

James McCowan Memorial Social History Initiative

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Jack McCowan History Essay Award – Grade 12

December 15, 2025

More Than a Land Acknowledgement Statement: The Importance of Critical and Creative Thinking Skills

In an uncontrolled manner, "new" primary sources become public knowledge every day, for example archival newspaper accounts. Some so-called primary sources could even be border-line "fake news" (politically-motivated pieces for example). In your random web-surfing -- all public knowledge -- you are bound to find some of these accounts that use dated language and skewed perspectives. It is the job of educators to guide you in using your critical thinking skills to carefully evaluate such accounts. Educators will guide you to use your creative thinking skills to imagine and compose alternative perspectives that may (or may not) be judged as potentially more truthful.

The 2025-26 Jack McCowan Grade 12 History Essay Award is open to Grade 12 History and English students in Ontario. The deadline for submission to bmccowan@netrover.com is May 1 2026.

- One \$600 prize for the best essay of the school year.
- One \$400 prize for the runner-up essay of the school year.
- Length 1500 to 2000 words. Submissions must be in .doc or .docx format.
- General topic: An early nineteenth century Indigenous experience with European settlers.
- Students will apply the principles of inquiry that have been learned, and use critical thinking skills in their analysis of a white settler account** of a particular event and then use their creative thinking skills to compose an original, albeit fictitious, alternate account of the same event.
- The essay must include an introduction of approximately 200 words explaining the author's historical perspective and writing strategy, properly citing research sources in footnotes. The author must choose one Specific Expectation from either the History or English Curriculum -- explain how you (through researching / writing your essay) satisfied this Specific Expectation.
- Submissions based even partly on Artificial Intelligence bots / apps will be disqualified.
- Any instances of plagiarism will be grounds for disqualification.
- Other criteria: clarity of message; spelling; grammar; sentence structure.
- Nominations for the essay competition are to be made by a high school teacher.
- Winning essays may be published by the McCowan Social History Initiative.
- List of Nominations may also be published by the McCowan Social History Initiative.
- Essays received will be adjudicated by a small panel of appointed judges.

This essay award is financed in memory of Jack McCowan by some of his nieces and nephews.

Permission is hereby granted for _____ to enter this History Essay

Competition by _____ (parent / guardian) on _____ (date).

Nominated by: _____ (teacher) on _____ (date).

** Refer to the attached article: 1885_July4-Globe-COUNTRY_LIFE_AnnisInnIncid1814-TConant.pdf. The author, Thomas Conant, is believed to be a great-nephew of Levi Annis' wife. The forename of the innkeeper was Levi, not Leir.