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ARCHIVES  
U.P.E.I.

VOL.5 NO.17

MAR.5,1974

## HISTORY UPEI

### HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY: what's the matter with it, what can be done about it?

by Don Cregier

(This article is adapted from the introduction to the author's forthcoming book, The Worms in Clio's Apple: History Teachers I Have Known. Copyright pending.)

History as a university discipline is dying. Within a generation it will be in the same state of rigor mortis as the classics are today. Student enrollment in history courses will progressively decline, unpopular courses will be dropped, departmental and library budgets will be slashed, new instructors will not be hired, senior professors will be pensioned off. The dire handwriting is on the blackboard, for the wise to heed, for the complacent to ignore at their peril.

This may seem a strange and daring prediction in view of history's current strength at UPEI. With about 1100 enrollees in its 16 courses last semester, it was some 300 ahead of psychology, the next most popular arts department. One out of every five

enrollees in arts was taking at least one history course. One of every eight "instructional units" (course enrollees) at UPEI was studying history.

These figures, however, conceal more than they reveal. As in previous years, two or three courses draw about three fifths of the history students. Without the magnetic power of one extraordinary lecturer, in particular, perhaps one-third or more of the History Department's enrollees would gravitate elsewhere.

There was another ominous note concealed in last term's enrollment figures: nearly 50% fewer freshmen and sophomores were taking history courses than in 1972.

It seems clear to me that after allowance is made for certain factors unique to the UPEI History Department, the trend here is similar to -- if slower than -- that at other North American institutions. The attraction of history as an academic

discipline is weakening. We must now ask why.

One reason is plainly economic. There are many fewer jobs requiring academic training in history than a few years ago. The students who take the most history courses are history majors who usually expect to teach or to enter graduate programs leading to an academic career.

As everyone knows, there is today a glut of teachers in most of the arts disciplines, not least in history. The no longer unusual case of a neophyte M.A. or Ph.D., for whom no academic post is available, working at a menial job or collecting welfare is not one to encourage university students to become history majors.

More disturbing, in my opinion, is the turning away from history as a subject -- that is unimportant, irrelevant or simply boring.

Even if jobs requiring history dry up and hence fewer students become history majors, there still could be a valuable place for the discipline as an auxiliary to other subjects where the prospects of majors are more hopeful. History is also an excellent subject for the university student still searching for his identity or his metier in life.

Unfortunately the image of history in the minds of many, if not most, university students is not an impressive one. Many are drawn instead to such subjects as political science, sociology, psychology and philosophy, which appear to be more dynamic or inspiring.

The image of history as a dreary, time-wasting subject arises principally from 2 causes. One, which I consider the minor cause, is the tediousness of most history courses in elementary and high schools. Part of the loss of interest in history is certainly due to what one writer describes as "the bombardment of cold sterile facts year in and year out

