

History of the Canadian Society for the History of Medicine

The first 25 years –the SCHM of Québec

On 24 October 1950, fourteen people met at the invitation of the abbé Arthur Maheux in the Institut d'Histoire et de Géographie, of the Université Laval in Quebec City to form the Société canadienne d'histoire de la médecine (SCHM). Among them were physicians, historians, and archivists. Dr. Sylvio Leblond (1901-1990), internist and instructor of medical history at Laval, was elected president and served in this capacity until he moved to Chicoutimi in December 1951.

Founding members, 24 October 1950

Jean-Charles Bonenfant	librarian of the province of Québec
Jean-Louis Bonenfant	pathologist
C.M. Boissonault	historian and publicist with the ministry of health
Benoit Boucher	doctor
Antonio Drolet	librarian at U Laval
Emile Gaumont	dermatologist
Charles A. Gauthier	doctor
Rosaire Gingras	doctor
Pierre Jobin	doctor and dean of Laval medicine
Luc Lacoursière	archivist of folklore
Sylvio Leblond	internist
abbé Arthur Maheux	archivist
Jean-Thomas Michaud	doctor
Antoine Roy	archivist of the province of Québec
Charles Vézina	out-going dean Laval medical school

The initiative to form a society had been prompted by the upcoming centennial of Laval medical school. One of the original goals was to oversee the writing of the faculty's history—a task completed in 1953 by the historian-journalist-poet, C.M. Boissonault (1902-1979).¹ The society also undertook to provide regular columns for the journal, Laval Médical.

The paper titles, proceedings, and publications were fully documented by Sylvio Leblond in two detailed articles about the society's history: one at the tenth anniversary,² and another just prior to the twenty-fifth anniversary.³ The founders chose the "pretentious"

¹ Charles-Marie Boissonault, Histoire de la Faculté de médecine de Laval (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 193), 438pp. The author of several political histories of Québec, Boissonault also wrote a history of life science. Charles-Marie Boissonault, Premières explorations de l'être vivant : D'Empédocle à Lavoisier (Québec : Editions Du Laval Medical, nd).

² Sylvio Leblond, "La Société canadienne d'histoire de la médecine, 1951-61," Laval Médicale 33 (fév. 1962): 117-9.

³ Sylvio Leblond, "La Société canadienne d'histoire de la médecine," Cahiers des Dix, no. 39, 1974, 189-220.

name for the local club, because they hoped that some day it would become truly national; they were confident that any national society in the future would eventually have to contend with theirs.⁴

In the early days, meetings took place several times a year, in homes, hospitals, or academic institutions. Members read their research papers to each other, sometimes more than one paper at a meeting. On at least nine occasions, the society met with other larger groups. For example, in 1952 and 1959 sessions were held in conjunction with the meeting of the Congrès of the Association des Médecins de la Langue Française, and in September 1954 a special conference was held on medicine in history and fiction. Over the course of twenty-five years, 127 works were prepared; 97 were read at 61 ordinary meetings. Numerous publications resulted, nineteen of which were printed in a special issue of the Cahiers of the Société Historique de Québec (1970, no. 22). Many others appeared in the Union Médicale du Canada, Laval Médical, Médecine de France (1957), Cahiers des Dix, Vie Médicale au Canada Français, and the Canadian Medical Association Journal. Founders J.C. Bonenfant, Drolet, Maheux, and Roy contributed to the history of French Canada, and at least two other members, Leblond and Fortier, wrote books about medical history.⁵

After an enthusiastic beginning, during which regular meetings took place, a lull of three years occurred—perhaps because Leblond was no longer in Quebec City. The society was revived under the leadership of the dermatologist-venereologist, Emile Gaumond (d. 1965). The vitality continued under the pediatrician, De la Broquerie Fortier (1904-1994), who was responsible for turning the local group into a truly national society with an international reputation.

The ties binding this group were those of long-standing friendship, as well as a love of medicine and its history. The Bonenfans were sons of a physician who had been the lone practitioner on Ile d'Orléans. Many others had been students together at high school or at Laval medical school: Gaumond and Leblond graduated in the Laval class of 1928; Fortier, in 1932. This deep affection is apparent in Leblond's tribute to Gaumond: "On March 15, Emile Gaumond wrote me of his intention to resign as president ... In early April, he was ailing and went to Boston where he was operated for a lung condition. On the 9th, he came home in his coffin. Gaumond was dead. Gaumond, whom I had met in 1917 on the benches of the Petit Séminaire de Québec, was an exceptional man. During the war, he contributed to the fight against venereal disease, which had its highest highest incidence among all Canadian soldiers in the region of Quebec and Montreal."⁶

⁴ Leblond, 1974, 191.

⁵ De la Broquerie Fortier, Au Service de l'Enfance (Québec: Edition Garneau, 1966); Sylvio Leblond, Medecine et medecins d'autrefois: pratiques traditionnelles et portraits quebécois (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1986)

⁶ Leblond, 1974, 208.

From Chicoutimi, Leblond took on the role of secretary—serving, somewhat reluctantly it appears, for five years until 1969. At a 1968 meeting, Galarneau was elected in absentia to the position of secretary, but he declined the office and Leblond—“toujours à Chicoutimi” --soldiered on.⁷

Prior to 1971, the society had no treasurer, because, as Mme Bonenfant recently put it, there was “no treasure.”⁸ The society’s first bank account was opened in 1958, when Poulenc Freres made a donation of \$50 to the SCHM. Annual dues of \$5 were instituted in 1963.⁹ The position of treasurer was created in 1971, but it was combined with the duties of the secretary in 1977. Mme Bonenfant served as secretary-treasurer for more than a decade through the transition from a local group to a national society. She was recognized as an honorary life member in 1988 and continues to serve as secretary to the still lively Quebec city society now presided over by Dr. Camille Gosselin.

The energetic Dr. Fortier, participated readily in various national and international events and actively promoted the society at home and abroad. Named by the SCHM as Canada’s representative to the International Society for the History of Medicine in 1967, he soon became vice-president of the latter society. On 19 May 1972, Dr. Fortier returned from Europe and calmly informed his colleagues that he had offered Quebec City as the site for the International meeting in 1976. Toward this end, he advised his friends that letters patent, incorporation, and a Canadian charter under a bilingual name, were soon to be granted (29 October 1973).¹⁰ Although Dr. Fortier was enthusiastic about the forthcoming conference, his colleagues were surprised, if not alarmed.

A truly national society was expected to host the international meeting; however, with a few significant exceptions the SCHM had been centred on Laval and Quebec City. Two vice-presidents were recruited to represent western and eastern Canada: Dr. Robert Macbeth, a surgeon, and Dr. Arthur Kelly, who soon resigned due to illness and was succeeded by Dr. G.R. “Pat” Paterson. A historian of pharmacy, Paterson was also the first executive director of the Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine, which had been formed by Associated Medical Services in 1974.¹¹ Dr. Paterson speculates that the invitation came his way, not only for regional representation, but also because he was perceived as an asset in raising monetary support.¹² Indeed, the society has benefitted from the largesse of AMS Hannah Institute in many ways over its second twenty-five years.

⁷ Leblond, 1974, 205, 212.

⁸ Yolande Bonenfant, letter to J. Duffin, 8 March 2000.

⁹ Robert Macbeth, letter to J. Duffin, 5 March 2000.

¹⁰ Leblond, 1974, 210, 215.

¹¹ John B. Neilson and Pat Paterson, Associated Medical Services, Incorporated : a history (Toronto : Associate Medical Services, Inc., 1987).

¹² Pat Paterson, telephone conversation and letter to J. Duffin, 28 February 2000.

The second 25 years: the SCHM/CSHM

The International Society for the History of Medicine met in Quebec City from 21 to 28 August 1976. Although that meeting occurred in the twenty-sixth year of the SCHM, it can be considered the first of the national meetings of the reconstituted society. A second meeting was held together with the Canadian Medical Association in Quebec City in 1977, but it was poorly attended. As a result, the original plan to meet in alternate years in conjunction with medical groups and with historical groups, was quickly abandoned.

Dr. Paterson claims that he had urged the SCHM/CSHM to meet in conjunction with the Learned Societies. His wish was fulfilled in 1978 when the society met with the Learned Societies conference in London, Ontario. Since that meeting and without fail, the SCHM/CSHM has met with the Learned Societies, in nineteen different cities, in nine different provinces. At each meeting twenty-five to thirty papers have been read.

Membership had grown eightfold in the first thirty years from 14 to 113; following the nationalization, membership rapidly increased nearly three-fold to a maximum of 350 in 1987. The next year, however, the boom had passed; 45 members were in arrears. The society has maintained its current size of approximately 270 members for a decade and a half. Its original diversity persists and expands. Already in 1980, Mme Bonenfant noted that 26 of the 113 members were women.

A few statistics

	1950	1963	1980	1981	1982	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1991	1996	1999
Members	14		113	133	160	281	331	350	254	265	241	287	269
Dues		\$5				\$15		\$25			\$25	\$35	\$35

The Constitution of the reconfigured society was developed by a small committee of Yolande Bonenfant, Wendy Mitchinson, and Charles Roland (chair); it was adopted in 1982. Revisions to the constitution were made during 1994-5 under the direction of Janice Dickin McGinnis and adopted June 1995.

The new constitution specified mailed nominations and mailed ballots. It also entrenched a vague tradition of allowing the Vice-President to automatically step up to President. Despite these recommendations, few mailed ballot elections have been held, most officers being elected by acclamation, and few Vice-Presidents have automatically stepped up to President at the anticipated time. The interpretation of the Constitution has been flexible.

Two honours are now part of the SCHM/CSHM annual meeting. The first is the AMS Paterson lecture. Founded in the early 1980s as the Hannah lecture by an AMS grant to

facilitate guest speakers, this lectureship was renamed to honour Dr. Paterson on his retirement as Executive Director of the Hannah Institute and as he stepped down as President of the society. The second award, established on the initiative of Dr. C.G. Roland, honours the memory of physician-historian H.N. Segall by recognizing the best paper read by a student.

From time to time, some members have questioned the rationale for the Learned Societies venue, wondering if the SCHM/CSHM should try to meet on its own, or in conjunction with medical meetings. Every time the issue has been addressed, the suggestion meets with little enthusiasm—not only for reasons of inertia. The “Learned Societies” venue (renamed the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities in 1998) helps to keep dues, fees, costs of accommodation, administration, and service charges within an affordable range, because it makes use of academic facilities, student labour, and a common administration. More importantly, it allows for attendance at (and combined sessions with) other scholarly societies, such as the Canadian Historical Association, the Canadian Society for the History and Philosophy of Science, and the Canadian Association for the History of Nursing. A portion of our dues are spent on our membership in the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada; but at the time of writing this expenditure has always been of net benefit to our society with reimbursements for travel offered to those presenting papers, especially students.

Another question that has been revisited, almost on an annual basis, is the tradition of continuous plenary sessions versus parallel sessions. In order to avoid dividing the audience—possibly along conceptual lines—program committees have opted to pack the days of the meetings in plenary sessions. To avoid parallel sessions, the meeting moved from two days to three days in 1990. Our meetings are characterized by surgically early starts, fashionably late finishes, and all too brief lunches and breaks. As the discipline grows and submissions increase, the question of parallel sessions is raised each year—so far, it has been rejected. True, the meeting days are long and early sessions can be poorly attended, but avoiding any overlap has meant that every delegate has had access to every paper. The courageous few Americans, Mexicans, and Europeans who have attended our meetings comment enviously on the interdisciplinary collegiality that characterizes the SCHM/CSHM—a quality of our society that may be fostered by our programming traditions. No doubt, the other meeting tradition that has contributed to this sense of community is an informal dinner at a member’s home or in a good restaurant with regional fare.

Publications

In 1979, Dr Kenneth B. Roberts of Memorial University in Newfoundland edited the first of the biannual newsletters. Dr. Roberts was assisted by Sylvio Leblond and Jacques Bernier. Meticulously produced, the Newsletter ran up to forty pages in length containing not only the usual news and announcements, but also scholarly articles, illustrations,

regional reports, programs of annual meetings, minutes, and financial reports. A 1981 survey conducted among SCHM/CSHM members encouraged the editors to expand and formalize the Newsletter as the Bulletin.

June 1984 saw the first number of the Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/Bulletin canadien de l'histoire de la médecine, with Dr. Roberts, assisted by Jacques Bernier, as editor and Charles Roland presiding over book reviews. Its printing was made possible by a grant from the Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine. Dr. Roland took over as editor in June 1987 and Wilfrid Laurier Press became the publisher. In recognition of its scholarly achievements, SSHRC funding was secured in 1992 while James T.H. Connor and Paul Potter served as editors. The Bulletin continues to operate partly from membership dues, partly from its SSHRC funding, and mostly from a generous grant of the AMS-Hannah Institute renewable at five year intervals.

Now well recognized for the quality and diversity of its contributions, the Bulletin is indexed in HISTLINE and other bibliographies of medical history. It is not yet indexed in MEDLINE.

Conclusion

The advent of a more formal Bulletin meant that the lag time from submission to printing lengthened. As an unfortunate result, communications are less spontaneous and the programs of annual meetings have not been printed regularly. Some members will have kept the programs and abstract books distributed by mail and at the annual meetings, but it has not been possible to match the exemplary histories of Sylvio Leblond, with a precise numerical accounting of the society's activities of the second twenty-five years.

We have also forgotten to write obituaries of our friends. The CBMH/BCHM or its predecessor contain notices on only six members: G. Bilson (1988), C.M. Boissonault (1980), C.A. Gauthier (1984), H.N. Segall (1991), W. Spaulding (1993), and L. Stevenson (1988). But in the last two decades we have lost, without comment, several key members of our society whose energy and devotion should not be forgotten. They include De la Broquerie Fortier, W. C. Gibson, G. Hetenyi, Sylvio Leblond, André Paradis, and A.A. Travill.

Our founding president closed his essay about our origins with the following words: "The little society born in Quebec City on 24 October 1950 has become a national institution. Let us hope that the year 2000 will find the future provincial divisions to be just as lively as that of Quebec in 1975."¹³ In becoming even larger, we have indeed fostered our discipline, with many more conferences, publications, and contacts. Our two main functions, the annual meetings and the Bulletin, are a source of enjoyment and pride. But in growing, perhaps we have under-emphasized the social aspects of our "society" losing some of the vivacity of smallness, which has been left to the many local clubs. To recover and foster the vivacity described by our founder is a goal for our next quarter century.

Jacalyn Duffin and Paul Potter, May 2000

Présidents/Presidents

1950-52	Sylvio Leblond
1952-55	Charles-Auguste Gauthier
1955-65	Emile Gaumond
1965-79	De la Broquerie Fortier
1979-80	Jean Beaudoin
1980-87	G.R. 'Pat' Paterson
1987-89	C. Stuart Houston
1989-91	Toby Gelfand

¹³ Leblond, 1974, 220.

1991-93	Gilles Maloney
1993-95	Charles G. Roland
1995-97	Jacques Bernier
1997-99	T. Jock Murray
1999-2001	Jacalyn Duffin

Sécrétaire/Secretary (après 1971, un Trésorier distinct; après 1977, en combinaison)
(after 1971, a separate Treasurer; after 1977 combined)

1950-52	Pierre Jobin		
1952-59	Jean-Thomas Michaud		
1959-63	Benoit Boucher		
1963-68	Sylvio Leblond		
1968-69	Claude Galarneau		
1969-71	Pierre Savard	Trésorier/Treasurer	
1971-74	Charles Marie Boissonault	1971-77	Rémi-Nelson Gilbert
1974-77	Jacqueline Demers Larue		
1977-86	Yolande Bonenfant		
1987-92	Robert Macbeth		
1992-96	John Crellin		
1996-	Paul Potter		

Réunions annuels/Annual meetings

1976	Quebec as host of International Society for the History of Medicine
1977	Quebec (with CMA meeting)
1978	London
1979	Saskatoon
1980	Montreal *
1981	Halifax ‡
1982	Ottawa ‡
1983	Vancouver
1984	Guelph
1985	Montreal (U de M) *
1986	Winnipeg (U M) * ‡
1987	Hamilton
1988	Windsor
1989	Quebec
1990	Victoria
1991	Kingston*
1992	Charlottetown *
1993	Ottawa (Carleton) *
1994	Calgary
1995	Montreal (UQaM)
1996	Ste Catherines
1997	St John's
1998	Ottawa (U O)
1999	Sherbrooke
2000	Edmonton

2001 Quebec
2002 Toronto

* program printed in SCHM/CSHM Newsletter or Bulletin
‡ report of AGM, or of secretary treasurer printed in Newsletter or Bulletin

Redacteurs du Bulletin / Editors of the Bulletin

1979-1987	Kenneth B. Roberts (jusqu'à/until 1984 <u>Newsletter</u>)
1987-1990	Charles G. Roland
1990-1995	J.T.H. Connor and Paul Potter
1995-1997	J.T.H. Connor and J.J. Connor
1997-	Cheryl Krasnick Warsh

Archivistes/ Archivists

1965-70	Antonio Drolet
1994- 2000	Barbara Craig

Discours Hannah / Hannah Lecture (* publié/published BCHM/CBMH)

1982	J. Crellin and S. Leblond*
1984	Robert J.T. Joy
1985	Jean-Charles Sournia*
1986	John Norris

Discours AMS Paterson / AMS Paterson Lecture (* publié/ published BCHM/CBMH)

1987	John Parascandola*
1988	Guenter B. Risse
1989	Jean-Noël Biraben*β
1990	Judith Walzer Leavitt
1991	John Harley Warner
1992	Jackie Pigeaud*
1993	Phil Teigen
1994	Susan Cayleff
1995	François Delaporte
1996	Barbara Rosenkrantz
1997	Gerald Geison
1998	Susan Reverby
1999	Charles G. Roland*
2000	Andrew R. Cunningham

Prix Harold N. Segall / Harold N. Segall Prize (travail d'étudiant(e)/student paper)

1994	Robert Sullivan
1995	Genevieve Dumas
1996	James Morin
1997	Fiona Miller
1998	Not awarded
1999	Jennifer Marotta

Membres honoraires/Honorary Members

Yolande Bonenfant
Bernard Longpré
Robert Macbeth
G.R. "Pat" Paterson