Celebrating One Thousand Years of Ontario's History

Proceedings of the Celebrating One Thousand Years of Ontario's History Symposium.

April 14, 15, 16, 2000
Willowdale, Ontario

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Sponsored by
The Ontario Historical Society
34 Parkview Avenue
Willowdale, Ontario
M2N 3Y2
April 14, 15, 16, 2000

The support of the Government of Ontario, through Ontario 2000 and the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation is gratefully acknowledged

The papers presented at the Celebrating One Thousand Years of Ontario's History symposium were prepared for publication by: Colin Agnew, Dorothy Duncan, Jeanne Hughes and Martin Ahermaa Editorial Services.

Design and layout: Payal Lall

ISBN # 919352-37-5

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Preface

The Ontario Historical Society (OHS) hosted the Celebrating One Thousand Years of Ontario's History Symposium in Willowdale, Ontario, April 14, 15, 16, 2000.

The introduction and the conclusion of the Symposium were both structured, however, a portion of the programme was devoted to the participants who responded to a Call for Papers. The response was excellent and the topics ranged over several centuries, stretched to the province's boundaries and beyond, and encompassed many aspects of Ontario's rich history.

All of the sessions of the Symposium were either taped or filmed so that the Society has a lasting record of this important event. Many of the presentations are available on video as a resource for teachers, scholars, historical societies, programme planners, and other interested individuals.

In addition to the Symposium, the OHS organized five colloquia in five locations in northern and southern Ontario to encourage Ontarians to explore and celebrate the history and cultural diversity of the province.

The OHS is grateful for the support and co-operation of our many partners for this series of events and the resources that have developed from them. To the speakers who shared their papers with us for this publication, to the volunteers who supported us in every possible way at the Symposium, and to our partners who hosted the five regional coloquia: West Parry Sound District Museum; Centennial Museum, Sheguiandah, Manitoulin Island and The Voyageur Heritage Network; The Kingston Historical Society; The Arts and Heritage Alliance of Thunder Bay, Arts and Heritage Thunder Bay, The Thunder Bay Regional Arts Council and The Southwestern Ontario Heritage Council.

A very special thank you must go to Rob Leverty and Colin Agnew who co-ordinated the Symposium programme and the presentations, to Steve Shaw Productions Inc. of Oakville for capturing the presentations of over forty speakers for posterity and to the Government of Ontario, through Ontario 2000 and the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation.

As the old millennium draws to a close and the new one begins, we have the opportunity to celebrate a turning point in the human history of this land that is to-day known as the Province of Ontario. The Ontario Historical Society encourages all Ontarians, of all ages and cultural backgrounds to explore and celebrate their challenges and accomplishments of the past and their dreams of the future.

Dorothy Duncan, Executive Director
The Ontario Historical Society

Welcome and Introduction

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Jeanne Hughes and I am the President of The Ontario Historical Society. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this symposium.

It is particularly appropriate that the OHS host this event, given that we were founded in 1888 and incorporated by an act of the provincial legislature in 1899. Our Society now spans three centuries and has a grand history of its own. So who better to host a celebration of One Thousand Years of Ontario's History?

The end of a year, the end of a century, the forthcoming end of a millennium are all occasions that naturally give rise to retrospection about where we have been and contemplation about where we are going. Over the next three days we shall be taking a keen look at the people and events that have formed the land that we now call Ontario, and we hope that this information might encourage you to contemplate, among yourselves, what our future might be. And what a line-up of speakers we have to help us with this examination! Take a look at your programmes and ask yourselves when you last saw such an impressive cast at one event?

In order to organize such an ambitious project the Society applied for funding from Ontario 2000. We did indeed receive support from them and, as a result, not only is the event being held this weekend, but also a publication of the symposium contents will be produced, parts of the symposium will be taped and made into a video, and also five one day colloquia will be held across the province in the fall. We are grateful to the Government of Ontario, through both Ontario 2000 and the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture, and Recreation for their support in this venture.

Jeanne Hughes, President
The Ontario Historical Society
1999 - 2000

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Greetings from the Minister

April 14, 2000

Dear Friends,

As the Minister responsible for heritage in Ontario, I want to extend a warm welcome and sincere best wishes to everyone taking part in the **Celebrating One Thousand Years of Ontario's History** symposium hosted by The Ontario Historical Society (OHS).

The symposium is a wonderful way for the OHS to mark the new Millennium and I am delighted that it is being sponsored, in part, by the Ontario 2000 Project as part of our province-wide Millennial celebrations. You have set yourself the fascinating task of tracing the human history of Ontario over the last 1000 years, from the life and times of the First Nations to the arrival of newcomers from all over the world.

I want to congratulate the OHS on its organization and hosting of this fascinating educational forum. We are a stronger province for it.

Sincerely,

Helen Johns
Minister

The World One Thousand Years Ago

Ivana Elbl

Everything changes, nothing ever changes

If the state of the world at the turn of the first millennium CE[1] was to be captured in terms of a modern newscast, the headlines would bear remarkable resemblance to those of today: religious tensions; economic ups and downs; natural disasters; changes of government; notable accomplishments of art, learning, and athletics; and human stories of extraordinary fortune and tragedy. The Vikings reached North America; the Muslim idea of unified polity suffered a final blow when the last ruling caliph was blinded and imprisoned by his enemies; the Srivijaya domination over trade in southeast Asia was greatly weakened by traders from India and China; exhaustion of the environment brought the classical Maya civilization to an end, forcing the survivors to relocate and start again in the Yucatan peninsula; the Pope declared the "Peace of God," forcing fighting and violence to stop on certain days and in certain areas; the great library of Cordoba boasted more than 400,000 volumes; the Chinese had developed paper money and printing; the Hindu civilization reached its apex; the end of the world failed to come...Each of these flashes of information encapsulates a reality much more complex and interconnected than the quick headlines or fleeting images imply. Yet much of what we know about the past is just headlines and images, bits and pieces of a mind-boggling mosaic of events and developments whose rich details are very often missing. Can we reconstruct what happened? Yes, but with difficulty, for there is both too much information and too little. To communicate all the information is impossible, but selection inevitably distorts the picture. Grappling with this problem, some historians tend to opt for admittedly simplified "big-picture" models, based on criteria that seem essential to them, while others argue that the past was so singular that it can only be narrated in the form of an infinite and unconnected series of stories utterly dependent for their meaning on the person and perspective of the narrator.[2]

If we assume for a moment that a "big picture" can somehow be constructed, and that the result will actually make sense, we can try to ask: What was the world like as the second millennium of the Western calendar dawned? Many might be tempted to visualize this time either as a "Dark Ages," with unwashed villagers living in the squalor of thatched huts and periodically assailed by hordes of armed raiders, or as a pristine environment unspoiled by technology and inhabited by human beings who cared for each other within "traditional" communities and lived in harmony with nature. Both visions, however, would be in sharp contrast with life as perceived by those who lived it so many centuries ago. The "past," whether we like it or not, serves as a mirror of present-day attitudes and dreams: images of barbarism and misery present a view of the things above which we deem to have successfully risen; images of idyllic pasts offer a reflection of our profound dissatisfaction with the here-and-now, and of our yearning for something humanity once possessed but has long since lost. This dichotomy can be traced throughout history: the "past" has all too often been imagined and written by subsequent generations as either a gradual progression toward an ideal reality (the fulfillment of history), or a gradual decline from a long-gone golden age into decay and toward an inevitable end.[3]

The ability of history to explain, justify, inspire, or condemn the present constitutes one of its main attractions: if we are pleased with what surrounds us, the past provides a satisfying backdrop; if not, it

offers alternatives and admonitions. The problem is that the past made the present and remains an integral part of it, like it or not. We cannot entirely divorce ourselves from it. The "past" we make in writing history has its own multiple "pasts," and the appearance of change can be merely an instance of wishful thinking. History should not be seen merely as a story of change. It rather ought to be a study of the dynamics of continuity and change, keeping in mind that change itself is a very relative concept: it can take entire millennia to occur, or just seconds - the impact of a mid-size asteroid generates within three to six seconds of the initial event a fireball and a pressure wave that ravages thousands of square miles, large masses of debris are lofted into quickly decaying orbit and change the planet's climate, the dinosaurs and other life forms begin to vanish...

The basics of human life one thousand years ago were not that different from life today or from life 35,000 years ago. This is often as difficult to accept as it is important. The core patterns of human life were forged during the four million years it took for the human species to emerge, and even more firmly during the 40,000 years of the documented existence of *Homo Sapiens*. Human life a millennium ago, just like now, reflected the dictates of human needs and wants, the cycle of birth, maturation, procreation, old age, and death, and the social dynamics of a species obliged to live in groups in order to survive and propagate.[4] Any human being suddenly transplanted into the past could exist, if she or he survived the initial culture shock and succeeded in finding a niche in the host society. It is more difficult to say the same about the future - gearing down would seem to be easier than gearing up. This does not mean, however, that plunging from one day to another into the past would not involve a very radical and multifaceted shock.

The past was both hauntingly similar to the present and vastly different from the world we know in the year 2000. It was also very complex, consisting of highly divergent physical, political, social, and cultural environments. If the entire population of Ontario were transported one thousand years back and scattered widely around the globe, each individual would face a profoundly different set of challenges, based on the new location (a great urban centre, village, hunting camp, forest or desert with no people at hand), the time-traveler's gender (women were more likely to be incorporated into new societies than men, but as social inferiors), skills (the ability to ride or to grow food would be useful), and personality. Survival would also depend on the willingness of contemporaries to accept someone who could not communicate, lacked relevant skills, but possessed entirely unexpected and novel ones, and displayed social and material expectations substantially different from the accepted norm. A few might become gods, most would become misfits or potential threats. All the time-travelers, however, would experience a crippling technological and linguistic handicap that would make them, at least initially, extremely vulnerable, resulting in very high mortality. On the other hand, the survivors would not only make do, but some of them would prosper and flourish, converting their disadvantages into an advantage, an outcome suggested by the experiences of those transplanted abruptly from one culture to another in the modern era or the relatively recent past.

The physical influx of some twelve million ex-Ontarians into the year 1000 would add 2.4% to a global population of c. 400 - 500 million, distributed in densities ranging from zero to more than 350 persons per square mile.[5] This influx would be far from insignificant. The impact would be the heaviest where the ability of the environment to sustain humans was very low or where the pre-existing density was already approaching the limits of sustainability. As today, the density of human settlement was the result of interaction between environment and technology. High concentrations of population

marked environments able to support high-yield agriculture or those that could be technologically adapted (for example through irrigation) to such a purpose. For instance, the Nile River valley, the "Fertile Crescent" in the Middle East, and parts of China and Central America. Cultivation of rice, high-yield grains, maize, potatoes, and other tubers such as yams and cassava, tended to sustain populations much denser than before the introduction of these crops. However, a thousand years ago the ability of the environment and of the available technology to sustain human life was substantially lower than today.[6] Many of the recurrent historical disasters had their roots in temporary regional over-population (localized "Malthusian crisis"). Overpopulation led to famines, and people weakened by famine fell more easily victims to disease or intruders. Survival instincts and the struggle for control over shrinking resources led to wars and raids, and the eponymous riders of the apocalypse - war, famine, disease, and death - reaped their grim harvest together.[7] While it may be true that these periodic disasters conveniently tended to return human population to sustainable levels, the suffering of those caught in the cataclysms was immense and stressed the unpredictability of fortune and the dependence of humans on forces far beyond their control.

A personal disaster did not require a cataclysmic collusion of circumstances, such as a Malthusian crisis. Fire, flood, drought, severe winters, wet and cold summers, illness: all these could suddenly shatter the lives of individuals and communities, without any broader process having to aggravate the situation. It is essential to realize that in the past humans were infinitely more dependent on the environment and on natural forces than most of us can comprehend. The relative isolation of human communities and the lack of non-local networks for social support and rebuilding further reinforced this vulnerability. Except for nomads and hunter-gatherers, most people (both villagers and city dwellers), lived in the same community their entire lives and their experience of the outside world seldom exceeded a 50-100 mile radius. It is not by accident that in Russian the word for village (*mir*) may also mean "world." The limited scope of individual experience was enforced by the demands of everyday life and the dangers the outside world represented in social, cultural, economic, and military terms. With interregional trade often absent or flowing at low levels of efficiency, long-term storage and emergency supplies were largely a local and personal responsibility. Even moderate crop failure could be devastating, and not only for the poor and socially weak. Lurking disaster due to a very short range of social cohesion networks was the other face of a "rugged self-sufficiency" sometimes uncritically idolized today.

The sheer need to survive explains the ready acceptance by many of various inequitable social arrangements, usually in the context of usurpation of power by the strong, well-armed, and mobile.[8] It also explains in part the repeated success of the ruling elites' efforts to render their subjects defenseless, unskilled in self-defense, and confined to a specific location. In the turbulence of Europe's 9th and 10th centuries, many farmers in the end surrendered their land and personal freedom to a warrior lord in exchange for protection and basic economic security. They became *serfs* (people tied to the land, technically unable to own property, but knowing that they had some right to expect that the lord would honour the contract under which they or their ancestors had accepted servitude). This was different from slavery: the slave master owned the person of the slave and could dispose of him or her at will within the terms of the customs and laws governing a given society. However, in most societies slavery and serfdom were considered degrading and dishonouring, regardless of how benign or reciprocal the actual human interaction might have been, because of the powerlessness which lay at the root of these arrangements.[9]