

Unit 1: Video 1 Transcript

Q1: Introduction

A: Frank Abbott. I am in the History Department at Kwantlen Polytechnic University for the past 25 years. And my main focus of research is Quebec religious, cultural, social history.

Q2: What interests you about 19th century Quebec? Talk about the historical research process.

A: I've always been interested in the cultural and religious history of Quebec. I grew up with a Catholic background. So I had an Irish Newfoundland Catholic background. So it struck me that there were a lot of similarities between my experiences and those of the people I eventually came to study. And the more I looked at this, the more I was convinced of that. In fact, whenever I tell my Newfoundland cousins what I'm doing, they understand instantly and no one else, at least in the English-speaking part of Canada, has the same intuitive grasp of that. So I thought this is a good way to ask questions about Quebec, I guess, from an outsider perspective. But with a certain sense that we have a few things in common. And I think there's much more commonality say in the Quebec religious, social experience between Quebec and at least Eastern Canada, than a lot of people would suspect. A lot of Quebec historians look to France for similarities of experience because of the language and the culture. And it's quite understandable. But seems to me there's a whole unexplored territory there between the experiences I had growing up and people in Quebec. There's a whole bunch of reasons. Quebecers were a cultural, and linguistic, and religious minority in the larger Anglo-Saxon world. And it struck me the same thing growing up in Nova Scotia from those roots, that sense of being a minority, not quite understood by the people around you, was a very formative one. So anyway, I took all of these questions to see if they'd work in Quebec. So the process of historical research meant finding a place that's ethnically, religiously homogenous and seeing if the questions I would ask made any sense in that context. So that's what I started with.

Q10: Why did you get involved with Quebec history?

A: Maybe why would I get involved in Quebec in the first place? So why did I get involved in Quebec history? An English speaker from the Maritimes living in Vancouver, what are you doing talking about—and somebody kind of, in Quebec, kind of implied—you're not really going to understand us, are you? And I thought, no; I mean, that's a legitimate question. But one of my colleagues in Mandarin at Kwantlen said the same thing. "Look, I teach Chinese History. What do Chinese people think about a Westerner talking about their history?" And he said, "It's great. It gives a different perspective. We allow—we can see ourselves through other people's eyes." So that would be my answer to people in Quebec. No, I think this is a fascinating culture. I think there's some interesting human parallels between experiences in different parts of Canada. And the other thing is, in nearly 50 years of going there, I've had nothing but the nicest experiences. I lived in Montreal for a while. Go back—is research in Quebec history going to Quebec City and Montreal a chore? It definitely isn't. It's just a totally fascinating place for me, and it always will be.