One hundred and ten years ago, in June of 1899, a pamphlet was launched that became the foundation for one of the oldest historical journals in Canada. Originally called Papers and Records and after 1947 continued as Ontario History, this publication was just one of many new initiatives undertaken when the Pioneer and Historical Association of the Province of Ontario was transformed into The Ontario Historical Society (OHS) at the end of the nineteenth century. Founded in 1888 as a federation of eight local historical societies, the members soon realized that the Association must expand its horizons and widen its terms of reference if it was to succeed as a provincial historical society. Months of debate and discussion, lobbying for support from the provincial government and an extensive exploration of all the alternatives followed. Finally, the Association came to the decision that the membership must be broadened, a permanent home found and a new constitution drafted. At a special meeting of the Association on 23 May 1898, chaired by President James Coyne, the new constitution was adopted that contained the commitment that “The Society shall engage in the collection, preservation, exhibition and publication of materials for the study of history, especially the history of Ontario and Canada.” President Coyne also anticipated the arrival of this new initiative in the Annual Report of the OHS for 1898 with the declaration “Through this publication The Ontario Histori-
The members who received their copy that day were greeted with this message from the editor, David Boyle:

**Introductory.**

The Ontario Historical Society herewith presents to its members the first volume of what is hoped will be a long list of valuable records and papers. The Editorial Committee regards itself as fortunate in securing copies of the Langhorn and McDowall Registers, which have been obtained through the good services of Mr. T.W. Casey, of Napane. These covered what was known as the Midland District, but, as the descendants of the persons mentioned therein are now widely scattered over the whole Province, they will doubtless be of increasing value to a very large number of persons. The existence of these Registers has been known to very few—one of them, the Langhorn St. Paul's Register came to light only after part of this publication had been sent to the printer. It is now in the safe keeping of the officials of the Kingston Diocese.

The two Thomson letters are particularly valuable in shedding light on the apparently haphazard way in which our lake and river international boundary line has been drawn; and for the first time Canadians will have an opportunity not only to respect the memory of the British Commissioner for his work, but to feel thankful that we were, on the occasion of the settlement, represented by a man who was thoroughly capable scientifically, and who so firmly stood by the treaty rights. For the privilege of copying these documents we have to thank Mr. Aubrey White, Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Province of Ontario.

The character of these and of the other papers and records in this issue is sufficient to show in a general way the scope of what our Society has in view by way of publication. There is no lack of material. Several municipal records of early date have recently been unearthed, and from these much may be gathered respecting the development of our present system of local government. A large portion of this Province is now beyond the mere bread-and-butter condition; and with an admirable school system, the time has come when our old people may, with dignified leisure, recall the days of old, while it is the duty, as well as the privilege, of the younger generations to study by-gone events in the light of the present day, and to lay the foundations of the future aided by the experience of the past.

The “pamphlet” that Coyne introduced that day was Volume I of the Papers and Records and also included a copy of An Act to incorporate the Ontario Historical Society, the names of the members of the Board of Directors, the thirteen Ex-officio members and the seventy elected members, as well as eighteen papers and records.

One hundred and ten years later as we review the life and times of Papers and Records and Ontario History, it is nothing short of a miracle that this publication has survived. As one individual project of the OHS it has been firmly tied, for most of its life, to the parent organization for its very survival, and so at times of scarce resources, diminishing budgets and uncertain fortunes, the editors have often been forced to suddenly cut corners, cut the size of the publication or delay publication altogether due to the lack of funds. In the Society’s Annual Report for 1900, when the Society and the journal were just one year old, President Coyne announced “The Society is hampered in its operations for want of funds” and in 1902 Papers and Records did not appear.

The original publishing grant from the Ministry of Education in 1898 was $500, but by 1914 it had only grown to $800 annually, while the membership who received the journal as part of their $1 membership fee, had grown to 400, thus putting a tremendous strain on the budget. As a result, President Clarence Warner personally assumed the cost of publishing the 1916 issue, as did several other presidents in subsequent years. The Society and the journal were to suffer many other financial setbacks, one of the most severe during the Depression in the mid-1930s, when publishing was often suspended for lack of funds. Despite the challenges, the journal continued to be the only regular publication of the Society, and as a result often carried a great deal of extraneous material that included names of officers, committee members, presidential addresses, reports of annual general meetings, affiliated societies’ reports, and much more, in addition to the papers, records and essays for which it had been designed.

The OHS did not regain its moment...
Our membership today is approximately five hundred – the largest at any time in the past sixty years. It is, however, far below that of sister societies in American states with less population and wealth and whose historic past is far more commonplace.

The reason is that there are thousands of Ontario residents who, though keenly interested in local history, have never heard of the Historical Society or do not know that they would be welcomed as members.

Tell your friends and acquaintances about the Ontario Historical Society. Show them copies of its publications, and many of them will want to join. Take their names and the $2.00 annual fee and send them in to the Secretary. If every member did this our membership would more than double in 1949.

On behalf of the Executive we wish you all a happy and prosperous 1949.8

It was not until the Annual General Meeting in Ottawa in 1954 that the membership fee for the Society was increased from $2.00 to $3.00 per year to be effective January 1955, and single copies of Ontario History would be available for $1.00.

As Canadians prepared to celebrate the Centennial in 1967 and take advantage of the newly announced grant programmes to assist communities in their festivities, the Society was again introducing some new initiatives for the journal. Two Cruikshank Silver medals were announced in 1967 to be awarded annually for the best articles in Ontario History written by an academic and a non-academic.10 The following year the OHS Bulletin was introduced as a successor to the News Letter that had been discontinued twenty years before. It was to be published bi-annually and designed to serve the ever-growing numbers of historical societies and museums. It is interesting to note that, despite this new publication, it was on the back cover of Ontario History that the affiliated societies and museums continued to be listed until 1984.11

We learn something of the challenges of co-editorship at this period from Kenneth McLaughlin, who later served as president of the Society:

The Ontario Historical Society revisited

It seems hard to believe that it was nearly a quarter century ago that I was sitting in my garret-like office in the History Department at Dalhousie University in Halifax when I had the first inkling that The Ontario Historical Society was about to play an important part in my life… Professor Paul Cornell, who was at the time serving as the editor of Ontario History had just written to ask if I would be interested in adding the co-editorship of the OHS quarterly journal to my new duties when I arrived at Waterloo.

Of course, I had known Ontario History as an undergraduate student and had been fascinated by the judicious blend of academic and local history; the new research findings...
of graduate students, documents and other related materials which were the stock-in-trade of that highly-respected periodical... On arriving in Waterloo that July day in 1970, I was presented with what we called the "blue box," not a box used to recycle goods as blue boxes are now, but a file box containing the articles and correspondence relating to materials submitted for publication in Ontario History and the OHS Bulletin.¹³

Over a decade later as the Society approached its own Centennial in 1988 a second survey of the members again confirmed that publications remained a priority as respondents said that the most important services provided by the OHS were workshops, publications, information, assistance to affiliated member societies, promoting public awareness of heritage conservation, and providing an opportunity to meet others with similar interests.

In 1974 an Index to the Publications of the Ontario Historical Society was published covering the period 1899 to 1972. Frederick Armstrong, who later served as president, paid tribute to the authors Hilary Bates and Robert Sherman in the Foreword:

> The Ontario Historical Society has long been one of the most active bodies in the country in the encouragement of authors and the publication of both original documents and new research. The journal of the Society, Ontario History, or as it was formerly called, the Papers & Records of the Ontario Historical Society, which has appeared continuously since 1899, is generally recognized as both one of the most important sources for the history of the province and a quarterly with a scholarly level that has long equalled that of most national reviews... This work, which has been in preparation for three years, originated in discussions between Hilary Bates and Robert Sherman, both then of the Library of the University of Western Ontario, and the writer about what could be done to provide some more useful research tools in Ontario history... The Society owes a debt of gratitude to them for their preparation of this Index, which will make the contents of its many publications so much more readily available to students of the history of the province.¹⁵

In the June 1975 issue of Ontario History Gerald Killan also praised the new Index and in his article “The Good, the Bad, and an Occasional Touch of the Ugly: Papers and Records,” reviewed in detail the early years of the journal and despite the title of his article, concluded:

> Through the Papers and Records, the Ontario Historical Society went far toward realizing its goal of developing the study of this province’s past. Admittedly the quality of the articles was uneven, but this was more than offset by the services rendered to Ontario historiography. The periodical helped shape and direct the thrust towards professionalism and sophisticated concepts of local history. New ideas and sources were brought to light, and new areas of enquiry opened to both amateur and professional historians. The journal also provided a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among its readers, and on occasion rallied those readers behind a variety of causes ranging from historic preservation to the promotion of local history in the educational system. For all this, students of Ontario history may well be grateful.¹⁶

In 1981 when Gerald Killan was concluding his term as president he gave a “State of the Society Message” at the Annual General Meeting at Niagara-on-the-Lake. He began his Presidential Address with these words:

> There is no way to hide the fact that financially, we are in a difficult situation. It may shock you to learn that every year since 1966, with only two exceptions, our annual expenditures have exceeded revenues. In 1971 and 1972 we did enjoy an excess of revenue over expenditures, but those surpluses, it must be conceded, were largely the result of selling our library and the reprint rights to our journal... What does this indicate—fifteen years of financial mismanagement? I think not... In 1978 the government froze its funding to heritage groups and continues to do so. Meanwhile inflation has sent our office and publication expenses soaring. Between 1970 and 1980, the cost of Ontario History (OH) doubled from $2,200 to $4,400 per issue... With expenses increasing so dramatically, membership fees had to be raised from $5 in 1970 (which included a subscription to OH) to the current $12 membership fee and $7 subscription rate for OH (total of $19), Understandably this has had a negative impact on our membership figures... But enough of this depressing picture. The OHs may be financially weak and the size of its membership modest, but one must not ignore the positive aspects of our organization. Our deficits are in part a testimony to fifteen years of sustained activity, programme development and enthusiasm. Since it was founded in 1888—93 years ago—The Ontario Historical Society has never been more vital, relevant, or credible than it is today.¹⁷

Less than a year later, Alec Douglas, in his President’s Remarks in the Summer 1982 issue of the OHS Bulletin brought welcome news for the beleaguered Society and its journal under the title “Summing Up and Looking Ahead”:

The Ontario History Endowment Fund, I am delighted to tell you, is now a fact. Your response to my appeal in the last Bulletin justified our hopes. In less than two months, members have donated $5,000 and our Wintario application for support has been successful. I am sure that I represent the view of the membership as a whole in expressing profound gratitude to the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture for supporting this important endeavour. Anyone who contributes to or reads Ontario History for years to come will derive benefit from this investment.

Unfortunately, this was not the case, and in 1989 the Endowment Fund was increased to $100,000 with a combination of individual donations, funds raised by the Society and support from Wintario, in an attempt to meet the ever-escalating costs of publishing and postage. The Endowment Fund was, and is, governed by the strict terms of a legal agreement with the Ontario government to ensure the security for the investment will be the only lasting guarantee of security for Ontario History, and will keep subscription fees down.18

In 1993, under the editorship of Jean Burnet, a supplementary Index for Ontario History was published covering the years 1973 to 1992. Elizabeth Bloomfield supervised the preparation, while librarian-bibliographer, Linda Foster undertook the main labour of reading and indexing all the articles, notes and book reviews. Elizabeth Bloomfield provides details in the Introduction: “Scholarly research and writing about Ontario have multiplied in quantity and variety in the past 20 years. Ontario History has continued to publish 10 to 12 full-length articles a year, as well as shorter research notes and increasing numbers of book reviews since 1978. In all, nearly 770 items published in Ontario History between 1973 and 1992 have been indexed here.”

Computerized methods of indexing and formatting were key components in the short length of time (a few months) needed to prepare this Index compared to the earlier one, which took several years.21

As Ontario History prepares to celebrate 110 years in 2009 there are still many challenges for all those involved in producing the journal as they attempt to balance articles, authors, topics, themes, escalating costs and budgets. To the editors, assistant editors, book review editors, managing editors, members of editorial boards and committees, authors, translators and contributors, a salute to your dedication, scholarship and perseverance for more than a century.

In the Summer 2004 OHS Bulletin, the journal editor at that time, Rae Fleming, described an author’s search for truth: “This illustrates one of the most important roles of any historian, that of a detective sifting through fragments of the past in order to arrive at historical truth, knowing full well that someone will follow with other evidence and revised conclusions. Such is history.”22

Congratulations on the celebration of 110 years and may this journal continue to bring Ontarians of all ages and cultural backgrounds and their history closer together.

21 Elizabeth Bloomfield, “Introduction” in Index.