data or performing text analysis. History blogging, then, may help to win over scholars who might not consider digital historical or humanities projects as rigorous or valuable as traditional forms of scholarship and service. Indeed, this process is already underway. While some mid- or late-career scholars may remain reluctant to count blog posts as scholarship, they are generally reading at least some of the posts published on Canadian history blogs.

Blog editors can facilitate such scholars' acclimatization, and perhaps eventually conversion to digital history by deliberately reaching out to this one, last underrepresented group — underrepresented among digital historians, anyway — and inviting them to write a post. Generational or age-based assumptions about the makeup of the history blogging community may actually be dissuading some mid- and late-career academics from participating. We have found that even senior scholars are often genuinely flattered to be approached, and that many are willing to contribute posts. Afterwards, some have thanked editors for the opportunity to re-engage with their long-term research projects, however fleetingly, in the midst of seemingly never-ending teaching and administrative duties, and for the pleasure that

they derived both from writing the post and witnessing people's reactions to it. If, by becoming bloggers themselves, some "traditional" historians might come to take digital historical work more seriously, then more outreach toward the upper as well as the lower end of the career spectrum should occur.

In time, blogging may become a natural part of historical work, a typical, although not obligatory step in a piece's journey from conception to publication. This will depend, however, on the goodwill of established scholars in their capacity as editors as well as authors. Currently, a scholar conducts research, writes up the results in a paper, presents that paper at one or more conferences, revises it based on feedback received informally from one's colleagues, and then submits it to a journal, where it is formally reviewed. Publishing a blog post could easily become part of this process. Blogging would enable authors to reach a wider and more varied audience more efficiently, solicit a broader range of comments and suggestions, and thus tune the paper more finely before it arrives in a journal editor's inbox.

Threading blogs into the publication process may be further facilitated by the structural similarities emerging between group and multi-author blogs and scholarly journals. Rebecca Goetz contends that most such blogs tend "to function more like journals, publishing book reviews, interviews with new authors, and ... generally longer pieces."<sup>61</sup> But editors of academic journals will need to view such blogs as collaborators rather than competitors in the work of publication. Potential contributors to the *Acadiensis* blog have sometimes hesitated to submit posts, fearing that doing so might negatively affect their chances of publishing similar research in *Acadiensis* one day. Aware of such concerns, the editorial board of *Acadiensis* decided that posting a piece on the *Acadiensis* blog would not disqualify a longer version of that piece from being accepted for publication in the journal. We hope that the editorial boards of other academic journals adopt similar policies with regard to blogging more broadly.

Blogging is both scholarship and service. It often mobilizes research and writing practices similar, if not identical, to those required to produce traditional modes of scholarship. But it also

encompasses elements of community engagement and scholarly networking that reflect and help fulfill expectations of academic service. Whether blogging hinders or helps academic careers in a formal sense depends on the person, the place, and a host of contingent and shifting factors, although it appears to be gaining ground and approbation within the Canadian historical discipline. When managed well and integrated thoughtfully into historians' regular cycles of labour and expected duties and responsibilities, blogging can benefit individual historians, the academic community, and the larger public we should be striving to reach.

### Conclusion: Blogging and Community

Blogging has already reshaped the work of researching, teaching, and communicating Canadian history in manifold ways. It has usefully broadened the discipline's range of narrators and narrative forms, and increased the potential reach of the narratives that result. It has allowed academic research to travel faster and farther than ever before, both prior to and after its publication in conventional scholarly forums. It provides students with the opportunity to refine skills associated with digital literacy and the comprehension and composition of scholarly writing, and instructors with the means to achieve learning objectives central to teaching history at the post-secondary level. Finally, it enables both junior and senior scholars to connect with like-minded peers and members of the public, and often to derive personal and professional benefits from doing so. While the labour of blogging has the potential to reinscribe persistent imbalances of power within the academy and Canadian society, it may also offer marginalized individuals and groups with the means to broadcast their perspectives more widely. If the Canadian history blogging community commits to operating on a care-full, thoughtful, and continually self-reflective basis, and is willing to learn from its missteps and mistakes, we see every reason to be optimistic about its future.

We conclude on a variation of the theme of inclusiveness that runs throughout the essay by reflecting upon the community-building capacities of Canadian history blogging. Blogs can

help construct academic communities from scratch, as NiCHE's website and *The Otter~La Loutre* has done for the subfield of Canadian environmental history. They can provide space online to expand existing communities and heighten the profile of particular subfields, as *Borealia* is doing for scholars of early Canadian history. They can continue and broaden conversations begun at academic conferences, as in the case of *ActiveHistory.ca*, now among Canada's foremost multi-author blogs. They can draw historians specializing in disparate nations or regions together by inaugurating interdisciplinary conversations around certain themes or sets of questions, as the *Notches* blog has done for the history of sexuality, or the *Age of Revolutions* blog has done for the concept of revolutions in history.<sup>62</sup> Finally, blogs can bridge the divide between paper-based and digital scholarship, helping staid academic journals such as *Acadiensis* and *BC Studies* find a foothold in the Web 2.0 world of scholarly communication.

We are now entering a new phase of community-building in the Canadian history blogosphere. Collaborative and multi-author Canadian history blogs have traditionally served as structural and practical models for each other, and have shared some editorial personnel. But they have otherwise operated largely in isolation, even as they have each become vibrant gathering places for Canadian historians and fellow travellers. In the last year, however, we have seen more and more cross-platform collaborations, both within and beyond Canada. In May 2016, *Borealia* and *The Otter~La Loutre* hosted a joint series on early Canadian environmental history, capitalizing on the energy and expertise of contributors and readers from both subfields. In 2016–17, *The Otter~La Loutre* and the Wisconsin-based “digital magazine” *Edge Effects* are co-hosting “Seeds,” a series that showcases the research of emerging Canadian and American environmental historians.<sup>63</sup> Smaller-scale partnerships have occurred between *Borealia* and both the *Acadiensis* blog and *ActiveHistory.ca* in Canada, and with *The Junto* and *The Republic* blogs on early American history in the United States.<sup>64</sup>

The proliferation of group and multi-author blogs has created greater vibrancy and momentum in the Canadian digital



historical community. It has fostered an atmosphere of collaboration, not competition; it has produced greater cohesion between the readers and writers of these blogs, rather than their fragmentation or dispersal. Just as a street full of used bookshops becomes a destination, so the growth of history blogging in Canada has raised the medium's profile. We hope that the ever-growing collegiality and conviviality of the Canadian history blogosphere will entice more historians to read, write, and edit blogs themselves, to experience the joys and benefits of blogging directly, and perhaps to adjust their estimations of this activity accordingly.

Such a development would benefit not only the profession, but Canadian society. In tandem with broader ideals of "active history" and community-engaged research, history blogging can help break down the all-too-persistent myth of the disengaged ivory-tower academic, both in the eyes of scholars themselves and members of the public. Beth Robertson remembers being told in one of her first graduate seminars that if anyone in the room thought they could change the world by doing history, they should leave now. Perhaps no one history blogger or digital historian has the ability to change the world, at least not radically. But professional historians are still constituent members of Canadian society, capable of making meaningful contributions to public debates, to policy-making, and to commonly-held understandings of Canadian culture and nation. Blogging offers a user-friendly, easily accessible means to do just that. And even if digital historians wind up leaving Canada much as it was when they began, blogging may still affect the way they understand, situate, and carry themselves as researchers and scholars in the wider world.

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## Endnotes

- 1 For the characteristics of collaborative (or group) and multi-author blogs, see Patrick Dunleavy, "Shorter, better, faster, free: Blogging changes the nature of academic research, not just how it is communicated," *LSE Impact Blog*, 28 December 2014, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/12/28/shorter-better-faster-free/> and Sadie Bergen, "From Personal to Professional: Collaborative History Blogs Go Mainstream," *Perspectives on History*, April 2017, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2017/from-personal-to-professional-collaborative-history-blogs-go-mainstream/>.
- 2 In addition to those discussed herein, other collaborative and multi-author Canadian history blogs include that run by the peer-reviewed journal *BC Studies* (<http://www.bcstudies.com/?q=blog>), and *Teaching the Past*, hosted by The History Education Network/Histoire et Éducation en Réseau (THEN/HiER) (<http://thenhier.ca/en/node/1043>). Important single-author Canadian history blogs include Christopher Moore's *History News* (<http://christophermoorehistory.blogspot.ca/>), Andrew Smith's *The Past Speaks* (<https://pastspeaks.com/>), and Andrea Eiding's *Unwritten Histories* (<http://www.unwrittenhistories.com/>).
- 3 Corey Slumkoski discusses some of the blogs and websites featured here in "History on the Internet 2.0: The Rise of Social Media," *Acadiensis* 41, no. 2 (2012): 153–62. Katherine O'Flaherty and Robert Gee discuss Canadian scholars' use of the microblogging service Twitter in "'Inviting Coworkers': Linking Scholars of Atlantic Canada on the Twitter Backchannel," *Acadiensis* 41, no. 2 (2012): 143–52. On digital Canadian history and digital humanities in Canada, see, for example, Corey Slumkoski, Margaret Conrad and Lisa Charlong, "History on the Internet: The Atlantic Canada Portal," *Acadiensis* 37, no. 1 (2008): 100–9; John Bonnett and Kevin Kee, "Transitions: A Prologue and Preview of Digital Humanities Research in Canada," *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique* 1, no. 2 (2009): [http://www.digitalstudies.org/ojs/index.php/digital\\_studies/article/view/167/222](http://www.digitalstudies.org/ojs/index.php/digital_studies/article/view/167/222); Sasha Mullally, "Democratizing the Past?: Canada's History on the World Wide Web," in *Settling and Unsettling Memories: Essays in Canadian Public History*, ed. Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 235–66; Corey Slumkoski, "Regional History in a Digital Age: The Problems and Prospects of Atlantic Canadian Studies," *Scholarly and Research Communication*

- 4, no. 3 (2013): 0301117, 10 pp.; Jennifer Bonnell and Marcel Fortin, eds., *Historical GIS Research in Canada* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2014).
- 4 Key works on digital history include Roy Rosenzweig, “Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (2006): 117–46; Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Roy Rosenzweig, *Clio Wired: The Future of the Past in the Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Daniel J. Cohen, et al., “Interchange: The Promise of Digital History,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008): 452–91. The American Historical Association (AHA) has prominently encouraged conversations about digital history. See especially “Guidelines for the Evaluation of Digital Scholarship in History,” <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/digital-history-resources/evaluation-of-digital-scholarship-in-history/guidelines-for-the-evaluation-of-digital-scholarship-in-history>, <viewed 8 July 2016>; “Resources for Getting Started in Digital History,” December 2014, <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/digital-history-resources/resources-for-getting-started-in-digital-history>. On blogging and historical scholarship, see Alex Sayf Cummings and Jonathan Jarrett, “Only Typing? Informal Writing, Blogging, and the Academy,” in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, ed. Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 246–58.
- 5 Scholars in other fields have already begun to consider blogging’s effects upon academic practices. See, for example, Melissa Gregg, “Feeling Ordinary: Blogging as Conversational Scholarship,” *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 2006): 147–60; Aaron Barlow, *Blogging America: The New Public Sphere* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008); Gill Kirkup, “Academic Blogging: Academic Practice and Academic Identity,” *London Review of Education* 8, no. 1 (March 2010): 75–84; Tania Heap and Shailey Minocha, “An Empirically Grounded Framework to Guide Blogging for Digital Scholarship,” *Research in Learning Technology: ALT-C Conference Proceedings* (2012): 176–88; Karen Fricker, “Blogging,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 25, no. 1 (2015): 39–45.
- 6 Moore, *History News; History & Policy*, <http://www.historyandpolicy.org>.
- 7 “About,” *ActiveHistory.ca*, <http://activehistory.ca/about/>, <viewed 2 July 2016>.
- 8 One occasion on which *ActiveHistory.ca* fostered public engagement recently was at its second conference, “New Directions in Active History: Institutions, Communications and Technologies,” held in 2015. There, federal servants discussed the importance of historical thinking to government policy, and curators and archivists considered how the

findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are reshaping their practice. Alan Corbiere also spoke about his work as the Anishinaabemowin Revitalization Program Coordinator at Lakeview School, M'Chigeeng First Nation. Although the conference happened in real time, the variety of topics, ideas and voices on display there reflected the kind of vibrant online conversations that *ActiveHistory.ca* has helped foster since its inception. Videos of some of the panels (<http://activehistory.ca/videos-from-new-directions-in-active-history-2015/>) and blog posts emerging from the conference were posted to the website. The event also led to other initiatives and collaborations between the blog and groups such as the Graphic History Collective (GHC) that have endeavoured to insert alternative and lesser-known narratives into the public conversation surrounding the 150th anniversary of Confederation. See especially *ActiveHistory.ca*'s cross-posting of the GHC's activist art project "Remember | Resist | Redraw: A Radical History Poster Project," e.g., 31 January 2017, <http://activehistory.ca/2017/01/remember-resist-redraw-1/>.

- 9 The newsletter helped disseminate early *Otter* content more widely than would otherwise have been the case, as many academics still preferred to read material on paper rather than on their screens. Jim Clifford recalls that one person printed the newsletter off and read it on the bus long before they began reading *The Otter~La Loutre* regularly online. Personal communication with author, 9 March 2017.
- 10 "About Us: The Mission of the Champlain Society," The Champlain Society, <http://www.champlainsociety.ca/about-us/>, <viewed 12 July 2016>.
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