

The National Library of Canada, 1950-1968

by JEAN LUNN

Many a national library has evolved from an already large and organized state-owned collection. This was not the case in Canada. The National Library of Canada did not enter upon the scene rehearsed and accoutred, ready to take the lead. It sidled on to the stage in the guise of a bibliographic centre and for many years that, primarily, was what it remained. It is remarkable that it got into the act at all.¹

The idea of a national library was stirring in Canada a hundred and fifty years ago. The need was felt for an adequate library to serve the people and none existed. Accordingly, early legislative libraries were opened to the public. Sir John A. Macdonald advocated the establishment of a national library, but finally settled for the appointment of joint librarians for the Library of Parliament, one a General Librarian to take charge of the Library as a scientific and literary institution, the other a Parliamentary Librarian to serve the legislative needs of government. There the movement stalled. The Library of Parliament continued to collect widely, but it did not take on the status of a national library. Meanwhile, public and university libraries did begin to develop in the last half of the nineteenth century.

Early in the twentieth century, advocates of a national library saw it as one with an extensive collection which would supplement the more limited resources of local and provincial libraries. As libraries in the private sector continued to grow, they made use of American services, those of the Library of Congress, of bibliographical publishers and of the American Library Association. The demand for a national library began to stress the need for equivalent Canadian services. In 1946 the Canadian Library Association was formed and at once mounted a campaign for a Canadian national library, putting emphasis on services. Finally, the Government acceded to a degree and authorized the planning of a bibliographic centre as the first step toward the creation of a national library.

In November 1947 Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, Librarian of the University of British Columbia, formerly Provincial Librarian and Archivist of British Columbia, was appointed Dominion Archivist, with the special assignment of preparing the way for the establishment of a national library. A National Library Advisory Committee of

1 This account is based on *The National Library of Canada* by F. Dolores Donnelly (Ottawa, Canadian Library Association, 1973), on the annual reports of the National Librarian and on personal recollections.

provincial representatives under the chairmanship of Dr. Lamb was appointed and it recommended the prompt establishment of a bibliographic centre.

The Canadian Bibliographic Centre came into being on 1 May 1950. Its functions were first, to compile a union catalogue of the holdings of the major libraries in Canada and, secondly, to publish a national bibliography listing titles of Canadian origin, authorship or interest. Space was provided in the old Public Archives building (now the Canadian War Museum) on Sussex Street (now Drive). The Centre was administered by Dr. Lamb. Martha Shepard of the Toronto Public Library was named Director and undertook the compilation of the union catalogue. Two months later, at the end of June, Jean Lunn, Librarian of the Fraser Institute in Montreal, was appointed Bibliographer and assumed production of the national bibliography.

The question of the eventual character and scope of the National Library was referred to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (the Massey Commission), 1949-1951. The commission accepted many of the proposals made in a brief presented by the Canadian Library Association, recommended the establishment of a national library without delay and, to the tasks of union catalogue and national bibliography, added the duty of developing a collection of Canadian and other publications. Collecting should be backed by a deposit law requiring the deposit of two copies of every work published in Canada. The National Library Act incorporating these provisions was passed in 1952 and came into effect on 1 January 1953. Dr. Lamb was named National Librarian as well as Dominion Archivist. Dr. Raymond Tanghe, Librarian of the Université de Montréal, was appointed Assistant National Librarian on 1 June 1953. The National Library absorbed the Bibliographic Centre. Reference and Cataloguing Divisions were then organized, the first including the union catalogue, the second the national bibliography, and an Order Section was added. Staff of the erstwhile Bibliographic Centre did not notice any difference when it came back to work on 2 January 1953, nor much difference for a number of years to come. Collection building had been added to its duties, but housing for a collection was nowhere in sight.

Quarters for the Bibliographic Centre/National Library had a certain bizarre charm. The Centre began with a few borrowed chairs and splintery desks in a corner of the historical museum in the Public Archives. Its space was marked off more or less by some filing cabinets used by the Archives. All was presided over appropriately, if fortuitously, by a bust of Sir John A. Macdonald which happened to be standing on one of the filing cabinets. It was thought likely that Sir John could scarcely believe his marble eyes. The scene was not what he had envisaged when he had advocated a national library; he had had something like the British Museum in mind. The telephone was along the hall in the office of the National Librarian's secretary and was an extension of the National Librarian's telephone. Personal calls in office hours were not a problem. Tourists visiting the museum innocently wandered in and asked what we were doing. We often wondered. When, in order to save everyone's time, it was proposed that a sign be put up reading "Canadian Bibliographic Centre — Centre bibliographique canadien," one staff member suggested that "Beware of the dog — Chien méchant" would be more effective. This suggestion was not adopted. The National Library expanded and more and more overran the other exhibits in the museum. In 1956 the Library was moved to the

recently-built Public Archives Records Centre in Tunney's Pasture. This was a warehouse building for the storage of inactive records transferred from government departments. Tunney's Pasture was a tract of land in the west end of Ottawa, now dense with government buildings but in those days still fairly open, rather rural in aspect and with an agreeable prospect of sky. The Library occupied storage space on the third floor, reached by a freight elevator with murderous doors which opened and closed horizontally. Working conditions were tolerable if not ideal. Staff would have preferred higher ceilings, less glaring lights, more air and cold summers. Wicked dog signs were not needed. Few visitors sought the National Library. Fewer found it. Some seekers when they inquired of its whereabouts from local residents were directed to the Library of Parliament and may never have known that they had not seen the National Library. The image was low profile.

Eleven years were spent in the Pasture. The National Library building was repeatedly postponed. The site selected was occupied by a wartime temporary building which was to be demolished. The Department of Trade and Commerce which occupied this building could not move out until its own building was ready. Then in 1958 the Jackson Building, a government office in downtown Ottawa, blew up and employees were relocated in the temporary building. Then funds were withheld during a period of government austerity. It was not until 1963 that the contract for the construction was let. The National Library building was officially opened on 20 June 1967, Centennial year. The Archives moved in too. Library and Archives are still vying for space.

During its homeless years, the National Library lacked both space and staff. Relatively few positions were allotted to the Library and not all of these could be filled. In 1953-54 there were 14 positions. In 1964-65 the total was 64, of which 10 were vacant. With an uncompetitive salary scale, no very visible image and increasing demand for staff from university libraries, it was particularly difficult to recruit professional librarians. It was not until salaries improved and the building was in sight that staff began to grow. In 1965-66 the number of positions rose to 119, the following year to 156 and in 1967-68 to 208, representing a considerable actual growth in staff, although it was still not possible to fill all positions.

The Library functioned within its limitations of plant and personnel. Its first assignment was to compile a union catalogue. In 1950 Canada did not have enough books and those that it did have were scattered in libraries across the country and in the libraries of government departments in Ottawa. The purpose of a union or collective catalogue was to show where books were located so that resources could be shared, to spread the burden of interlibrary loan for which requests had hitherto naturally been addressed to the largest libraries most likely to have the item sought, and to reduce the dependence on the generosity of American libraries.

The technique for compiling the union catalogue was to microfilm the 3" x 5" index cards in library catalogues, selecting the main entry for each book, then print out the film on rolls of five-inch-wide papers, rubber stamp on each entry a code representing the particular library, then cut between the entries so as to produce 3" x 5" slips which were then filed. Slips representing the holdings of other libraries were interfiled and the final step was to assemble on a master card the codes of all the libraries holding the particular book and to discard the individual slips.

In May 1950, using at first a borrowed camera, Miss Shepard photographed, by

way of experiment, the catalogues of two federal government libraries, then took the camera to Toronto to record the holdings of the Toronto Public Library Reference Division. Entries for this library's collection of 207,000 volumes would make an excellent basis for the union catalogue. At first Miss Shepard worked alone, but she got an assistant when she encountered sets of cards tied together which had to be separated before filming and retied before being returned to the catalogue.

Between 1951 and 1959 catalogues of the major libraries in each province were copied and subsequently a number of special libraries and new collections were added. Once its catalogue had been copied, each library undertook to report its new accessions on index cards or slips. These too were filed into the union catalogue. Accessions reports poured in, especially during the sixties when universities expanded with government support and academic libraries increased their collections enormously. Between 1963 and 1968, daily receipt of accessions cards rose from 1,500 to 4,442. By 1968 the union catalogue held ten million cards representing fourteen million volumes in three hundred Canadian libraries.

The inflow of cards was such that it was impossible to interfile quickly enough to maintain one alphabetical order in the union catalogue, but practical control was established by placing in each drawer a number of alphabetized sections. The arrangement made searching the file practicable if time consuming. The combining of entries on master cards could proceed only slowly and selectively. This was not a routine task. The same book may be entered under different headings by different libraries. To reconcile entries requires a knowledge of cataloguing rules. Effort was concentrated on sections with the most complicated headings, such as government publications.

Meanwhile ever-increasing demands came from libraries seeking locations of books which they wished to borrow for their clientele. Staff located desired items in the union catalogue and forwarded the requests to libraries shown to have them in their collections. These libraries then sent the material to the borrowing library. Bibliographical description of items requested was often incomplete or inaccurate, so that staff had to search other sources of information in order to identify the item and to find the entry in the union catalogue. Requests came in by mail, by telephone and, after 1964, also by Telex. In order to accommodate libraries in other time zones, the Telex was left on all night. Staff would sometimes arrive in the morning to find the floor covered with literally yards of requests for interlibrary loan locations. The union catalogue was put to use early while the copying of library catalogues was still in progress. In 1954-55 requests to locate 2,189 titles were received and of these 62 per cent were found in the catalogue. In 1968-69 there were 81,383 location requests, an average of 373 per working day, of which 80 per cent were found in the catalogue. Notwithstanding the magnitude of its task, the hard-pressed union catalogue staff gave consistently good and prompt service.

The national bibliography also began in 1950. In that year the Bibliographic Centre published lists of Canadian books in six instalments in the Canadian Library Association *Bulletin*. This was in effect a continuation of the *Canadian Catalogue of Books published in Canada, about Canada as well as those written by Canadians* which had been issued annually by the Toronto Public Library since 1923. In January 1951 the Centre began *Canadiana*, a separately-published bibliography, issued at first semimonthly, then monthly, with an annual cumulation. At first *Canadiana* included only commercial publications and those of the federal

government. In 1953 publications of the provincial governments were added and in subsequent years sheet music, graduate theses relating to Canada published on microfilm by University Microfilms at Ann Arbor, Michigan, Canadian films and filmstrips and Canadian microforms. As time went on cataloguing became more complete for non-government publications by the addition of Dewey classification numbers, of French and English subject headings and of special classification numbers, similar in form to those used by Library of Congress, for Canadian history and literature. Indexing became more thorough. Volume increased. *Canadiana* grew in size from some 2,000 entries in 1951 to over 14,000 entries in 1968.

The national bibliography, like the union catalogue, began as a single-handed effort and with borrowed material. Before 1953 when the deposit law came into effect, a few publishers donated new publications for listing, but other material was borrowed or catalogued *in situ*. A memorable cataloguing site was the top of a ladder in the copyright vaults beneath the Library of Parliament. Here the Bibliographer (Jean Lunn) perched, sorting through the copyright deposits, a great number of which were American publications, and cataloguing then and there any Canadian items which were found. A hazard was that careful Library of Parliament staff passing by, seeing an open door and a light left on, unaware of the percher, might turn off the light and close the door. The imaginative would at once hear rustlings and assume rats. The timid would anticipate being locked in for the night if not forever. The prudent carried a flashlight. Government publications could be catalogued less adventurously at one's desk, since the Library of Parliament arranged to have one of the six copies which it received sent around by the Bibliographic Centre to be catalogued in passing.

Matters improved in 1953 when the National Library Act made the deposit of two copies of Canadian books obligatory. Publishers were often slow to deposit, but they did accept the law with good grace. One Toronto publisher with a wry sense of humour sent the National Librarian duplicate Christmas cards in one envelope. The law did not apply to government publications. However in 1953 the National Library became a full depository for federal documents. Provincial documents were sent in voluntarily.

Production of copy was laborious. Entries were typed on five-inch-wide strips of thin card stock ruled at three-inch intervals. The strips were then cut to produce individual 3" x 5" cards. These cards were arranged in appropriate order, then pasted lightly, overlapped, on brown paper mounts, each constituting camera-ready copy of a page of *Canadiana*. The sheets of mounted cards were sent to the Government Printing Bureau which then printed *Canadiana* by photo offset. The mounted cards were returned, removed from the mounts with a letter opener, and filed, each month's issue being interfiled with the previous months of the year. At the end of the year, the whole file was checked and mounted again for the annual cumulation. At first the card strips were typed on an electric typewriter. In 1954 this was replaced by a varityper which produced copy resembling letterpress. In appearance the finished product gave no hint of the strenuous drudgery involved in creating it. Another improvement was that after the first year of *Canadiana* the editor was able to stop mounting the cards herself, bundling the mounts together and dropping them off at the printers on her way to lunch. Sometimes delivery was made after lunch, the parcel meanwhile being left in the care of the obliging cashier of the Chateau Laurier cafeteria. In 1954 the adoption of the varityper seemed to be

a major advance in applied technology. The next such advance was in April 1968 when the index to *Canadiana* was first produced by computer, the initial step in the subsequent automation of the whole publication.

The quality of cataloguing in *Canadiana* was good and coverage was extraordinary. The latter was due to the skill of Adèle Languedoc who came to the Bibliographic Centre in 1951 and soon assumed responsibility for acquiring material for *Canadiana*. Material did not flow in effortlessly. Dilatory Canadian publishers had to be reminded to deposit, missing federal government publications had to be claimed, provincial documents had to be solicited, and privately printed Canadian items, books by Canadians published abroad and foreign publications relating to Canada had to be bought. It was necessary first to know what was being published. Miss Languedoc combined a gift for deduction with an intensive search of Canadian and foreign newspapers, periodicals, book reviews and catalogues. Nothing even remotely Canadian escaped her, in French, English or any other language. There were detractors however. Some items were inevitably missed when first published, but were discovered later. Since *Canadiana* was not only a catalogue of recent publications but also constituted the post-1950 national bibliography, the latecomers were listed in current issues. Critical *Canadiana* watchers noticing the earlier imprints among those of contemporary date declared with equal glee and injustice that here was proof that *Canadiana* cataloguers were years behind with their work. In 1963, upon Dr. Tanghe's retirement, Miss Languedoc became Assistant National Librarian. Her successors in charge of *Canadiana* acquisitions carried on zealously. An invaluable by-product of the search was the Canadian author file established by Miss Languedoc, containing clippings, informative book jackets, portraits, and sometimes correspondence. The file is a unique source of information about Canadian writers.

What *Canadiana* failed to do to the satisfaction of its users was to be sufficiently current. At first publication fell behind schedule. When issues finally appeared on time, there were complaints that new books were not listed promptly enough for *Canadiana* to serve as a cataloguing aid. Other libraries could buy and catalogue new publications before *Canadiana* appeared, especially those libraries which had standing blanket orders with the publishers. Time had to be allowed to assemble the issue of *Canadiana* and for the issue to go through press. Few publishers deposited books immediately upon publication. The deposit law allowed a month's grace so that publishers were implored but could not be forced to deposit more promptly. Items to be catalogued increased very much more rapidly than the hands to catalogue them. It was not feasible to increase the frequency of *Canadiana* but in 1966, in an effort to provide instant cataloguing, a weekly proof sheet service was initiated consisting of sheets of advance xerox copies of selected entries which would appear later in *Canadiana*. This service doubtless helped, but the material was awkward in form and distribution was restricted, since only a limited number of sheets could be produced within a reasonable length of time. Whatever its faults, *Canadiana*, in 1968, was nevertheless a well-established, comprehensive national bibliography with a worldwide distribution. It was perhaps more honoured abroad than it was at home.

In addition to *Canadiana* the National Library also compiled and published *Canadian Theses—Thèses canadiennes*, an annual list of unpublished theses accepted by Canadian universities for graduate degrees, beginning with the year

1960-61. Listings rose from 1,725 in the first year to over 4,000 in 1967-68. In 1951 the Canadian Bibliographic Centre had published *Canadian Graduate Theses in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1921-1946*, compiled by the Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canadian Social Science Research Council. In 1968 the National Library had in preparation for press *Canadian Theses-Thèses canadiennes 1947-1960*. In addition to listing Canadian theses, the National Library also undertook their actual publication on microfilm in 1965-66 and made the films available for purchase and for interlibrary loan. The service was available at a fixed fee to any Canadian university which wished to publish all or any of its theses. By 1968 over 1,800 theses had been filmed.

The function of *Canadiana* was to record Canadian publications as they appeared, beginning in 1950. The National Library also gave attention to recording pre-1950 publications. Dr. Tanghe and his able assistant, Madeleine Pellerin, began the compilation on cards of *Canadiana, 1867-1900*, a hitherto-neglected period of Canadian bibliography. By 1968 the file held 25,000 items. In addition the Library undertook publication of the work of other bibliographers, such as *A Checklist of Canadian Imprints, 1900-1925*, by Dorothea Tod and Audrey Cordingley; *Publications of the Governments of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, 1758-1952* and *Publications of the Government of the Province of Canada, 1841-1867*, both by Olga Bishop; and *Stephen Leacock: A Check-List and Index of his Writings*, by G.R. Lomer.

The third major duty of the National Library, after the union catalogue and national bibliography, was to build a collection. The National Library began with no book stacks and few books. It soon had no book stacks and too many books. Early in the morning of 4 August 1952, the civic holiday in Ottawa, fire broke out in the dome of the Library of Parliament. Two hundred thousand gallons of water cascaded down over the books lining the walls and into the basement vaults where more books were stored. The Library was cleared of its contents and volunteers from other Ottawa libraries spent many weary hours crouched on various floors, some concrete, standing up soaked books to dry and hanging damp pamphlets on clotheslines strung overhead. The Library of Parliament had for years been painfully overcrowded, with books standing two and three deep on the shelves. When the building was restored, only part of the collection was moved back. The rest, some 300,000 items, was transferred to the National Library. The National Library had no place to put the books either. The collection was boxed and stored and moved from warehouse to warehouse at the dictate of the Department of Public Works in accordance with its changing requirements for space. National Library staff made melancholy jokes about DPW running a durability test on travelling cardboard cartons and about the Library having the largest collection of second-hand books in the world. The Library had also gained hundreds of thousands of arrearages before it even began cataloguing.

In addition to this embarrassment of riches, the Library collection began to build, chiefly by way of other gifts, by exchange and by legal deposit. The first international exchange was set up in 1954 with the National Library of Australia. Books were also purchased, but the book budget was extremely limited compared with the university libraries. Policy was to acquire all Canadian material but, in other fields, not to duplicate the holdings of other large librarians. Emphasis was placed on the humanities and the social sciences because extensive scientific

collections were already available in the libraries of the National Research Council, the Department of Agriculture and other federal government departments.

A gift of funds from a private benefactor enabled Dr. Lamb to have copied on microfilm some eight hundred of the twelve hundred titles in Marie Tremain's *Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1951-1800*. Eight hundred was 98 per cent of the imprints known to have survived. Copies of the microfilms were made available to other libraries by purchase and by interlibrary loan. Microcopies of the *Early American Imprints* series and of *Three Centuries of English and American Plays* were bought. Centennial year brought generous gifts. The sum of £100,000, given by the British Government for the purchase of British books, added ten thousand volumes. The Beta Sigma Phi Sorority presented a collection on the performing arts. Australia, Denmark, the USSR and the United States donated collections. The Jewish community of Montreal presented twelve hundred volumes as the nucleus of a Judaica collection.

Music became a specialty of the Library. The private library of Percy Scholes, noted English musicologist and editor, was bought when it came on the market in 1957. Standard sets of scores were purchased. A centennial gift of over thirty-five hundred recordings of Canadian musicians and composers initiated the Canadian Library of Recorded Sound. Edward B. Moogk, better known to radio listeners as Ed Manning, had suggested the project to the Centennial Commission and was invited by the commission to assemble the basic collection.

To the thousands of periodicals transferred from the Library of Parliament were added files donated by other libraries and a number of subscriptions. In 1965 application of legal deposit was extended to current Canadian periodicals. Before that date there had been no prospect of handling or housing them.

From the beginning the Library bought long files on microfilm of leading foreign newspapers, English, French, American and other, as well as microfilms of Canadian newspapers. With the move to the new building in 1967, the Canadian newspaper collections of the Public Archives and of the Library of Parliament were transferred to the National Library, creating a collection of eighteen thousand bound volumes representing five hundred Canadian newspapers, plus seventy-five hundred microfilms of five hundred more titles, Canadian and foreign. Subscriptions were placed for over twenty-five current Canadian dailies across the country.

From 1953 the National Library had been a depository for federal government publications and had done its best to collect those of the provincial governments. In addition many thousands of Canadian and foreign documents had come from the Library of Parliament. Runs of foreign documents, such as the British House of Commons *Sessional Papers, 1731-1800*, were purchased on microfilm.

By 1968 the collection was still far from completely organized. Full cataloguing had begun as early as 1956, but progressed slowly owing to lack of staff and the demands of *Canadiana*. A large measure of control had been established however. Books transferred from the Library of Parliament were brief-listed and classified in broad subject divisions. A card catalogue and an "in process" file gave guidance to the general collection. Canadian material not yet in the card catalogue could be located through *Canadiana* files. Serials and government documents were arranged on shelves and brief-listed on cards or recorded on Kardex. Material could be located but undoubtedly the multiplicity and variety of files and the lack of a

comprehensive subject approach made service difficult. Complete bibliographical control requires full cataloguing and classification of all materials in one consistent system and there should be no backlog of material awaiting processing. No large library ever achieves this state of perfection. Those that grow slowly, maintaining some balance between acquisition and capability of processing, most nearly approach the ideal. National Library cataloguers were swamped from the beginning.

The union catalogue, national bibliography and collection building were not the Library's only activities. It compiled and published selective bibliographies. It prepared and published a union list of *Periodicals in the Social Sciences and Humanities currently received by Canadian Libraries*. It reported to UNESCO on Canadian book production statistics, translations and bibliographical activities. It reported new Canadian serial titles to the Library of Congress. Its staff members wrote articles and read papers. It went recruiting with the Public Service Commission. It even performed copyright duties on behalf of the Library of Parliament after the fire by receiving deposits and sending out receipts. In January 1968 it initiated the Office of Library Resources of which the first task was to make an inventory of research collections in Canada. The staff had the impression that the National Library was a busy place. Outsiders criticized it because they believed that it was not busy enough.

Canadian libraries had some justification for disappointment with their national library. In the early enthusiastic days of campaigning for a national library, supporters envisaged services equivalent to those of the United States and a large impressive building filled with organized collections of everything that their own libraries did not have. They thought that they wanted coordination. They claimed that they wanted leadership. To expect immediate realization of such ambitions was unrealistic, but to wait for the preternaturally slow development of the Library was valid reason for complaint.

The National Library did not develop from an already large and organized library. It began from scratch, scrambled together in a corner of the Archives' museum, an unimpressive start but, otherwise, it might never have begun at all. Then it moved to livable but inadequate space in the Public Archives Records Centre. Whether the Library survived in the shelter of the Archives or languished in its shade is a matter of opinion. The Library was never really one of the government's favourite projects, felt to be urgently needed. At first some Members of Parliament were supportive, but others contemplated the large and continuing costs that would be involved in the foundation and maintenance of a permanent institution. The building was repeatedly postponed. Adequate space and staff were not provided. The National Library was less well funded than the academic libraries which were its severest critics. These began to organize networks and services among themselves. In time National Library staff came to feel that theirs was the forgotten library. It was not in a position to provide much coordination or leadership. Possibly Canadian libraries did not want as much of either as at first they thought they did. It is not unusual for Canadians simultaneously to demand, resent and resist federal government services. Regional development was bound to occur. The territorial imperative is strong; local initiative is not necessarily unhealthy.

By 1968 the National Library had survived many years of hard labour, semi-starvation and close confinement. It had carried on its services, collected its

resources and finally moved with its treasures into an undeniably large and impressive building. When Dr. Lamb retired in 1968, he left to the country a firmly established, functioning, growing and internationally recognized national library.