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Conrad, the Textbook Writer

ALVIN FINKEL, Athabasca University, is co-author with Marg Conrad of two volumes of *History of the Canadian Peoples* as well as *Canada: A National History*. He is also the author of a number of books including *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History, Business and Social Reform in the Thirties*, and *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*.

Abstract

Marg Conrad, through her pioneering work on *History of the Canadian Peoples*, insured that feminist perspectives on Canadian history were integrated into the foundational materials that students receive in first-year Canadian survey history courses. She made clear to students the need to understand the gendered nature of social and political developments throughout Canada's history.

Résumé

Marg Conrad, par le biais de son travail de pionnière sur *History of the Canadian Peoples*, a assuré l'intégration des perspectives féministes sur l'histoire soient intégrées dans le matériel de base que les étudiantes reçoivent pour leur cours sur le sondage canadien durant leur première année d'études en histoire. Elle a bien fait comprendre aux étudiantes le besoin de comprendre la nature genrée du développement social et politique au cours de l'histoire du Canada.

When the two volumes of *History of the Canadian Peoples (HCP)* first appeared in 1993, students taking survey courses in Canadian history were exposed to individuals and concepts that had never been part of an introduction to Canadian history before and were still relatively new in senior courses as well. Mary Whibby, for example, was someone whom earlier textbook authors would have deemed an unlikely inclusion in a first-year textbook. She was a Newfoundland woman who was deserted by her husband in 1853 and who then worked at menial jobs for the next 13 years to provide for her four children. When she died in 1868, leaving a modest estate that included savings of \$1000, the husband who had abandoned her claimed her estate. Though one of her sons challenged this claim, the courts ruled that, as her legal husband, he had a right to her money.

Marg Conrad, the feminist historian who told Mary Whibby's tale, placed it within a section on "Gender and Society" in mid-nineteenth-century British North America, that began by noting: "No distinction in colonial

society was more fundamental than that between the sexes." She added:

While men and women contributed different skills to the family economy, women were placed in a subordinate position by laws that recognized men as household heads and wives and children as their property. In this patriarchal system, women's sexuality and reproductive powers were carefully controlled. In pre-industrial society girls and women were supervised within families, while church, state, and collective community pressure encouraged strict conformity to acceptable sexual behaviour. Women considered to be of easy sexual virtue were publicly ridiculed and socially ostracized. (Conrad *et al.* 1993, 493)

Brian Henderson, executive editor at Copp Clark Pitman, had approached Marg to write a single-author one-volume survey text in Canadian history, with a focus on social history, in 1986. She was a logical person to approach since her *curriculum vitae* embraced political history, women's history, Atlantic Canada history, and public history. Marg was wise enough to recognize that this was too big a job for one person and that ideally it would involve a team which, among them, covered a wide variety of fields in Canadian history. But finding people with both the time and the ability to write a survey history provided considerable challenges for the publisher. I joined the writing team in 1989, and as Marg put it in a presentation she made to the Pearson sales reps in 2001, "Since Alvin joined the project, we have been the authors of the text, whatever the cover information says" (Conrad 2001).

When I joined the writing team, Marg had already completed six chapters, including a chapter on the Atlantic colonies in the British North American period, two chapters on the social, cultural, and economic history of British North America in the mid-eighteenth century, and three post-1896 economic history chapters - the original four authors had decided to divide the post-Confederation period into *longue durées* and to have separate chapters on political, economic, and social history for each era. Marg's writing was brilliant. Particularly, I am still in awe of the two chapters on the mid-eighteenth century with their wonderful mix of summary

statements about the various colonies and lively anecdotes that combined to create a tableau of emerging social orders in all their complexity. They became my model of what I hoped to create in the chapters that I had been asked to write, chapters on the early history of the Canadian west, the political march to Confederation, and then the three chapters on the period from 1867 to 1896.

Marg had built on her experience as a writer and editor of Atlantic Canadian history, political and social, in several eras, and the history of women in Atlantic Canada to create a variety of well-integrated regional histories that showed the similarities and dissimilarities in the societies that were developing across British North America on the eve of Confederation. Those two chapters, now divided into three chapters, have survived through five editions of *HCP* with only minor changes. Though our editors on the first edition, Barbara Tessman and Curtis Fahey, did a close editing job of every word in the two books, they found little to change in these tightly-written, evocative chapters. Barbara, then the managing editor of Copp Clark Pitman, had worked with dozens of Canadian academics and knew the reputations of many more within the tightly knit publishing world. "Marg Conrad is the best academic writer in Canada," she told me on many occasions. She was in awe of Marg but found her perfectionism and sometimes rigidity on certain issues challenging. After the editors had checked over her work, and mine as well, Marg would begin what amounted to an endless tightening up of paragraphs and sections, never willing to accept that the writing was as good as it was going to get.

Even at the proofing stage, when no rewriting should be done, Marg would not stop. That resulted in the first editions being exceedingly well written but unfortunately with spelling mistakes introduced by Marg, who is a sloppy speller, in rewrites at the proofing stage. Nor would she accept Copp's style guide when it clashed with her view of correct expression. One day, Barb called me, exasperated because Marg, in a long battle with the editors about using U.S. (which Marg favoured) over US, which Copp always used, suggested that the Acadia History

Department, which she chaired, would not use our texts if Copp persisted in calling the Americans US. "Is she really saying that she won't use her own text? How can someone who is always so nice in person be so obsessive?" Barb asked. "Just give in," I advised; "Marg's accommodating most of the time, and when she's not, she's not going to yield."

At my first meeting with Marg and the publishers at the Learned's in Victoria in 1990, we decided that what seemed to be developing as a 1000-page text was too formidable. In any case, most universities and colleges at the time offered separate semester surveys in pre-Confederation and post-Confederation Canada. So the one-volume text became a two-volume text. E-mail discussions ensued about what to call each of the texts, but, after a long debate, we decided to stick with the working title, and simply have a pre-Confederation Volume 1 and a post-Confederation Volume 2.

During the three years before the first editions were published, Marg and I began what soon turned into a daily exchange of e-mails about how best to approach various topics. We suggested revisions in each other's draft chapters, reflected on the pedagogy of our text and the notions of history embodied in our work, and inevitably shared a great deal of personal information as well, though both of us seemed to work the equivalent of several full-time jobs. As Marg told the Pearson sales reps: "I live alone and am on the road so much that even plants have trouble living with me..." (Conrad 2001).

Marg was unfailingly supportive of my efforts, even when she did total rewrites of certain sections. Our backgrounds seemed to complement one another. We were both working-class and workaholic, and both had well-defined political interests and a belief that one could study history without embellishing the facts while still maintaining a political agenda that linked the study of the past to the study of the present. But Marg's main interests were women's history, cultural history, and Atlantic history, while I focused on labour, social policy, and the West. Our writing styles were different. As Marg put it once in one of our meetings with the editors:

"Alvin tends to rant; I tend to lament." In practice, though, while our interpretations sometimes differed, we were essentially on the same side of the fence on most issues, our rants and laments reflecting similar stances on social justice. Marg's version of feminism wasn't much different from my version of socialism, since we both had our eyes trained to issues of who had power and money, and who was placed in a subordinate position, as well as on the ways in which those without power or money sometimes challenged their supposed social betters. We both wanted the book to capture as much about life at the bottom of Canadian society in each period as life in the decision-makers' chairs, and we both recognized that families, rather than having common characteristics within and across societies, were socially constructed and sites of power struggles every bit as much as were workplaces and the state. We tended to defer to each other in the areas that we regarded as the other's area of expertise. We responded quite similarly to readers' comments. This was a writing partnership made in heaven, albeit an atheist heaven. Marg summed up our relative strengths and weaknesses as writing partners in 2001:

We both can write fast and do not let our egos get in the way of getting the job done. I overwrite a lot of Alvin's work and he does the same for mine. He is more adept than I am at catching grammatical errors - I cannot spell or make nouns agree with verbs. I am, however, a stylist, able to summarize vast quantities of information in a sentence or two - this judgment from Barb Tessman, our editor for the first two editions - who says that I am the best writer that she has ever encountered. Alvin has a theory that if it is a good idea to say it once, it is better to say it twice, an attractive aspect of his personality but not a good feature in a textbook. I usually suggest that the second mention be deleted. In contrast, Alvin says that I avoid important issues and he raps my knuckles on this score repeatedly. We make a good team. (Conrad 2001)

This was also a writing partnership that reshaped the notion of what a Canadian history survey text should be surveying. The "Introduction" pointedly identified our texts as a product of the "new social history" that had

made its international appearance in the 1950s and 1960s, awaiting the 1970s in Canada to have any real impact. We wanted to give voice to women, workers, farmers, Aboriginal people, and minority groups and to reflect their diversity. We wanted also to make clear that there was nothing inevitable in history. We wrote: "At times in this text the limitations on an individual's behaviour set by age, class, gender, region, or race may appear to suggest that many, perhaps most, of our ancestors were hopeless victims of forces beyond their control. A closer reading should reveal that people sought in various ways to transcend the limits placed on their lives" (Conrad *et al.* 1993, xxiii).

Marg was particularly insistent, as we wrote the book, about the importance of using terminology that reflected what groups called themselves. "Attempts by oppressed groups to find their own language to fit their experiences should be seen in the context of their struggles for empowerment" (Conrad *et al.* 1993, xviii). Marg insured that sexist naming was excluded, wherever possible, and that Aboriginal nations' names for themselves, however the number of syllables, rather than the names that Europeans imposed, were the ones that we employed.

Marg's feminism, as the opening paragraph suggests, informed all of her writing. It was a socialist feminism that gave pride of place not to elite women, though, of course, they were not absent from the narrative, but to women of modest means such as Mary Whibby. Women who challenged social norms, including gender norms, received special attention. So, for example, a full page was devoted to Mary Ann Shadd, an African American who had migrated to Canada in 1850 where she became a prominent abolitionist and founder of an anti-slavery weekly newspaper.

History of the Canadian Peoples was nonetheless a comprehensive survey text, not a replacement for the excellent women's history text, *Canadian Women: A History* produced by Alison Prentice *et al.* (1988). While the latter focused almost exclusively on social history, *HCP* was and is a blend of the social and the political, and the history of both women and men. It is also a history of social

and economic change, and the forces, both elite and grassroots, that drive such changes. Feminist understandings of power relations permeate both volumes and there is close attention given to the struggles of working-class people and farmers, Native peoples, and ethnic and racial minorities throughout, with constant attention paid to the fact that all of these groups contain two sexes.

Our books met with an excellent reception from those who were involved in writing social history and who had tried to introduce its concepts to survey course students without the aid of supportive survey texts. For the 1993-94 academic year, our first, we sold about 4500 copies each of volumes 1 (pre-Confederation) and 2 (post-confederation) of *HCP*. The Canadian Historical Association had a well-attended session on Canadian history textbooks at its 1994 annual conference, and three of the four historians who spoke effectively endorsed our texts, at least from our perspective, the fourth historian being scrupulously non-partisan. Among our supporters, Gerald Friesen observed, for example:

The Conrad/Finkel is closest to the new social history, strongest on Atlantic Canada and women and best at reflecting the diversity of experience of contemporary Canada by its conscious adoption of a multiple narrative rather than a single national story. In this sense, it acknowledges an important contemporary reality that should be reflected in a synthesis designed for today's classroom. (Lutz 1995)

But, as Marg has noted:

Although initial reaction was positive, a groundswell of anger erupted from scholars fighting the rearguard action in the so-called "culture wars" that swept North America in the 1990s. These wars were really little more than a tempest in a teapot - a *cri de coeur* from those who saw history primarily as a discipline focused on political and military themes rather than one that embraced a growing number of sub-fields. Within a decade, most thinking people had come to recognize that it was not an either/or issue but in the meantime there was a lot of blood on the floor in history department common rooms.

(Conrad and Finkel 2003, 12)

Jack Granatstein led the charge, and was not especially courteous. In an article lamenting the lack of sufficient coverage of military events in Canadian history in Canadian textbooks with the significant exception of his own, he was especially vitriolic about our post-Confederation volume which our publisher made us aware had decimated the audience for his once successful post-Confederation text. Wrote Granatstein: "If a text this bad can find a publisher, and, so I am told, 25 adoptions in universities and colleges in its first year of circulation, then something is most definitely wrong with the historical profession in this country" (Granatstein 1994, 124). There were, in fact, closer to 60 adoptions that first year. Granatstein elaborated on his complaints about our text in his strident attack on all those he considered his historian enemies in *Who Killed Canadian History?*, published in 1998. That included feminists, Marxists, Quebec sovereignists, Aboriginal nationalists, historians of minorities, regional historians, and anyone else who strayed from a civics-based national narrative, along with provincial bureaucrats. As the authors of a textbook that, in Granatstein's view, capitulated to every instance of political correctness, we were savaged as virtual executioners-in-chief. He remained particularly angry about our minimal coverage of the battles of the world wars and our apparent cluelessness because we had made a comment in passing that women "were unwelcome on the front lines" during World War One. Since front lines were always male, we were creating an imaginary issue, in Granatstein's view, in our woolly pacifist efforts to deal with military history (1998).

Ironically, Granatstein's book appeared just as our second editions of *HCP* also appeared. Marg had taken on the job of writing separate chapters on each of the world wars, chapters that included a great deal of military history along with our social history materials. Those chapters reflected the rethink that Marg and I undertook as we did the second editions, a rethink that mainly affected the second volume (the first volume was rewritten more extensively for the third editions). Largely driven by Marg, who had

been unhappy with the original team's use of long post-Confederation periods that often neither began nor ended with an important political event and the lack of themed chapters, we recrafted the text so that while the social history materials were not reduced, the text was framed more clearly by political events. Even the first edition had coverage of the key political events in Canadian history, and both Marg and I, after all, have published political history monographs. But our adversaries continued to claim that we ignored or provided questionable coverage of political history and especially military history. As we completed the third editions of the texts, Marg noted:

Our flexible response to criticism meant that we were not nearly as hidebound as our detractors claimed, but there are very few people involved in the culture wars who will admit this. In the most recent round of revisions, one of our reviewers indicated that the chapter on the Second World War was totally inadequate, most likely because he thinks that I wrote it. What could "a girl" know after all? The truth is that Norm Hilmer helped us get the story right and no scholar is more respected among the military historians than Norm. Had his name been attached to the text it might well have elicited a different response from the politically-driven reviewer. (Conrad 2001)

Conservative historians, in our view, deliberately turned our critical approach to Canadian history from an effort to reflect divisions within the country in different periods to an effort to sow divisions. Critical historians, they claimed, were working against national unity while they allegedly were promoting a Canadian ideal that had been forged on battlefields and in political offices. We disagreed. Even in terms of warfare, we believed that our equal focus on men and women in uniform and the struggles of the folks back home, on the one hand, along with the traditional focus on generals and battles, on the other, provided a more complete story than the traditionalists rendered. We were telling the story of the people who had lived in the territory that is now called Canada and our pointing out that there was nothing inevitable about the creation of an entity called Canada was hardly equivalent to a call for its break-

up. In any case, there was a great deal of hypocrisy in our adversaries' notions of national unity. They were so wedded to free-enterprise and/or Cold War ideology that they barely noticed the threat of American imperialism to Canadian independence.

Indeed, in our chapters on the recent past, we provided critical coverage of Canada's slide into the American colossus and its impact on Canada's political, economic, and cultural independence. While we are too steeped in empirical historical writing to readily embrace any meta-narrative, it is pretty easy to read into our history a focus on the efforts of various groups at different times to win as much self-determination and equality as possible, and to free themselves of colonial, class, or male domination. We did not accept that that made us "anti-national," whatever that protean word could mean. We WERE telling the real history of Canada and the people who composed it, who were indeed of many origins, making the word "peoples" more appropriate than the singular word, "people." But, why did that mean that we were not writing the national history? So, when Pearson decided that we would have a single-volume version of *HCP*, Marg proposed the title, *Canada: A National History* to emphasize that our goal was not, as our critics decried, to debunk the idea of national history but instead to unsettle the accepted version of national history by constantly posing the questions, "whose nation?" "whose national history?"

In that sense, Marg Conrad's notions of national history, embodied in our texts, are not substantially different from her views of local history, women's history, or public history. In each of the above she tries to incorporate national and international influences without losing the local contexts and the peculiarities of the individuals involved.

One of the big challenges in producing texts like *HCP* that are trying to provide an evocative but manageable survey for undergraduates beginning their study of Canadian history is how to respond to space limitations. As we have moved through our five editions so far of *HCP*, we have attempted to respond to reviews of previous

editions and then drafts of new chapters provided by various historians. Each response is somewhat idiosyncratic, reflecting different approaches to the teaching of survey courses, regardless of where people put themselves on the continuum of focus on political history and focus on social history. That has caused much reflection on our part regarding the purpose of our texts, and how we want students to make use of them. As we worked on the fourth edition of the texts, Marg wrote:

I think we should add a paragraph to the next edition on "How to Use a Textbook." It is a book designed to be a synthesis of scholarship, pointing readers to main events and interpretations of them. It is not meant to be read as a novel or in one sitting. While designed to pique the reader's interest, it is meant to be consulted and "engaged," not memorized. One of its most important features is an index which serves as a glossary - i.e., students can look up the word and find its meaning in context.

(Personal correspondence, Marg Conrad to Alvin Finkel, 18 March 2003)

The changes in the synthesis of the scholarship from edition to edition, though dramatic in the transition from the first edition to the second edition, may be less clear to the casual reader than to the authors, though the third edition of the first volume went from 14 to 23 chapters without adding pages, as we tried to respond to professors' calls for individual chapters that would be spread across fewer lectures than in the earlier editions. With each edition, we have incorporated more environmental history and more global history, placing developments within Canada in not only local and national frameworks but also global frameworks. As we began work on the fifth edition, Marg noted: "On the international issue, the new 'Atlantic approach' can be referenced in the colonial period" (Personal correspondence, Marg Conrad to Alvin Finkel, 5 July 2007). In general, she wanted each chapter to make more effort to link global, national, and local. Since the second volume always tries to take the story of Canada to the present, each edition of the second volume ends with a somewhat different conclusion about how the past has conditioned the present in Canada.

The change from publisher to publisher, or at least from one wing of the Pearson empire to another as *HCP*, its one-volume equivalent, and readers went from edition to edition did not much affect content though it proved disruptive. Copp Clark Pitman created a family feeling as we produced the first editions. Though Brian Henderson left for Oxford University Press before we had finished those editions, his replacement as executive editor, Jeff Miller, was as dedicated to the books as Brian. The clobbering of Copp Clark Pitman¹ in favour of Addison created a great deal of angst for us because in the transition, months went by before anyone from Addison thought to contact us. Jeff and Barb had gone on to other careers. Marg had lined up several Canadian publishers eager to do our second editions if Pearson had lost interest. Addison finally contacted us and told us that they remained committed to *HCP* as the anchor for their history list and Ron Dolman, our new executive editor, though not knowledgeable about history, proved quite genial. He was a bit taken aback, though, with Marg's response when he met with Marg and myself at the Addison office and rolled out a chart of Pearson's international holdings. As he proudly began to tell us about the international enterprise of which we were now more clearly a part, Marg cut him off gently, saying: "Thanks Ron. Alvin and I already know that we have sold our souls. We don't need to hear the details." As edition two developed, Ron was able to involve Brian Henderson, who had by then left Oxford and who insured that Barb Tessman, working as a freelancer after the ravaging of Copp, was again our editor for edition two. Brian was our executive editor for the third edition before another reorganization within Pearson that cost him his job. We've worked with a number of very fine editors in more recent editions, particularly Laura Forbes, and what has characterized each new edition is a great deal of input from professors and students that have helped us to improve *HCP* while staying true to our initial goals.

Over time, the contents of our texts have changed not only to reflect changes in scholarship but also to recognize the

increasing importance of the Web. From the first edition onwards, every chapter ended with an up-to-date list of materials for further reading for students. Beginning with the third edition, Web links were added for each chapter as further sources for students to explore. CD-Roms with all the links were made available to all students as well. Perhaps a Web-based work will eventually replace all of the print texts though arguably that would simply mean offloading printing costs to students.

Like most of the recent texts in Canadian history, *HCP* has, from the first edition onwards, been accompanied by readers that provide students with greater detail about some of the key issues raised in the texts. For our first editions, Copp Clark Pitman hired Chad Gaffield to produce the readers. Eventually Pearson asked us to do our own readers, and the first of two editions of readers for each volume appeared in 2004.

So, between *HCP, Canada: A National History (CNH)*, and the two readers, it seems that Marg and I, along with the many other things we do, are almost always doing some writing for the textbook industry.

In the end, the impact of *HCP* has not been simply to provide professors with one set of texts that they can use to introduce social history along with conventional political history to beginning students in Canadian history. As Marg has noted, the other texts, in an effort to compete with us after our first editions became the market leader, incorporated much that we had done. "If it is true that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we realized that we had hit the mark when our major competition - Francis, Jones and Smith - subsequently came out with a new edition that mimicked our text in every respect: illustrations, footnotes, selected readings, and historiographical debates, as well as more social history" (Conrad 2001).

So, I would argue that the effort to produce a Canadian history text for university and college students, begun with Marg Conrad's efforts in 1988 to write 6 chapters for the original text-writing team, has resulted in a universal change in how university survey texts in Canadian history are conceived. Ours remains the only text in which critical

perspectives prevail - the approach of the other texts, from my point of view, is to add women, Aboriginals, workers, people of colour, etc, and to stir rather than to use these additions to unsettle accepted interpretations of the central story of Canadian history. But the right of non-elites to have something of their story included in all textbooks in Canadian history is now established, and Marg Conrad deserves to be seen as the pioneer for establishing that right. The result is that undergraduate students, who once began their study of Canadian history learning mainly about key political events, are now exposed immediately to a complex social history in which social class, gender, race, and the environment are as important as specific political events and also serve as categories of analysis for political events.

Endnote

1. Copp Clark Pitman, a longstanding Canadian publisher, was purchased by Longman, a British publisher, in 1985, but was allowed by the new owner to continue as a largely independent company for the next 10 years. Longman in turn had been acquired by Pearson, a media conglomerate, in 1965. In 1988, Pearson purchased American publisher Addison-Wesley and merged it with Longman to create Addison-Wesley Longman. Pearson decided in 1995 to place most of Copp's departments within the Addison-Wesley Longman arm of its media empire, discharging most of the Copp staff in the process. In 1998, after Pearson had also acquired the academic division of Simon and Schuster, the company merged that operation with Addison-Wesley Longman to create Pearson Education. Pearson Education bought out other publishers in the years after 1998, including Prentice Hall. Prentice Hall's history division was larger than the pre-existing Pearson history division and so, after purchasing Prentice Hall, Pearson incorporated its history division into Prentice Hall's rather than going the other way, though the Prentice Hall operation was rebranded as a Pearson Education division.

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The Contributions of Margaret Conrad to Public History in Canada

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Abstract

The presentation elaborates and assesses the contributions of Margaret Conrad to the field of public history in Canada. Throughout her career, she has been concerned with the relationship of the historical discipline to its diverse publics. By her example, she has shown how scholars from academic history backgrounds can more effectively engage public history, strengthening both the

profession and the credibility of public representations of history.

Résumé

Cette présentation élabore et évalue les contributions de Margaret Conrad dans le domaine de l'histoire publique du Canada. Tout au long de sa carrière, elle se souciait de la relation entre la discipline historique et ses publics divers. Par son exemple elle a montré comment les érudits avec des antécédents académiques en histoire peuvent engager de façon plus efficace l'histoire publique, renforçant ainsi et la profession et la crédibilité des représentations publiques de l'histoire.

Few historians of Canada have made so many notable contributions across the spectrum of the field of Canadian history, including public history, as has Marg Conrad. While public history represents only one aspect of her career, it is an area in which she has been enormously productive and engaged for many years. It is also an aspect, she has argued, with which all professional historians need to become more engaged, if they wish to stay relevant to Canadian society in the new century. Her example offers many cogent lessons as to how we can make the practice of history more connected to the people whose histories we are trying to understand and represent. This paper briefly elaborates and assesses Marg Conrad's role in public history, but it is only one in a series of papers addressing different aspects of her career as a historian, and should therefore be read in conjunction with its companion pieces by other authors. Another caveat is that Marg Conrad's work in public history is a work in progress as she continues to contribute on a variety of fronts. For this discussion, I use the term "public history" to refer to any historical activities undertaken with a view to reaching, interacting with, teaching, serving, influencing, or reflecting upon the public, however it might be defined. The ground covered in this brief report is also necessarily selective, and cannot address more than a representative sample of the many public history endeavours with which Marg has been associated over several decades.¹ She has long grasped that