

**University of Toronto Archives and  
Records Management Services**



**James B. Conacher  
Personal Records  
B2005-0011**

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### **Biographical Sketch**

James B. Conacher was one of Canada's most distinguished historians who specialized in the study of British history. He was born in Kingston on Oct. 31 1916, the son of Madeleine (nee Cashal) and William Morrisson Conacher, professor of English at Queen's University. He earned his B.A (1937). and M.A.(1939) from Queen's University and began his Ph.D. at Harvard in 1939. World War II however interrupted his studies as Conacher enlisted in the Canadian Army Signal Corps. In 1944, he moved to the Historical Section, and worked under the direction of Col. C.P. Stacey. In 1946, he left the Army and came to the University of Toronto as a lecturer in history while still pursuing his Ph.D. which he obtained from Harvard in 1949.

Through the following decade and a half, Prof. Conacher rose through the ranks, becoming a full professor in 1963. From 1972-1977, he was Chairman of the Department of History and at the time of his normal retirement in 1983 was appointed Professor Emeritus. After 1983, he continued his academic pursuits and teaching. He was visiting professor at the University of Sydney, Australia and at Queen's University and gave many special lectures at various universities in Great Britain and the United States.

Early in his career at the University of Toronto, Prof Conacher honed his administrative skills on various University committees. A few significant ones include the Plateau Committee, 1955-1956, the Presidential Advisory Committee 1957-1959, two stints on the Haist Committee on appointments, promotions and tenure in 1964-1965 and 1968-69 and the Presidential Search Committee in 1970-1971. Within the Department of History, he was Departmental Secretary 1948-1949 and held two terms as Graduate Secretary 1955-56 and 1958-62. He was an active member of the Committee on Teaching Staff, serving as its V.P. in 1965-66 and was the first president of its successor, the University of Toronto Faculty Association, in 1971-72. He was also a founding member of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. As Chairman of the Department of History (1972-1977) he served on several committees including the Faculty of Arts and Science Committee on Academic Standard (1973-1977), School of Graduate Studies Council, Division I (1972-1977) and the University Research Board (1972-1975). In the late 1970s and early 1980s his expertise was exercised on the President's Budgetary Advisory Committee 1978-1980, as chairman of the Committee on Academic Affairs 1979-1980 and on the Executive Committee of Governing Council 1980-1981.

Prof. Conacher was a prolific researcher, writer and editor. His first book, *The Aberdeen Coalition 1852-1855*, published in 1968, established Conacher as a leading 19<sup>th</sup> century British historian. He published three other major books, edited two other books including a translation of Francois De Creux's *History of Canada*, by P.J. Robinson. He also published numerous articles. He was joint editor of the Canadian Historical Review from 1949-1956, general editor for the Champlain Society 1950-1962 and an associate editor in the Disraeli Project 1982-1993.

Throughout his life Conacher was active in the Roman Catholic community. At various times, he was a board member of the St. Vincent de Paul's Society and was on the parish council of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church (1967-68). Other catholic organizations include the Committee on Higher Education for Catholics which he initiated and the Canadian Catholic Historical Association.

James B. Conacher died at the age of 77 on October 3 1994. He was survived by his wife Muriel, whom he married in 1943, their two children Desmond and Patricia, along with their families. Mrs. Conacher died in 2005 soon after these papers were donated to the University of Toronto Archives.

### Scope and Content

1843 – 1993 (pre-dominant 1937-1993)                      6.13 m                      Textual

These are a fairly complete set of records documenting most aspects of Prof. Conacher's career as a Canadian academic, a scholar of British history, a university administrator, and a teacher. There is a voluminous amount of professional correspondence found not only in **Series 1 Professional Correspondence** but in most other series. Much of it documents his professional and personal relationships with colleagues and friends. Records in **Series 8 Professional Activities** also give evidence to these relationships as it pertains to activities on associations. Researchers wishing insight into the network of Canadian historians active in Canada from the 1950s to the 1980s will want to consult these records and in particular Series 1 and Series 8. Conacher's non-academic life is best documented in **Series 2 Family Correspondence** and **Series 12 Non-Professional Activities** but again personal correspondence with family and friends is interfiled in Series 1 and discusses life in general for himself and his family.

While manuscripts of his major published works have not survived, (except for his final work *Britain and the Crimea*), other documents such as correspondence with publishers, contracts, reviews and corrections to drafts give a good sense of his work on these publications. As a whole, his research, writing and editorial works are well documented in **Series 4 Books** as well as records in **Series 5 Talks, addresses and articles**, **Series 6 Reviews**, and **Series 7 Disraeli Project**. His editorial role with the *Canadian Historical Review* is documented in **Series 8 Professional Activities**, while his editorial files for the Champlain Society have been transferred to the Champlain Society Papers (Ms 50) held by the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

A quick look at Conacher's c.v. reveals the numerous administrative posts he held in his more than forty years at the University of Toronto. His career covers a period in the University of Toronto that saw unprecedented expansion, changes in University governance, movements by both faculty and students to have a greater say in decision making and the beginning of budgetary constraints on University and external research funding. Within the Department of History, curriculum was rewritten several times, new disciplines were being established and the graduate department further defined. Records found in **Series 9 University of Toronto, Series 10 Department of History, and Series 11 University of Toronto Faculty Association** document to varying degrees all of these developments. A copy of Conacher's unpublished memoirs found in Series 5: Talks, addresses and articles lends a very personal voice to these developments.

Conacher's role as a teacher to his students, as well as a mentor to his graduate students and younger colleagues are reflected in the records found in **Series 3 Letters of Recommendation, Series 13 Teaching and Series 14 Ph.D. Student Files**. The fact that so many sought his help and advice is evidence of his influence with a whole generation of historical scholars. Much of the correspondence in Series 3 and 14 shows his personal relationships with those he mentored.

**Access :** Restrictions apply to Series 3 and 14. See series descriptions for details.  
All other series are Open.

**Related Records:** B1986-0041 - Conacher's Oral History Interview  
B1983-0017 - copy of Conacher's Ph.D. thesis

**Associated Records:** Records relating to Conacher's time as Chairman of the Department of History can be found in Department of History Records  
A1990-0023

Conacher's Editorial files for the Champlain Society have been transferred to the Champlain Society Papers (MG 50) in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library

**SERIES 1****PROFESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE**

1937-1992      0.97 m      textual

This voluminous series documents all aspects of Conacher's career including such matters as appointments, salary, editorial projects, research, sabbaticals, professional activities within associations and participation in University administrative units. While there are series devoted entirely to most of these activities quite a lot of correspondence related to them is found filed chronologically in this series. Researchers will also find personal correspondence with friends and at times family members in these files despite the fact that most of this latter type of correspondence was filed separately and makes up Series 2.

The early correspondence from the late 1930s relates to his studies at Queen's and his move to Harvard. There are several files of World War II correspondence documenting his employment in the Privy Council and in the Canadian Army signal division and historical section. There is a substantial amount of correspondence specifically with C.P. Stacey. At the end of this decade correspondence reflects Conacher's attempts to establish his career as an historian. It discusses progress on his thesis, administrative issues regarding his employment and the teaching of courses.

Correspondence during the 1950s and 1960s is the most extensive and varied. It documents editorial projects such as a translation of Francois Du Creux's *History of Canada* and projects related to the *Canadian Historical Review*. There is correspondence relating to organizations including: Canadian Historical Association, Atlantic Treaty Association, Frontier College and many others. Correspondents with other historians include (not exclusively): Kitson Clark of the University of Pennsylvania; Gordon O. Rotney of Memorial University (Nfld); C.L. Mowat of the University of Chicago; as well as U of T colleagues Donald Creighton, Archie Thornton and John Buchanan and close friend Kenneth McNaught. Of particular note is extensive correspondence regarding the dismissal of Professor Harry Crowe in 1958 from the United College of Winnipeg. Prof. Crowe was dismissed after the contents of his private letter were read by the Principal of the College and members of the University of Toronto History Department came to his defence.

There is a gap in the chronological correspondence files from 1971-1977. During most of this time (1972-1976) he was chair of the history department so it is assumed that much of this correspondence was filed with the office correspondence. Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing in the late 1970s and early 1980s is correspondence relating to issues of university governance as well as changes in curriculum and structure of the Faculty of Arts. There is also correspondence relating to various sabbaticals – London 1977 and Australia 1983. Correspondence nearing the end of his career until the time of his death relate to reviews, requests for recommendations as well as some correspondence relating to editorial and research projects.

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**Series 1 (cont'd)**Box List

B2005-0011/001	1937-1956
B2005-0011/002	1956-1962
B2005-0011/003	1961-1964
B2005-0011/004	1965-1969
B2005-0011/005	1969-1979
B2005-0011/006	1980-1983
B2005-0011/007	1984-1989
B2005-0011/008(01)-(03)	1990-1992

**Series 2      Family Correspondence**

1843- 1982 (pre-dominant dates 1946-1982) 0.2 m

This series contains family correspondence between James Conacher and family members. Correspondence from the 1940s and early 1950s is with his parents, his brother Desmond who was a professor of English at Trinity College and wife Muriel. Much of the correspondence with his family while at Harvard and during WW II is interfiled with general correspondence found in B2005-0011 /001. Later family correspondence was exchanged while the Conachers were on research leaves and is mostly with their grown children. Arrangement is chronological.

Also included in this series is some historical correspondence and documents belonging to ancestor James Roy Conacher (1938-191-).

B2005-0011/008 (04)-(06) and B2005-0011/009

**Series 3      Letters of Recommendation**

1950-1983      0.26 m      textual

Letters of recommendation for colleagues and students document Conacher's status as a senior historian and mentor. Conacher's support was sought by colleagues for grant applications, fellowships, appointments and promotions. Recommendations for students were mainly for scholarships and entrance into graduate school. Early correspondence is filed in two bunches by following years 1950-1956, 1957-1965. For the period 1967-1983, correspondence is filed in general alphabetical files.

Access: Restricted for 30 years from last date of file activity.

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**Series 4                      Books**

1968-1989      0.67 m

This series documents Conacher's publishing activities relating to his major works including:

*The Aberdeen Coalition, 1852-1855 : A Study in Mid-Nineteenth-Century*

*Party Politics (1968)*

*The Peelites and the Party System 1846-1952 (1972)*

*Waterloo to the Common Market, Borzoi History of England Vol 5. 1815  
to the Present (1975)*

*Britain and the Crimea, 1855-56: Problems of War and Peace (1987)*

Included are files arranged chronologically by title of publication and contain correspondence and contracts with publishers, comments, reviews, partial drafts of chapters and revisions for his first three books. There are three drafts of manuscripts for his final book "*War and Peace*", - its title during the writing phase.

B2005-0011/012 - /015

**Series 5                      Talks, Addresses and Articles**

1939-1992      0.33 m

This series contains correspondence and manuscripts relating to talks and papers many given at symposiums, conferences and meetings. There are also drafts of some published articles as well as a copy of his M.A. thesis from Queens (1939) and a draft of his Ph.D. Thesis from Harvard. Files are arranged chronologically.

His writings on British history are found in two main files containing mainly drafts, as well as a file documenting his contributions to *Encyclopedia Americana*. On various occasions Conacher gave tributes to many well known Canadian historians. There are typescripts for his tribute to Donald Creighton, C.P. Stacey, Arthur Lower and close friend Kenneth McNaught. Also included in this series are notes prepared for an oral history interview in the early 1980s as well as a draft copy of his unpublished memoirs. Both are interesting for their insights on the University administration and the Department of History in particular.

B2005-0011/016-/017



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**Series 6                      Reviews**

1947-1991      0.13 m

This series documents Conacher's role as an external assessor and reviewer. At times it is other historians he has been asked to assess for promotion or act as external reviewer of a Ph.D. candidate. At other times it is a review at the institutional level, as in the case of his role in reviewing the Dalhousie Graduate History Department (1977) and the University of Western Ontario, Graduate Department of History (1986). There are also files relating to Conacher acting as referee for articles most of which are filed in four chronological files covering his entire career (1947-1991). These files contain correspondence with publisher as well as drafts of published reviews.

B2005-0011/018

**Series 7                      Disraeli Project**

1982-1993      0.2 m

The Disraeli project had begun in 1972 as a large research project aimed at searching out Disraeli letters and related primary and secondary materials for publication. Conacher joined the pared down second phase of the project in 1982 recruited by Senior Editor M.G. Wiebe (Queen's University). From 1982 to 1993, the group comprising of Wiebe, Conacher, John Matthews and Mary S. Millar published Volumes 3 and 4. Correspondence, reviews, grant applications, minutes of meetings, revision notes, drafts document the groups efforts and Prof. Conacher's particular involvement.

B2005-0011/019

**Series 8                      Professional Activities**

1959-1991      0.39 m

Records in this series document Conacher's active involvement in several professional associations including: the Canadian Historical Association, the American Historical Association, the Council of Conference on British Studies, the Champlain Society and the Canadian Catholic Historical Association. There is one file relating to his early involvement in the Canadian Association of University Teachers (1950-1957). Finally there are also files that document his time on the editorial committee of the John Stuart Mill Project (1960-1990) and the *Journal of Modern History* (1971-1973). Files are arranged alphabetically by name of association. Canadian Historical Association files are boxed in B2005-0011/022.

Associated Material: Original Editorial files (1951-62) for the Champlain Society have been moved to the Champlain Society Papers (MG 50) in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.

B2005-0011/020-022

**Series 9**                      **University of Toronto**

1955-1981 0.26 m

Throughout his career, Prof. Conacher was active on various University administrative committees. In some cases, he was a member of the committee, in other cases he corresponded with committee members or wrote memos on behalf of both the Dept. of History and/or the Faculty Association. There are files for the following committees on which he served: Plateau committee, sub-committee on staff (1955-56), Policy and Planning committee (1961), Presidential Committee on Appointments (1964-1965), Presidential Advisory Committee on Academic Appointments and Tenure also known as the Haist Committee (1968-1971), Presidential Search Committee (1971). There are also several files on the Faculty of Arts General Committee (1970-74) as well as one file relating to a proposed restructuring of the Faculty of Arts (1976)

There are also several files on University structure including records relating to the Duff Berdahl Report (1963), general memos and correspondence (1965-69), the Committee of Concerned Faculty (1971), the Dumphy Committee for Participation of Faculty in Governance (1976), the Ad Hoc Committee on Academic Freedom (1977), the Budget Advisory Committee (1978-79), the Governing Council, Academic Affairs Committee (1980), and the Decanal Promotion Committee (1981),

He made submissions to Committee on Graduate Studies (1964-65), Placement Services 1967, MacPherson Committee (1967), Robarts Library fundraising letter (1973), review of Scarborough College (1970), the PACE Committee (1971), Library Advisory Committee (1981). There is documentation on a meeting organized by Conacher with Minister of Finance Donald Macdonald relating to university and research funding and his part in proposing an Emeritus College Retirement Complex (1983-1986).

B2005-0011/023 - /024

**Series 10**                      **Department of History**

1945-1988              0.33 m

General correspondence, business files and various committee files document Prof. Conacher's career in the Department of History. General correspondence covers the period just prior to his hiring in 1948 to his post retirement period up to 1988. Business files are specific to his time as Chairman and relate to managing budgets, general administrative issues and more specific issues being referred to the Chair by various departmental committees.

Finally there are files relating to 40 years of committee work within the Department many dealing with curriculum and the development of the graduate program including the 1968 Graduate Appraisal Committee on re-organization of the graduate department, the Dyck Committee dealing with student staff ratio (1973-1975), the Curriculum Committee (1948-1966) and perhaps most importantly the Appointment and Tenure Committee (1960-1974). Correspondence and related documents from this last committee are boxed in B2005-0011/026.

B2005-0011/025 - 027

**Series 11**                      **University of Toronto Faculty Association**

1948-1986              0.2

This series documents Conacher's active involvement in both the U of T Faculty Association of which he was president in 1971-72 and its predecessor the Association of Teaching Staff, for which he was V.P. in 1964-65. Files include minutes, agenda, notes, correspondence, memos and briefs. There are several files relating to University governance and specifically the measures to ensure representation of Faculty on the Board of Governors and after 1970, Governing Council. Files are arranged chronologically.

B2005-0011/028

**Series 12                      Non-Professional Activities**

1956-1993                      0.26 m

Correspondence, memos, reports, minutes of meetings document Prof. Conacher's involvement in non-professional associations. Several files relate to his life as a Roman Catholic, including files on the Committee on Higher Education for Catholics (1960-61), Parish Council for Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church 1967-68 and several files relating to his long-time work in the St. Vincent de Paul Society. During the 1950s and 1960s, Prof. Conacher belonged to the Atlantic Treaty Organization. Files contain correspondence with Edgar McInnis, president of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and with Ronald Ritchie, chairman of the Canadian Atlantic Coordinating Committee Ronald Ritchie. Finally there is one file for an anti-nuclear organization called Third Track for Peace (1984) that included many from the University of Toronto community.

Arrangement is alphabetical with all records relating to the St. Vincent de Paul Society filed in B2005-0011/030.

B2005-0011/029-30

**Series 13                      Teaching**

1947-1985                      0.4 m

This series contains course lectures, outlines, reading lists for courses taught by Conacher throughout his career including: 1c European History to 1648 (1947-); 2a History of Great Britain (1947- 195-); 3c British History since 1763 and 2d British History 1485- 1763 (1950s); Britain and 1<sup>st</sup> WW (1979); History 330 and 337 (1970s , 80s); History 1430 Party Politics (198-). Also included are lectures while visiting professor at Notre Dame 1964-66.

For History 330 and 337, there are course evaluations by students for the 1982-83. Also for these later years are Conacher's comments on student essays and notes on graduate seminars (1980-85).

Files are arranged by course, more or less, chronologically with evaluations and comments filed at the end.

B2005-0011/031-032

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**Series 14                      Ph.D. Student Files**

1959-1987      0.26 m

These Ph.D. files document Conacher's on-going relationship with many of his Ph.D. students. Files contain mainly correspondence, examiners' comments, thesis reports, as well as recommendation for grants, appointments and promotions. There is also one file of miscellaneous notes regarding graduate theses. Arrangement is alphabetical by the name of the student.

Access: Restricted for 75 years from the last date of file activity.

B2005-0011/033-/34