

TODAY'S HISTORY LESSON: LOOK TO THE PAST FOR A JOB WITH A FUTURE

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By Holly Hubbard Preston

Your child, friend or spouse walks through the door proclaiming he or she wants to be a historian. An honourable profession, you think, but will it ever generate much income?

It may indeed since the need for historical expertise has expanded from the classroom into the corporate world and well beyond. Ford Motor Co., for example, was forced to look into its past to defend itself against a class-action lawsuit for allegedly having profited from the slave labor of thousands of civilians at one of its German truck factories during World War II.

To research the allegations, the car manufacturer called not only its corporate lawyers but also the Rockville, Maryland-based History Associates Inc., a concern specializing in litigation that has historical elements.

Philip Cantelon, a former Williams College professor who founded History Associates 20 years ago, employs 50 full-time historians working in three locations in North America as well as an international division run by independent contractors.

His company has helped clients sort out the movement of Nazi gold, tracked down looted works of art, set up archives and written corporate histories. These services generate about \$4 million per year in sales for the company, making Mr. Cantelon a fitting example for someone who has found a way to make history lucrative as well as relevant.

"When I taught contemporary American history, the students would change but not the content of the class." Mr. Cantelon said. "Now, I feel my mind is always being stretched."

Fred Hosking, who co-founded Public History Inc, in Ottawa, has a similar story. He opted to take his master's degree in history and start a

historical-research services company with three partners. Within five years, Public History has grown from a staff of four to 45 and now brings in more than 2 million Canadian dollars (\$1.3 billion) annually.

For the would-be historian, the path that led Mr. Cantelon and Mr. Hosking away from the ivy-covered environs of academia is worth noticing since competition for full-time professorships is becoming fiercer around the world. Indeed, historical societies in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States report a huge drop-off in the number of full-time professorships being offered in their respective countries.

The reason? A trend among university administrators to hire more part-time (and less expensive) faculty.

Arnita Jones, executive director of the American Historical Association in Washington, noted that tenured professors who retire, "are not being replaced by one person but two or three different professors." Those people, she said, might be teaching five or six different courses, possibly at different institutions, for a minimal fee of \$1,500 or \$2,000 per course, with no benefits.

Suzanne Cawsey, director of operations for the British Historical society in London, said a contract history professor earns about \$28 per hour.

Don Wright, an executive board member of the Canadian Historical Society who recently landed a full-time professorship at Brock University in St. Catherine's, Ontario, said he finds it hard to have the ways of communicating with them. "It is that shift that has made it necessary to begin to train people to work outside the university setting."

She cited the National Museum of New Zealand in Wellington. "It is thematic rather than chronological, uses the most up-to-date technology in teaching video games as well as visuals, and is a festival as much as a museum."

The situation is different in Japan, according to Masaru Udagawa, professor of Japanese business history at Hosei University. Mr. Udagawa is also a

board member of the Business History Society of Japan, which was founded in 1964 amid the country's rapid postwar economic expansion. At the time, historians, economists and sociologists were interested in the development of Japan's big corporations while foreigners wanted to know about the evolution of Japanese approaches to management.

Many companies have a department that compiles company history, but the dedication to such endeavours had peaked and may be declining. Mr. Udagawa said, since the economy has had to compete against 60 other applicants. "We were all similarly qualified," he said.

With an average of 12 years invested in post high-school studies, historians who take the academic route are obviously not in it for the money, but their options are growing. Mary Sheehan, president of the Australian Council of Professional Historians Associations in Sydney, estimated that roughly 80 percent of association members work for corporations, private groups and governments.

The latter area is particularly promising, she said. Since the 1970's, the Australian federal and state governments have enacted laws to protect the natural and cultural heritage of native people. "Fulfilling the statutory requirements of these various forms of legislation has, in simple terms, required the professional services of historians to research and write histories, often in report form." As a result, salary and fee levels have also generally increased, she noted.

In fact, there is growing demand for public historians - people who work with governments, museums and other cultural organizations to deliver history to the masses all over the globe.

The Ministry of Education has dropped a requirement that management faculties offer a course on business history. Besides, "young people are less interested in history, these days," said a Mr. Udagawa. "Universities that used to offer three courses on the topic now offer two, and those who offered two are now offering one, and so on," he added.

The emergence of digital history – putting historical content on the vast, collaborative world of the Internet – promises to open up dramatic opportunities for historians. For example, there is a massive global effort called the Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative, involving 700 scholars from more than 30 countries. Broken into teams, they are working to create a digital platform where maps, research, images and diagrams for 250 subjects pertaining to the humanities can be digitally displayed.

Safi Mafudikwa, one of the scholars working on the initiative from his native Zimbabwe, has the assignment: "Afrikan Alphabets: The Story of Writing in Africa."

He said: "I can fly to any European capital much faster, cultural organization to deliver history to the masses – all over the globe.

Mr. Cantelon said a historian armed with a bachelor's degree might expect to start out at about \$29,000 per year and eventually earn as much as \$42,000. With a doctorate, the starting salary would be about \$38,000, rising to \$75,000 or more. At History Associates, a profit-sharing program can boost the annual compensation by 20 percent in a good year. Historians working as contract employees, Mr. Cantelon added, average \$50 per hour.

"Cultural institutions around the world have changed dramatically in the 20th century," said Janelle Warren-Findley, co-director of the graduate program in public history at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona.

Ms. Warren-Findley, who has also worked as a public historian in Britain, New Zealand and Sweden, added: "Where museums and libraries once welcomed mainly people like the scholars who staffed them, they now cater to people with a range of options for their recreational dollar."

As institutional audiences have shifted, noted Ms. Warren-Findley, so have the ways of communicating with them. "It is that shift that has made it necessary to begin to train people to work outside the university setting."

It is effects like this, said Ed Ayers, professor of digital history at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville that are "opening an entirely new avenue of displaying and interpreting the record of the human past."

As Mr. Ayers can attest, digital history is also opening new commercial avenues for historians. He recently helped found a small commercial venture called Octagon Multi-media Productions L.L.C. that builds web sites for commercial publishers of history texts.