

Looking Forward

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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LOOKING FORWARD

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At the end of May 2001, the Folklore Studies Association of Canada met for three days at Laval University in Quebec City to reflect upon the present, but especially the future, of our organisation and of the discipline of Canadian folklore/ethnology. The time and place were both auspicious. The Association was officially formed in December 1975, and thus the meeting took place in our 25th anniversary; and for much more than a quarter of a century, Laval has historically been a location where folklore/ethnology has been pursued with great intellectual and professional vigour.

Quebec also provided an enticing location to attract international visitors. We had a particular mix of individuals and perspectives in mind, and we were indeed fortunate that all our first choice plenary speakers agreed to come. Barbro Klein, from Sweden, wanted to renew her acquaintance with a city she had previously visited at the invitation of Elli-Kaija Kõngäs Maranda. Leonard Primiano, from the United States, was attracted by the many sites where he could pursue his interest in religious folk traditions. Valentina Bold, from Scotland, wanted to meet others involved in the multimedia presentation of traditional culture, having received inspiration from the work of the Canadian Museum of Civilisation. Because our meeting was held as part of the Congress of Social Sciences and Humanities, Gérard Althabe, from France, was able to meet Canadian and international scholars gathered together for the event. We also included a plenary speaker from Laval, our host university, Bogumil Jewsiewicki, who supported our efforts logistically as well as intellectually.

The meeting provided an alternative to the usual fare for FSAC. Thanks to generous support,¹ we were able to focus upon the questions

1. We are grateful for assistance from the Research Development Initiatives of

at hand: to assess the state of ethnology/folklore studies in Canada; to identify future directions; and to mobilize efforts towards strengthening the presence of the inter/discipline. Normally, only those who present papers at scholarly meeting have their travel costs reimbursed. For this meeting, we were also able to fund participants; we asked those requesting funding to give us a statement describing their interest in and commitment to folklore/ethnology studies and this workshop.

Several other aspects of this meeting differed from most other FSAC meetings. First, we held five invited plenary sessions, involving scholars at various points in their careers and from different intellectual, professional/academic, and national locations. We also invited a variety of individuals to comment upon these talks, and welcomed dialogue from the audience. These plenary events are produced in their entirety here, including the presentations, discussants' comments, and audience reactions.

Second, we were able to provide simultaneous translation between Canada's two official languages² for the plenary sessions, ensuring that our discussions could proceed on a secure basis. The translators agreed to stay for our Annual General Meeting, substantially reducing its duration, normally requiring considerable time for folk translations by participants.

Third, our meeting was international. We were joined not only by our invited colleagues but by others from France, Africa, and the U.S.A. In fact, the meeting was the largest ever for FSAC, and participants consequently left the event feeling that there were others in Canada and elsewhere with common goals, interests, and concerns.

Finally, we organised separate meetings for university faculty, students, museums/archive workers to share the joys and sorrows of their work and to plan collective action based on their needs. We also encouraged participants to discuss research in progress, and their plans

the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the Department of Canadian Heritage, Official Languages Translation Program; CELAT at Laval University; the University of Winnipeg Research Office and Work-Study Program; the Summer Career Placements Program, Human Resources Development Canada; and the Dean of Arts at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

2. Thanks to the Official Languages Support Programs of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

for smaller as well as larger scale work. And we offered practical workshops, in such areas as publication, working with the media, and grants and funding sources. Most of the papers proposed by individuals also addressed our overall topic, and we reproduce one of them here. Michael Robidoux offers an example of folklore research techniques in the kinesiology classroom.

The Quebec meeting offered our members an unprecedented opportunity for participation in the development of folklore and ethnology in Canada and the world, as well as a chance to work on specific skills and practices. We talked concretely about what was happening, what we as folklorists/ethnologists do best, and what we envision for the future in terms of collaborations, exchanges, and research programs. Following upon our 2000 meeting in Edmonton, which introduced FSAC to the Ukrainian folklore/ethnology program at the University of Alberta, students from elsewhere in Canada had a chance to meet those involved with ethnology at Laval, and we hope that this opening up of communication and learning will continue in our upcoming meeting, sponsored by the folklore/ethnology program at the University of Sudbury, in 2002.

The five plenary sessions and the additional paper range from the concrete to the theoretical, but each (like the disciplines of folklore/ethnology) combines analytical reflections with theoretical sophistication. Each paper, in its own way, talks across theoretical, ideological, and material boundaries, as is often noted by the discussants. They address issues around dissemination, teaching, fieldwork practices, and national/international connections and margins. The results, published here, represent a particularly Canadian dialogue; francophones, anglophones, and allophones may never totally understand each other, but at least we continue to talk across the boundaries of our sometimes shared, sometimes divergent history.