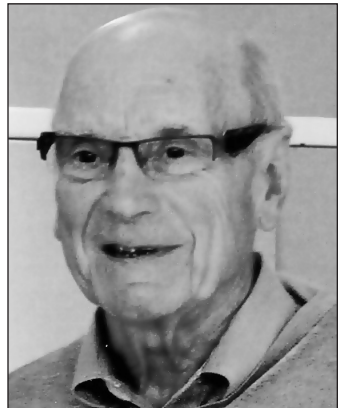


In Memoriam: Robert M. Stamp 1937–2023

The Canadian History of Education Association/ L'Association canadienne d'histoire de l'éducation (CHEA/ACHÉ) arose out of a hallway conversation between Robert Stamp and Nancy Sheehan at the University of Calgary in 1979. With their colleague David Jones, they constituted a working committee and organized the first CHEA/ACHÉ conference in Calgary in February 1980. Inspired by the innovative scholarship on the history of education conducted in Canada and elsewhere during the 1970s, they believed it was time to formalize an association of those with mutual, though broad, interests in the subject. York University's Susan Houston was elected the association's first president.¹



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Robert M. Stamp, who contributed in such substantial ways to scholarship in the history of education in Canada, passed away in Sooke, BC, on June 9, 2023. He was born and educated in Port Colborne, Ontario, and taught high school in London, Ontario, as well as a course on the history of education for Western University's Althouse College. After earning his BA in history at Western and teacher education credentials at the Ontario College of Education, he later obtained an MA in history from the University of Toronto and a PhD in history from Western. In 1969, he and his family moved west, where he taught history of education and interdisciplinary Canadian studies at the University of Calgary. He left academia for a time and moved to Toronto in 1983 to focus on writing and operating an antiquarian bookstore, Heritage Books. He returned to Calgary in 1995 and retired from the University of Calgary as professor emeritus in 2006. He and his wife, the painter Arlene Stamp, moved to Sooke, BC, in 2016, where he spent his remaining years.

Stamp's PhD dissertation, "The Campaign for Technical Education in Ontario, 1876–1914," was a pioneering study of the emergence of technical and vocational

¹ Robert M. Stamp, "Born in Calgary: CHEA/ACHE's Founding Conference," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 17, no. 1 (2005): 181–82.

schooling against the background of industrial and urban change. Though it remained unpublished, it formed the basis of a number of Stamp's early publications, including a lengthy chapter in a co-authored book, *Studies in Educational Change*, and a *Canadian Historical Review* article that explored the impact of federal-provincial relations on the evolution of technical education nationwide.²

Stamp co-edited, and contributed to, the first text on the history of Canadian schooling that did not adopt the traditional institutional, or "house history," outlook that had previously dominated the field. *Canadian Education: A History* (1970),³ which covered some three centuries, approached the subject through a regional and thematic lens, and explored the history of education through the combined use of political and, to a lesser degree, social history.

Stamp's most significant academic contribution to the study of educational change was his 1982 book, *The Schools of Ontario: 1876–1976*,⁴ a volume in the Ontario Historical Studies series, which was awarded the Founder's Prize from the CHEA/ACHÉ. A finely crafted overview of a century of education in the province, the book, among its other historiographical contributions, illustrated the tension between centralized and local control in education policy and the continuity in educational reform campaigns. The new education movement at the turn of the century, which stressed the cultivation of an individual child's physical and mental development, was echoed decades later in the 1968 Hall-Dennis Report (formally titled *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario*). Stamp scarcely disguised his enthusiasm for progressive education in *The Schools of Ontario* and other publications, but he always offered a balanced, non-polemical account of educational controversies in every era. He wrote insightfully on other issues—Empire Day, the bureaucratization of Calgary's schools, high school life between the wars, and a history of private schooling in Ontario, the latter prepared for the 1985 Commission on Private Schools in Ontario, headed by Bernard Shapiro.⁵ The government of Ontario also commissioned Stamp's informative history of student retention rates in Ontario from the 1920s to the 1970s, which explained the links between program

2 Richard Leyman, Robert Lawson, Robert M. Stamp, *Studies in Educational Change* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1972); Robert M. Stamp, "Technical Education, the National Policy, and Federal-Provincial Relations in Canadian Education, 1899–1919," *Canadian Historical Review* 52, no. 4 (1971): 404–23.

3 J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp, L.-P. Audet, *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall, 1970).

4 Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario: 1876–1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

5 Robert M. Stamp, "Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario: The Training of Young Imperialists," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 8, no. 3 (1973): 32–42; Robert M. Stamp, "The Response to Urban Growth: The Bureaucratization of Public Education in Calgary, 1884–1914," *Journal of Educational Thought/Revue de la Pensée Éducative* 10, no. 1 (April 1976): 49–61; Robert M. Stamp, "Canadian High Schools in the 1920's and 1930's: The Social Challenge to the Academic Tradition," *Historical Papers*, Canadian Historical Association 13, no. 1 (1978): 76–93; Robert M. Stamp, "A History of Private Schools in Ontario," *Report of the Commission on Private Schools in Ontario*, Appendix G (Toronto: The Commission, 1985), <https://archive.org/details/reportofprivschools00comm/page/192/mode/2up>.

innovation, school policy, and dropout rates, decade by decade.⁶

Apart from his academic scholarship, Stamp's professional career had another noteworthy dimension: the writing of popular and local history. His list of publications—totalling thirty-nine entries in the Toronto Public Library catalogue—included books on the history of transportation in Canada, the electrification of Toronto, and the lure of the royal family in the nation's popular culture.⁷ He wrote a history of Richmond Hill, Ontario, to 1930,⁸ a memoir of Port Colborne High School in the 1950s,⁹ a two-part recollection of his school years for this journal,¹⁰ and an account of the ways in which Calgary modernized and suburbanized after the Second World War.¹¹

In a final act of creativity, Stamp penned his own obituary in which he described himself as “an extremely lucky fellow” to have been born in 1937, “the year of the smallest crop of babies in all of 20th century Canada,” which provided his generational cohort with great educational and employment opportunities.¹² As a teacher, researcher, and writer, he used these opportunities well, and he and Arlene took great pride in the work they did in promoting and facilitating community education. They co-founded the Saturday School, which offered arts education, and the Calgary Association of Lifelong Learners, and Stamp initiated Sooke Region Lifelong Learning.

Fellow historians will recall Robert M. Stamp as a gentle, generous, humble, and productive colleague who helped spur an intellectual surge in the writing of Canadian educational history. His legacy will endure.

Paul Axelrod
York University

6 Robert M. Stamp, *Ontario Secondary School Program Innovations and Student Retention Rates: 1920s–1970s*. Transition Series (Toronto: Ministry of Education, 1988).

7 Robert M. Stamp, *Canada's First Superhighway* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1987); Robert M. Stamp, *Bright Lights, Big City: The History of Electricity in Toronto*. A Project of the Toronto Chapter of the Ontario Association of Archivists (Toronto: Ontario Association of Archivists, 1991); Robert M. Stamp, *Kings, Queens & Canadians: A Celebration of Canada's Infatuation with the British Royal Family* (Markham, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1987).

8 Robert M. Stamp, *Early Days in Richmond Hill: A History to 1930* (Richmond Hill, ON: Richmond Hill Public Library Board, 1991).

9 Robert M. Stamp, *Mid-century Memories: Port Colborne, Its High School, and Us, in the 1950s* (Port Colborne, ON: Gail Atkinson Todd Publisher, 2005).

10 Robert M. Stamp, “Growing Up Progressive? Part I: Going to Elementary School in 1940s Ontario,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 17, no. 1 (2005): 187–98; Robert M. Stamp, “Growing Up Progressive? Going to High School in 1950s Ontario,” *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 17, no. 2 (2005): 321–31.

11 Robert M. Stamp, *Suburban Modern: Postwar Dreams in Calgary* (Victoria, BC: TouchWood Editions, 1994).

12 Robert Stamp Obituary, *Globe and Mail*, June 17, 2023, <https://www.legacy.com/ca/obituaries/theGlobeandMail/name/robert-stamp-obituary?id=52255172>.

