

Canadian Photographs in the British Library

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In 1982, a Strategic Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under its programme "Canadian Studies Research Tools," permitted an investigation of the Canadian materials received by the British Museum, now the British Library, between the years 1895 and 1923 as required by the 1895 amendment to the *Canadian Copyright Act*. "Monthly Accession Lists" at the British Library indicate nearly one hundred per cent receipt of everything copyrighted in Canada commencing 23 July 1895 and ending 31 December 1923—including some 4,263 photographs. This note describes what has and is happening to those photographs.

When we began searching for the photographs in 1984, the staff at the British Library insisted that the Museum had never kept photographs sent to it over the years. Patricia McLaren Turner, then Head of the North American Section, suggested, however, that the Canadian photographs might have been sent to the overflow facilities in Woolwich Arsenal for storage in an area designated (in a less politically correct era) as the "colonial dump." This group of miscellaneous, uncatalogued material from Canada and other Commonwealth countries measured over five hundred linear feet; through numerous relocations it had lost any semblance of its original organization.

Our search through the material resulted in the discovery of published Canadian materials as well as photographs from various Commonwealth countries, including Canada, and from the United States. The photographs had been stored loosely: we found them in piles, inside books, and under books. After extracting all the Canadian material, we divided the photographs into two categories: those damaged and in need of conservation and those intact. We took no further action regarding the damaged photographs. The intact photographs were dusted with cheesecloth and placed in acid-free envelopes marked with the copyright registration number on the outside.

An additional thousand Canadian photographs were located in the Map Room of the British Library, and over one hundred photographs of Canadian native peoples at the Museum of Mankind (formerly the Department of Ethnography of the British Museum). Searches for the remaining photographs petered out in dead ends

that we had neither the time nor resources to overcome. Thus, with a sense of disappointment, we published in 1989 *A Checklist of Canadian Copyright Deposits in the British Museum: Volume V Photographs* in which we detailed the 2,445 photographs located and merely listed the information supplied by the Canadian Copyright Registers on the 1,818 missing photographs.

Since that time all the photographs located in the "colonial dump" were removed by the conservation office of the British Library from Woolwich to Great Russell Street. Once there, all the photographs underwent restoration and conservation and by 1991 had been remounted in fifty-odd binders. "The Canadian Photograph Deposit Collection," as it is now known, may be viewed in the Reading Room.

Last year, in its *Strategic Objectives for the Year 2000 (BL News 179)*, the British Library set out its commitment to working with new technology. In March 1994, a prototype version of the British Library's Photo CD project, named the "Pixproject," was available in the Reading Room. Along with images in two other categories, 1,337 images from "The Canadian Photograph Deposit Collection 1895-1923" had been digitized, indexed, and stored in the "Pixproject." The system has the potential to produce print-outs at source and to send images electronically.

Although gratified by the British Library's decision to highlight this collection in their pilot project, I found my enthusiasm for the photographs in their new format on the computer screen tempered by the absence of the photographs we had failed to locate. Good news, however, was soon forthcoming. Jim Egles, North American Section, reported that, while readying themselves for the eventual move to their new building at St. Pancras, the British Library staff had located a cache of over one thousand uncatalogued Canadian photographs in the Map Library. These photographs have since been moved to the Conservation Office, where they await restoration and conservation. Eventually they too will be added to "The Canadian Photograph Deposit Collection" and digitized into the "Pixproject."

Undoubtedly the collection is of value to anyone interested in Canadian studies; the British Library deserves our thanks for their on-going efforts to preserve this collection and for developing a software package to make it available to researchers on CD-ROM. Anyone requiring further information about the project or the collection should contact Peter Carey, Pixproject, British Library, or James Egles, North American Section, British Library, Great Russell Street, London, England.