

# *Libraries and Canadian Studies*

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Along with archives and museums, libraries play an essential role in the preservation of the past. They also attempt to respond as best they can to present needs and they should be concerned about ensuring the availability of documents to future generations. These objectives are complementary, but they are almost invariably conflicting too, for very few libraries, if any, have the human and financial resources necessary to pursue all three objectives simultaneously and efficiently.

Being service-oriented, most librarians naturally have as their first objective to respond to the current needs of their readers. In fact, most libraries have no general heritage function to perform and their acquisitions and service policies are dictated by the perceived current needs of their clientèle, be it general or specialized. Most special libraries, for instance, collect and keep only current information to support mission-oriented research. This is especially true of scientific and technological libraries and documentation centres. Obsolete material is periodically discarded to make room for new materials. Most of these libraries are not much concerned with the past and they need not be concerned either about future generations. There should be two exceptions, however, to this general mission. Special libraries attached to institutions should, and most do, perform an archival function *vis-à-vis* that institution. They should also ensure that unique material is preserved, whether they do it themselves or arrange for its transfer to a library willing and capable of doing so. A great deal of scientific and technological information and documentation can be discarded to no great loss by special libraries when it is obsolete and surplus to the requirements of their users, provided it is available from a back-up library. Most of this documentation is of foreign origin and is not related to Canadian studies. In fact, in recent years, hundreds of libraries have discarded some two million publications a year to the Canadian Book Exchange Centre of the National Library of Canada (and God knows how many more elsewhere!) which has redistributed from 500,000 to 700,000 items to other libraries which requested them, and pulped most of the rest. The information explosion continues to generate a paper pollution which cannot be but partially controlled through such continuing discard and destruction.

What precedes is also true of school, college and, *mutatis mutandis*, public libraries whose mission is also to respond to the needs of students, teachers, and readers, most of which are normally met with current or recent publications. Classics and other books of permanent value are normally kept on the shelves, but

large portions of these collections become surplus as curricula are modified, new textbooks appear, or reading habits or clientèle change (witness the gradual aging of public libraries clientèle); indeed, a great many of their holdings are destroyed beyond repair through heavy use. Public libraries, large and small, have much larger collections of foreign books and periodicals than Canadian: they are user-oriented and Canadian readers read far more foreign books than those of native authors. General collections held by public libraries are rarely of such comprehensiveness that they can be considered to be valuable research collections and their periodic weeding out to make room for new books or more recent editions of older books still in demand is no great loss to the country. There is simply no other practical solution to the endemic problem of space facing most libraries.

It is imperative, however, that public libraries, large or small, collect and preserve local material — books, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, maps, films, town or city reports, organs of local institutions and organizations — a great deal of which is collected neither at the national nor at the provincial level. These special collections, however limited, are an integral part of the national printed heritage and they supplement the national collections which, with few exceptions, are never fully comprehensive. It is not infrequent that the so-called ephemeral material acquires research value in the long run. Public libraries do not normally discard such local collections, but it would be highly desirable for library managers to promulgate their policies for collecting and preserving local materials and to take steps to ensure that they are fully implemented when this has not already been done.

All types of libraries also have the responsibility of ensuring the preservation of valuable special collections donated to them by local collectors and which frequently contain rare, and sometimes unique, material. These collections are frequently unrelated to the collection policy of a given library and are located in places where they are not likely to be used very much. Since much of this material is not duplicated elsewhere in the country, it should be preserved and its existence should be made known to prospective users through inventories. When libraries are not equipped themselves to ensure the preservation of such special collections, they should endeavour to arrange their transfer to a library capable of doing so. But, as will be emphasized later, a great deal more effort will be required to first locate these collections and then ensure their preservation. And, as everyone knows, valuable items and collections are also in private hands.

Canada is not unique in having its library collections decentralized; this is true everywhere, owing to the need of having working collections as close as possible to readers across any country. However, the collective resources of Canadian libraries — both of Canadian and foreign publications — are more decentralized than they are in most countries. Geography is obviously a factor, but history also accounts for this situation. The capital city is not the metropolis and, as has been said, Canada enjoyed longer than other industrialized countries the dubious honour of not having a national library. When one was established in 1953 under the direction of the distinguished archivist, librarian, and scholar in whose honour these papers are published, there was a lot of catching up to do. A limited national bibliography had been launched three years before, and thirty years later, legal deposit is not yet extended to all categories of library materials, and the national bibliography is consequently not as comprehensive as it should be, owing to an endemic shortage of staff, funds, and space. Furthermore, the gradual acquisition by the National

Library of earlier Canadiana is slow and expensive (and the national collection will never be complete), as is the compilation of the retrospective national bibliography. The indexing of the periodical literature also started late and is far from being as comprehensive as it should be. In some countries, it is centralized and assured by the national library or some other government-sponsored body; in Canada, it is mostly in private hands and there is a good deal of duplication of efforts, whilst large gaps still exist.

Although the national collections of national libraries are never complete anywhere, most are more comprehensive in both retrospective and current materials than that of the young National Library of Canada in Ottawa. They are accordingly better equipped to provide more adequate back-up services in support of national studies (let alone all kinds of other studies) and to implement a national preservation programme for the benefit of future generations. In Canada, both services — back-up reference and lending and conservation — need a more decentralized approach which, in a country where jurisdiction over culture and research is shared, does not make things any easier. We owe it to ourselves, however, to do what needs doing, regardless or in spite of jurisdictional barriers, if we are “to know ourselves,” as Tom Symons puts it.

No attempt will be made in this paper to provide a comprehensive survey of bibliographic initiatives which support Canadian studies. Surveys are available, such as the proceedings of the *National Conference on the State of Canadian Bibliography* held in Vancouver in 1974, complemented and updated by those of the Conference held in Halifax in 1981 under the joint sponsorship of the Association for Canadian Studies and the National Library of Canada and issued by the former as volume four of its *Canadian Issues*. Both owe much to the initiative of Professor Anne Piternick, whose papers on the subject are also important sources of information and ideas. These, and other inventories, recite lists of initiatives, projects, and achievements which go a long way in helping many who undertake Canadian studies; they also point out the existence of many gaps, some of them serious, in the coverage of general and specialized bibliographic information. The recommendations brought forward at these conferences aim at improving the coverage and availability of such information, some addressed to the National Library, some to granting bodies, and some to bibliographers, as appropriate. As a result of the publication of *To Know Ourselves* and of the two conferences just referred to, there is a growing awareness of the need for better and fuller bibliographic services to support Canadian studies, and this paper is a plea for action on the part of governments (federal and provincial), municipalities, academic institutions, and enlightened and dedicated individuals in the hope that, as a result of complementary initiatives on their part, Canadian studies may be better supported today and made possible tomorrow.

I referred earlier to the fact that Canada did not have a national bibliography before 1950, that its coverage was extended only gradually to various categories of materials, and that it is not yet comprehensive. For a great deal of the nation's earlier publications, one has accordingly to go to individual bibliographies, some of which are major contributions to the control of Canada's literature. The works of Faribault, Gagnon, Dionne, Morgan, Tod and Cordingley, Marie Tremaine, Bruce Peel, Bernard Amtmann, Lawrence Lande, Olga Bishop, John Hare, and others are so well-known that there is no need for me to insist further on their importance. It is

hoped that such individual initiatives will continue in the years ahead, and it is gratifying to know that the preparation and publication of bibliographic tools are henceforth supported by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grants. Special bibliographies are essential to the pursuit of many research projects and the contribution of the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec in this respect is significant.

It is nevertheless important that the National Library of Canada improve and extend its general bibliographic services. More staff, funds, and space will be required to extend legal deposit to other categories of materials, such as microform and maps, and to arrange for means of ensuring the availability and conservation of texts published on demand. Discussions are now under way to attempt to develop a decentralized scheme for the preservation of newspapers. It is hoped that a national register of microform masters will be established soon, including those of materials for the print handicapped. It is also hoped that the programme for the filming, listing, and sale of these will eventually be more comprehensive, thanks to the participation of all degree-granting institutions. Given additional resources, the National Library would also upgrade its treatment of government publications, both federal and provincial, to increase their use by researchers: they are essential to the successful pursuit of research in many fields. In addition, it would be desirable to expedite the completion of the retrospective national bibliography, upgrading the file for the period 1867-1900 now available on microfiche and publishing it in hard cover, and undertaking and completing the definitive creation of standard records for the period going from the establishment of printing in 1762 to 1867, and then from 1900 to 1950 for books, and later for materials which were incorporated into the national bibliography more recently. All these records should eventually be available on-line from DOBIS or from its successors at the National Library, and from other major bibliographic systems at home and abroad. To expedite the creation of records and avoid unnecessary duplication, the National Library has entered into a contract with the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions.

While bibliographic records are essential tools, they do not necessarily make available the documents themselves. For that reason, the National Library has established and developed a national union catalogue in which are recorded the catalogued and reported holdings of some three hundred Canadian libraries. This manual catalogue was closed on 1 April 1980 and records received on cards are now coded for entry into DOBIS. The closing of the manual catalogues coincided with the decline in the number of libraries reporting to the Union Catalogue of Books, because they too had adopted automated systems and were no longer producing cards for their own catalogues or for the union catalogues. In order to avoid the unnecessary duplication of records, the National Library does not request reports from libraries whose data are stored on UTLAS, because these records are available on-line for the purpose of providing locations. The Library, however, is studying the feasibility of loading machine-readable accessions from tapes provided by other Canadian libraries into DOBIS. This development of programs to make possible the acceptance of machine-readable accessions to the DOBIS data base is complicated by the fact that many libraries do not adhere to the MARC or mini-MARC formats, and there is a limit to the number of conversion programs that can be written with the resources of the Library. The development is important for the future of the Canadian Union Catalogue, the central source of holdings for the location and interlibrary loan service, but it is expected that this central file will

be supplemented by other bibliographic data bases; hence the importance of developing a cost-effective nation-wide communications network.

Information on holdings is also available from union lists and checklists published by the National Library for social sciences and humanities periodicals, which include thousands of Canadian titles and are accessible on-line from CAN/OLE, as well as Canadian newspapers, Canadian ethnic serials, statutes, regulations and law reports, and collections surveys; all help to direct users to strong collections, including some with substantial Canadian holdings in such areas as music, fine arts, dance, philately, and native studies. The union catalogues and survey reports facilitate access to millions of foreign publications, a great many of which are also necessary to support Canadian studies which cannot be conducted in isolation as if Canada was not part of the world.

Although much is available in the way of bibliographies, union catalogues, inventories, and surveys, the documents themselves are not always available. Some have never been catalogued, some were lost, some have not yet been located anywhere in Canada, and some are known to exist in foreign libraries. For instance, we must obtain from the British Library copies of publications deposited under the Imperial Copyright Act and which were not kept by Canadian repositories. The legal deposit of the Quebec publications at the BNQ is an additional insurance against the eventual unavailability of that part of the Canadian printed heritage. Some copies of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century publications cannot be used because they are too brittle. It is accordingly of the utmost importance and urgency not only to compile inventories of Canadiana for current use, but to ensure their reproduction in microcopies to meet both current and future needs. This is a major challenge which will require considerable human and financial resources over a long period, for what has already been achieved through projects such as the CLA newspapers microfilming project, phase one of the CIHM programme and other initiatives like those of Micromedia, the Société canadienne du microfilm, the Canadian Theses, Peel Bibliography, and Marie Tremaine projects of the National Library, and others, covers only part of what needs to be done. It is imperative that the CIHM be adequately funded for years to come if future generations of Canadians are to be able to study their past history, for publications are an essential complement of archival sources. In this respect, one is gratified that archives and several university and large public libraries have acquired important collections of individual papers and have assured their preservation, as one also regrets that these limited voluntary initiatives have let so much be destroyed which would have been had for the asking. But for a long time too few asked too little from too few, and what has been lost forever may very well be as much as what has been saved.

Conservation is a world-wide problem and some large national libraries have substantially increased their activity in this field in recent years. For instance, the British Library is reported to have spent £3,277,000 in conservation in 1981-82; the Bibliothèque nationale was awarded some \$25 million over ten years to attempt to save a substantial part of its collections, and the Library of Congress, which already has a large microfilming project, is planning both mass deacidification of original material and transfer of millions of pages to optical disks. The National Library of Canada, in comparison, does very little, although it recently started a mass deacidification programme using the Wei T'o System operated by the Records

Conservation Unit of the Public Archives. The system needs to be enlarged to process far more publications annually than is possible with the existing prototype, and it should be duplicated and operated in several other large or regional institutions to ensure the preservation of the scattered collections of documents which should be conserved in the original — whether Canadian or foreign.

All copies of all publications need not be preserved everywhere in the original. For masses of documents, the preservation of the intellectual content suffices. This has been achieved in part through microfilming programmes which, it is expected, will be superseded by digital disk storage, a medium which will facilitate teletransmission at rates which hopefully will be distance free. Decisions will have to be made by libraries — and indeed archives — regarding what needs to be preserved in the original (and deacidified), what should be transferred to film or disk, and what should be preserved in both forms — all of which is labour intensive and costly. But the alternative is worse and should not be considered even in periods of economic restraint unless we are prepared to accept the permanent loss of a large part of the library and archival materials dating from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present. This essential conservation operation will not happen by miracle: it will require additional staff and funds to pay for librarians and archivists to select and collate the material to be deacidified or copied, to train larger numbers of conservators, to buy and operate equipment, and even to collect and organize a good deal of material which is not now subject to legal deposit, nor collected by libraries or archives in a systematic way. The Symons Report has assisted in making many aware of the shortcomings of our collective efforts in support of Canadian studies, but a bolder awareness programme is urgently needed to sensitize governments and other purse holders to the magnitude of the task to be done. There are solid foundations on which to build and now that recent technological developments make the job to be done increasingly easy, we should succeed in ensuring the collection, organization, availability, and permanent preservation of the Canadian printed word which is an essential part of the nation's heritage.