

Librarianship in Canada Before 1952

by **BRUCE PEEL**

When the Canadian Library Association was organized, its first priority was the establishment of a national library for Canada. A five-year campaign of lobbying came to a successful conclusion with the passage through Parliament of the National Library Act in 1952. During the debate the Prime Minister, Mr. Louis St. Laurent, indicated that it was the intention of the Government to have the Dominion Archivist fill the post of National Librarian as well. The incumbent in the archival position at that time was Dr. W. Kaye Lamb.

Libraries, if defined as collections of books held privately or publicly, may be traced to the very beginning of Canada. In 1606-07 Marc Lescarbot had a library of books at Port Royal in Acadia. An educated man — lawyer, historian, and poet — he evidently could not contemplate a season in the wilds of the New World without the companionship and stimulation of books. As the outposts of civilization shifted westward in Canada, one reads of other instances of private libraries brought to the frontier. In 1788 Roderick Mackenzie, fur trader and builder of Fort Chipewyan, brought into the Athabasca country a library of books which for several decades provided winter reading for traders in Mackenzie Valley posts. Two years earlier, in 1786, John McKay, surgeon, on a fur trading venture to the West Coast aboard the sailing vessel *Experiment*, brought the first library west of the Rocky Mountains.

Before writing about institutionalized libraries, recognition should be given to the significance of the libraries of private collectors, particularly when such collecting has been intensive in a subject or period specialization. Many a private collection ultimately comes to enrich an institutional library, as for instance the Phileas Gagnon collection of Canadiana in the Bibliothèque municipale of Montreal.

A few libraries owe their genesis to the generosity or initiative of early colonial governors. In Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe donated his private collection to the province, and it became the nucleus of the legislative library. Earlier, in 1779, in Quebec City, Sir Frederick Haldimand founded a bilingual library supported by membership fees. Later, in 1816, in Halifax, Lord Dalhousie founded the Garrison Library which still exists under the title of the Cambridge Library.

British regiments stationed in British North America sometimes had libraries which on their departure were given to the citizens of the locality. Thus, the 6th Regiment of Foot, stationed in the Red River Settlement between 1846 and 1848,

left a book collection which became the Red River Library; part of this collection later formed the beginning of the Manitoba Legislative Library. And in 1862 in British Columbia, a company of the Royal Engineers left behind a library which became the initial collection of the New Westminster Public Library.

Mechanics' Institutes, the first efforts towards adult education, were founded in five major urban centres of British North America between 1827 and 1834; the idea then spread to smaller towns. The institutes were supported by membership fees and government grants. By mid-century, with more educational opportunities available, the activities of the institutes had been largely curtailed to the maintenance of reading rooms and the sponsoring of discussion groups. The government of the Province of the United Canadas passed in 1851 "an Act for the Incorporation and Better Management of Library Associations and Mechanics Institutes."

The first library established to support scholarship was that of the Collège des Jésuites de Québec dating from 1635. Today its collection of books is in the library of Laval University. The first university was established in the Maritimes, King's College, for which books were collected in England in 1802. Several other Canadian universities were founded in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and they all established library collections. For more than a century, most university libraries grew by slow accretion, and most remained basically college-level collections; it was only a decade after the period covered in this paper, in the 1960s, that collections grew spectacularly.

Until a quarter of a century ago, scholars depended heavily upon legislative libraries for collections of Canadian materials. Usually the legislative library was the oldest in a province, and successive librarians had appreciated the importance of providing a repository for Canadian or regional publications when these were current. As often as not, in the early years in particular, the legislative librarian had archival responsibilities as well. It was in such a setting in Victoria, British Columbia, that Dr. Lamb had his first experience with libraries and archives.

The British North America Act of 1867, in its division of powers between the federal and provincial governments, granted control of education to the provinces. In consequence, any study of public library service in Canada must follow library enactments and developments in each of the provinces.

The dates of provincial legislation making provision for free public library service are significant, if such legislation can be seen as public realization of the importance of providing easy access to information. Library service may be regarded as an extension of formal education services. Probably because of the sound educational system established in Ontario by Egerton Ryerson, that province had the first public library act; it was passed in 1882. Within a year eight Ontario cities had taken advantage of the act to establish public libraries.

The western provinces in their initial political, social and educational patterns were strongly influenced by Ontario. In 1891 British Columbia passed a free libraries act, followed by Manitoba in 1899. After the turn of the century, the newly-created provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were quick to introduce public library acts, Saskatchewan in 1906, and Alberta the following year.

In the Maritime provinces, and in Newfoundland prior to its confederation with Canada, comparable public library legislation was not introduced until the 1930s,

starting with New Brunswick in 1929. As for Quebec, with cultural life polarized around two languages, two school systems, and two religions, it was not surprising that an "Act Respecting Public Libraries" was passed only as late as 1959.

Early library legislation was permissive rather than directive. It allowed municipalities to establish tax-supported libraries and, if it provided grants-in-aid, these were minimal. In retrospect, legislative provision for financial support tended to be too limiting to assure more than an austerity level of library service. For small urban centres, the tax base was too narrow to encourage the establishment of libraries, let alone their proper maintenance. One consequence was the continued existence in provinces of association libraries, and in Quebec of parish libraries; these usually had small static collections of books. A 1930s Commission of Enquiry into Canadian libraries would characterize permissive legislation thus:

Permissive legislation is sufficient if books are only a wholesome luxury, but if it is recognized that no one can be educated without books, it inevitably follows that a government should put libraries in the same class as schools, making both compulsory.

Perhaps more serious was the absence of provision for library service to Canada's rural population, which until the First World War formed the larger segment of the population. In the war years the newly formed Canadian Library Council had as a slogan "95% of rural Canadians, and 50% of all Canadians, have no library services."

However, some effort was made to provide rural residents with reading materials, either a few books sent by post to an individual or a box of books shipped by freight to a community for its winter reading. About 1894, Lady Aberdeen, wife of the Governor General, was inspired by a group of Winnipeg women to found the Aberdeen Association. Its purpose was to collect books and periodicals and to distribute these in monthly parcels to settlers in outlying districts. The lasting significance of the association's work was its influence on the pattern of the travelling library services subsequently developed in the three prairie provinces. In 1894 British Columbia set up a system of travelling libraries. In Eastern Canada about the turn of the century, the MacLennan Travelling Libraries were organized and administered first by McGill University, later by its affiliate MacDonald College, to serve English-speaking rural districts in Quebec, and districts in the Maritimes as well. In Newfoundland in 1926, the Bureau of Education developed travelling libraries for lighthouses, ships at sea, and remote and near outposts. But across Canada service to people in rural districts remained woefully inadequate until the organization of regional libraries and until better highways made regular bookmobile service possible.

At the turn of this century, Andrew Carnegie, the American steel magnate-turned-philanthropist, inaugurated his scheme to encourage the erection of buildings to house free public libraries. Between 1903 and 1919 in Canada, 125 cities and towns took advantage of the philanthropist's generosity, expending a total of \$2.5 million. Nearly a hundred of these libraries were built in Ontario. In return for a modern library building, the recipient community had to pledge the maintenance of library service. The importance of the Carnegie gift was that many small towns would not have had library service for many years had it not been for the incentive provided by the Carnegie money.

A most significant event in Canadian librarianship was the survey of Canadian libraries in 1930 by a Commission of Enquiry sponsored by the American Library Association and financed by a Carnegie Corporation grant. The three commissioners were John Ridington of the University of British Columbia Library, Chairman, Mary J.L. Black of the Public Library of Fort William, and George H. Lock of the Toronto Public Library. The commission's report entitled *Libraries in Canada: A Study of Library Conditions and Needs* appeared in 1933. Like William the Conqueror's Doomsday Book — to which allusion is made on a preliminary page — the report remains a census and assessment of the library collections and services that existed at the time. Intended to persuade provincial governments to provide better library service, draft copies of the appropriate chapters were sent to the nine provincial premiers. Never has a report been so ill-timed; by 1933 Canada, like all the Western world, was in the grip of the great economic depression, and the agriculturally-dependent prairie provinces were suffering as well from a disastrous drought. No additional money could be allocated for library service by provincial governments harassed by financial problems. Yet the commission's recommendations were to influence future library trends. Its main recommendations were as follows:

1. A provincial book-service policy formulated to meet the needs of all types of citizens, whether living in town or farm, "or beyond the borderlands of organized municipal government."
2. Recognition of the public library on a basis of parity with the public school.
3. Official responsibility by the provincial government for the encouragement and supervision of all public libraries.
4. A representative and influential provincial library commission.
5. Standards of library service to be set forth and minimum professional standards for librarians prescribed.
6. Provision for a library income commensurate to the services required.
7. Permissive arrangements for cooperation between existing libraries, or combination or creation of library units into county or regional libraries.

Of these recommendations, the last was to have the greatest impact on public library development in Canada.

Regional library units were demonstrated or organized in three provinces in the decade of issuance of the commission's report. The first was in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. Following a survey conducted under the aegis of the provincial Public Library Commission of the area's suitability for regional library development, and with the provision of \$100,000 in Carnegie funds for a five-year demonstration of a larger library unit, the Fraser Valley Demonstration got underway in 1930. In December 1934 when the demonstration ended, having proved the value of a larger library unit, a regional library was organized to take over the assets and continue service to the area. The second demonstration unit, also supported by the Carnegie Corporation but for a three-year period, was in Prince Edward Island. The scheme, covering the whole island, began on 1 June 1933. The experiment was a success, but near the end of the period there was a change of government and financial support was substantially reduced. In Ontario, library cooperatives were organized within

counties and received substantial grants-in-aid from the provincial government. The first Ontario cooperative was organized in Lambton in 1933; there were twelve cooperatives by 1947. In Newfoundland a plan for twenty-five regional libraries was drafted in 1940, and put into operation two years later. In Saskatchewan a regional library supervisor was appointed in 1946; the first unit, the North Central Saskatchewan Regional Library, became operational in 1948. In Nova Scotia a survey was carried out in 1937 and legislation passed providing provincial aid and a regional library commission, but it was not until 1949 that the first regional unit was opened; it served the Annapolis Valley. The next year two more regional libraries were opened, a fourth in 1951, and a fifth in 1954.

When the Second World War came in 1939, the nation mobilized its industrial power and its manpower. A meeting called in Ottawa to discuss library service for men in the rapidly expanding Canadian armed forces at home and abroad jolted some librarians out of their parochialism; no librarian was invited because there was no organization to speak nationally for the library profession.

For librarianship, as for most facets of Canadian life, the end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new era. Canadians came out of the war with a sense of achievement, citizens of a middle power whose military effort and industrial productivity had contributed mightily to victory. It was a time of high expectations in many social and educational fields. The time was opportune for the formation of a national library organization, for librarians to shed their parochialism for a national outlook toward libraries and information.

Two social and intellectual factors which increased the importance of libraries in Canada were the steady rise of the level of education over a quarter of a century and the world-wide explosion of knowledge in the years following the war. In 1911 the average educational level of the population was eight years of schooling; by 1941 it was Grade 10, and continuing to rise. Two decades later the number who reached senior matriculation was substantial. Beginning with the veterans who were given educational grants at the end of the war, larger numbers of young Canadians enrolled in colleges and universities. The higher the level of education, the greater the need for books and libraries for the country's adult population.

The second factor was the increase in knowledge, particularly in the scientific and technical fields. From the time the atom was split, the quantity of knowledge began to accelerate, placing a strain on libraries and other information services. Even today no library, not even the greatest national libraries, can provide all the information which patrons might request; libraries have been impelled to move toward greater cooperation to make more information available through access to larger stocks of books and periodicals. Furthermore, the knowledge explosion necessitated greater bibliographic control of printed materials, but Canada was wanting in bibliographical services relating to Canadian writing and publication.

The establishment of the Canadian Library Council arose out of two parallel movements. The Library Association of Ottawa, being in a favorable position to watch national developments, had concluded that there was a need for a national library association which could deal with questions of vital concern to libraries and librarians. Meantime, the American Library Association had appointed a Committee of Canadian Consultants. At a dinner held in Ottawa on 27 January 1941, representatives of the Library Association of Ottawa and members of the

Committee of Canadian Consultants met and discussed the need for a national organization. The meeting concluded with a resolution that "proposals for the establishment of a Canadian Library Council offered the best prospect for the advancement of Canadian librarianship and for the development of a Canadian library organization." Later, the chairman of the Committee of Canadian Consultants, C.R. Sanderson, Chief Librarian of the Toronto Public Library, submitted a report to the American Library Association. It proposed the organization of a Canadian Library Council and listed the names of the persons to be invited to sit on it. The report suggested further that the council should consider projects such as the following: the submission of briefs to the Canadian government on any matters that concerned the interests of librarians, the promotion of the establishment of a national library, the undertaking to issue a library bulletin, the creation of a central bureau of information for and about Canadian libraries, and the encouragement of the publication of bibliographical material, on a permanent basis, as, for example, a Canadian index of periodicals. Finally, the council should have as one of its aims the establishment of a permanent self-supporting Canadian library organization.

The council was formed in 1941, and with its publication of the *CLC Bulletin*, gave librarians across Canada, so often isolated, a national medium of communication. The council prepared papers and submitted briefs which were widely distributed in Canadian library circles. One brief in 1944 had as its title "Canada Needs Libraries." The National Film Board's film, *Library on Wheels*, which showed the Fraser Valley Regional Library system and emphasized the value of the larger library unit, was widely shown across the nation. Perhaps the council's greatest achievement was in recruiting Elizabeth H. Morton as secretary. Later, after the formation of the Canadian Library Association, she was to become its executive director, serving with *éclat* and distinction for a score of years.

The organizational conference of the Canadian Library Association was held in June 1946 at McMaster University in Hamilton, having as its theme "Libraries in the Life of the Canadian Nation." An activities committee drew up a list of plans. The new association would take over the activities carried on by the Canadian Library Council. Some of these were the headquarters office serving as a clearing house for library information inside and outside Canada; issuing bibliographical and professional literature; forming a liaison between library associations and the Dominion Government and also with organizations concerned with education, information, recreation and cultural activities; developing library standards; encouraging the preparation of Canadian reference books; and supporting efforts to promote library training.

In the first year, 1946-47, under the presidency of Freda Waldon, the association inaugurated three significant projects: the promotion of the idea that Canada needed a national library, the microfilming of newspapers of historical importance, and the indexing of Canadian periodicals and films. In the year 1947-48, W. Kaye Lamb served as the association's second president. During his presidency the Canadian Library Association became incorporated, the internal committee structure was organized, the *Canadian Periodical Index* financed, the first catalogue issued of Canadian newspapers on microfilm, the promotional work for a national library continued, and the March of Books for the Canadian Book Centre for war-damaged European libraries inaugurated.

The achievements of successive presidents in the following years might be chronicled, but suffice it to say that the infant association at two years was walking and making itself heard in the educational and cultural affairs of Canada.

In the early years, when the membership was small and so much was to be done, a spirit of harmony and a sense of personal involvement pervaded the Canadian Library Association. At the end of the first year, personal membership was 555. Conference attendance was small enough so that everyone could participate in organizational or committee work. This sense of mission among Canada's librarians had within a decade changed the library scene beyond recognition.

The Canadian Library Association had as a primary goal the creation of a national library. The association, in collaboration with the Royal Society of Canada, the Canadian Historical Association, the Social Science Research Council, and the Canadian Political Science Association presented a brief to the federal government. The brief had the endorsement also of the provincial library associations and twenty other associations with mutual cultural interests. This brief went forward to Prime Minister Mackenzie King on 18 December 1946 and was discussed with Secretary of State Colin Gibson on the following January 25. In March 1948 the National Library Committee was appointed and in November 1948 when Dr. Lamb was appointed Dominion Archivist, he was given the special assignment of preparing the way for the establishment of a national library for Canada. In the meantime, the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (the Massey Commission) had been set up and during its hearings across Canada received many briefs supporting a national library. The commission's report, published in 1951, advised the immediate establishment of a national library, and late in the following year, the National Library Act was passed.

In 1946-47, in presenting the brief to the government, the Canadian Library Association and its supporters acknowledged that the organization of a national library would require several years of effort, but the promoters suggested that in the meantime certain essential services could be initiated, and with a minimum of financing, organization and staff. These services should be mainly bibliographical, specifically the publication of a current national bibliography and the compilation of a national union catalogue. The forerunner of the National Library, the Canadian Bibliographic Centre, came into being in 1950.

For many years the Toronto Public Library had published annually *The Canadian Catalogue of Books Published in Canada, About Canada, as Well as Those Written by Canadians*. The Canadian Bibliographic Centre first issued lists of new Canadian books in the *Bulletin of the Canadian Library Association*, but beginning in 1951 it started publishing a monthly entitled *Canadiana*. This publication, supplemented by the *Canadian Periodical Index* which the Canadian Library Association had begun, gave coverage of Canadian literature in book and periodical form.

The Canadian Bibliographic Centre commenced work on a national union catalogue in 1951. First the Centre sought bibliographical control of the nearly two million books in federal government libraries in the Ottawa area. Then began the work of photographing the catalogues of selected libraries. By 1958 the Centre had copied the holdings of 136 libraries. The value of the National Union Catalogue was proved in the decade of the 1960s. Canadian universities were rapidly expanding

their teaching and research programmes although their library book stocks were quite inadequate to support graduate studies and in-depth research. The National Union Catalogue made possible a well-developed interlibrary loan network.

When the National Library Act was passed in 1952, it included a provision that publishers must deposit with the National Library two copies of every book to come off their presses. For the first time Canada had an effective book depository law and the National Library was able to perform the important function of collecting the nation's literature. In addition to building its own collection, the law enabled the library to keep informed of what was being published so that it could be publicized through the pages of *Canadiana*.

In summary, Canadian librarianship before 1952 developed slowly over many decades. Public library legislation was introduced early in Ontario and in the western provinces, but the legislation tended to be permissive rather than providing sufficient financial support or proper supervision. Andrew Carnegie's offer of money to erect library buildings stimulated library development in many communities which otherwise would not have had library service. The report of the Commission of Enquiry issued in 1933 was important in its influence on future developments. The most significant development in Canadian librarianship was the formation of the Canadian Library Association in 1946. The greatest achievement of the association in its early years was the successful lobbying of the federal government to create the National Library and thus provide bibliographic services of value to all libraries. The association gave members of the profession a national outlook and provided the focus for their efforts to improve services in all types and levels of libraries. The stage was set for the period which saw new ideas and trends come to fruition.

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