THE PUBLICATION OF DOCUMENTS IN CANADA

By

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For a satisfactory programme of records publication, three things are necessary - a sound selection policy, a good editor, and money. Such publication has been sporadic in Canada because all three are difficult to find. Over the years, however, we have been able to print an impressive quantity of primary material.

The first significant publication of documents in Canada resulted from the combination of a keen historical society and a government grant. In 1832 the Lower Canadian Legislature passed an act granting the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec the sum of 300 pounds "to obtain and publish Historical Documents relating to the early times in Canada." This society, founded in 1824, began its publishing program in the troubled year of 1838, with Louis de Courville's memoirs of Canada from 1749 to 1760. Twelve more volumes followed, as well as shorter publications in the Society's annual transactions.

In 1859 a second historical society, the Societé historique de Montréal, began another series of published documents. It is probably significant that the impelling reason behind the Montreal project was the correction of errors in contemporary historical studies, rather than the idea of preservation which had been behind the Quebec programme twenty years earlier.

Another ten years passed before the appearance of a volume of historical documents published directly by a government. In 1865 the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia recommended the publication of "a volume of public documents to be selected by the Commissioner of Records, provided the selection be contained in a single octavo volume of moderate size." The resulting publication appeared in 1869; "moderate" was interpreted liberally, and it ran to almost 800 pages. There was no intention on the part of the Nova Scotian government that this volume would be the first of a series - in this one book the unfortunate Dr. Akins was expected to include all the important and interesting records in his archives.

After these beginnings, Canadian publishing of historical records reached its most productive period in the thirty-five years before the first Great War. It was at this time that the Public Archives of Canada and many of the provincial archives began a systematic programme of publication. Historical societies like those of New Brunswick and Lundy's Lane, institutions like the Collège de Ste. Marie and the Institut canadien de Québec, published important compilations. Editors like Abbé Casgrain, Senator Masson, Brigadier Cruikshank, W. O. Raymond, and Sir Arthur Doughty contributed to the boom in documentary publication.

One of the most important developments in this period was the founding of the Champlain Society in 1905, the first and still the most important organization in Canada whose sole aim is the publica-

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tion of primary materials for the study of Canadian history. It was founded by two professors, Colby of McGill and Wrong of Toronto; a financier, Walker of the Bank of Commerce; and a librarian, Bain of the Toronto Public Library. Since 1907 it has published 68 volumes. Twelve were in conjunction with the Hudson's Bay Record Society, and eight concerning regions of Ontario have been financed by the government of Ontario. The Champlain Society has been able to continue functioning through wars and depression, because it prints limited editions with a guaranteed market in its membership. This same principle has been adopted by the newly formed Manitoba Record Society, whose first volume, Professor W. L. Morton's **Manitoba: the birth of a province,** was published in 1965.

In recent times the cost of book publishing has increased tremendously. No longer can the average historical society sustain a systematic programme for the publication of documents, particularly when it has other pressing demands upon its time and its funds. The provincial archives, except in Quebec, no longer produce annual volumes of documents.

The Public Archives of Canada is only now re-entering the field of publication, after a lapse of some years. Many important documents have of course been published in the last thirty years, but most of them have been published with difficulty. The main reason for the decline of document publication is that it is now economically impossible to produce a book with a probable sale of only a few hundred copies.

With the greatly increased interest in Canadiana in recent years, some manuscripts have been published commercially with apparent success. Macmillan's Pioneer Books series, for example, includes several such volumes. This method of publication, however, is possible for only the most popular type of document; the hard core of documentation remains caviar for the general, and cannot be published commercially. Another type of records publication that is still possible without subsidization is the source book for the university undergraduate, who provides a sufficiently large market. We have had landmarks in this field, for example Shortt and Doughty's constitutional documents, and Innis and Lower's economic ones. More recent examples have sometimes tended to reprint the old chesnuts rather than dig in primary sources to find unpublished material of at least equal importance, although it is admittedly impossible to avoid some repetition.

This, then, is the present situation of document publication in Canada. It must be remembered, of course, that large numbers of documents concerning Canada have been published beyond our borders. We owe a great deal to societies like the Hakluyt Society and the Hudson's Bay Record Society in England, and the Prince Society in the United States. We owe a great deal to scholars who have edited collections abroad - men like Dr. E. B. O'Callaghan, John Dawson Gilmary Shea, Reuben Gold Thwaites, and Milo Quaife in the United States, Pierre Margry in France, and a succession of editors from Hakluyt himself to Paul Knaplund and E. E. Rich in England.

The responsibility for the publication of Canadian documents, however, belongs to us in Canada. What should be published, and who

should publish it? We would probably agree that there are still many unpublished records that should be in print. The situation has changed, however, from the days of Casgrain and Doughty. The scholar has acquired much greater mobility because of rapid, cheap transportation, and the growing number of travel grants and fellowships available to him. Mohammed can now go to the mountain of manuscripts with comparative ease. An even more important change is the tremendous advance in microfilming procedures. When Clarence Carter wrote his brochure on historical editing in 1952 he listed the advantages and disadvantages of microfilm compared with publication.[1] On the credit side, microfilm provides exact facsimile reproduction; it is more rapid and requires less storage space. On the other hand are its inflexibility, its unsuitability for annotation and indexing, and the need for special equipment for its use. In the few years since Carter wrote, a system for indexing microfilm has been marketed, and this is only the beginning. We are on the verge of systems of computerized information retrieval which enthusiasts maintain will make the printed word obsolete. Computers may do all that is claimed for them, but their widespread use in Canadian institutions is almost certainly still in the distance.

Practically, then, our choice at the present time is between microfilm and book publication. Because of its relative cheapness microfilm would seem preferable for copying large collections indiscriminately and completely. For collections with a high incidence of crucial material, or for topical selections, publication would be more satisfactory. Despite all the new technology, the books is still the handiest and most accessible means of imparting information. It still is most suitable for the cumbersome apparatus of scholarly editing.

In the United States where the new machines are most advanced, there has been a vast revival of document publication in the last fifteen years. A number of great publication programmes have been undertaken, and comprehensive editions of the papers of many prominent men are pouring from the scholarly presses. In the field of politics alone, Jefferson's papers are projected in 50 volumes, Calhoun in 15, Franklin in 40, Clay in 10, the Adams in 100, Hamilton in 22, Madison in 50. It is an impressive and overwhelming list.

Even supposing that the millions of dollars being spent on these programmes were available to us, is this what we want in Canada? Possibly Sir John A. Macdonald or George Etienne Cartier would merit such treatment, but will Canadian scholarship be enriched by the publication of Sir Mackenzie Bowell's laundry list? The number of Canadians whose most trivial jottings deserve full scholarly publication is very small. So also is the scholarly community, and good editorial work requires scholarship - meticulous, painstaking scholarship, with a deep knowledge of the period and a strong sense of perspective. In this country we simply cannot afford the luxury of multivolume comprehensive publication.

With our limitations then, what should be our aim? If we discard major comprehensive publications, we must then depend upon selection - selection of single documents which merit publication, and compilations of significant manuscripts pertaining to a theme, person,

[1] *C. E. Carter, Historical editing (U.S. National Archives, Bulletin* 7, *Washington,* 1952).

area, or period. The trouble with selection, of course, is that it is almost impossible to avoid the personal predilictions of the editor from influencing his choice of documents.

Another problem is that fashions in historiography change; in Canada we have seen shifts of emphasis from political to economic to social. No editor, however, can hope to produce a definitive volume. Even when he is publishing a comprehensive collection, his work can be quickly superceded. For example, Brigadier Cruikshank's great collections of Simcoe's and Russell's papers published by the Ontario Historical Society between the wars are now both unsatisfactory, the Simcoe volumes because the transcription made under the direction of John Ross Robertson in the 1880's is inadequate when compared with the originals now in the Ontario Archives, and the Russell volumes because of the large quantity of Russell material that has become available since their publication. The editor, like most historians, cannot hope for immortality through his works.

The future of documentary publication in Canada, then, probably lies in selective volumes, supplemented by comprehensive microfilming and the use of the new technology. How are these to be undertaken? As the **Times** said, "the Champlain Society goes on, in its majestic way, providing the researcher and the common reader alike with admirably printed materials for their labours or their curiosity." But the Champlain Society alone is unable to provide for all the historian's needs. Cost of publication has eliminated most historical societies from the field. Private foundations in Canada have never been particularly interested in documentary publication, although perhaps more support could be obtained from them. This leaves the various levels of government as the most probable instruments of publication, with their archives or historical branches the most likely agencies employed.

In some cases it might be possible to obtain an extra grant specifically for a publication programme. This would seem to be the ideal solution because publications could then be prepared without diminishing the ordinary work of the archives. Budget chiefs are often more willing to make such grants which result in an impressive series of volumes, than to increase their estimates to maintain regular services.

If special funds are not obtainable, however, should the archives, all of whom are now struggling with ever increasing work loads, attempt a publications programme with the inevitable drain on both staff time and budget? As custodians of our collections, is not our primary responsibility to acquire; to preserve; to organize, index, and arrange our holdings; to guide our readers? With most of us scholarly publication, even of our most important documents, is a luxury beyond our means. Until we can honestly say that we are adequately fulfilling our fundamental duties, should we not leave publication to the historian? We will publish our inventories, finding guides, indexes. The great union list of manuscripts has been made possible through our efforts. We will superintend microfilming projects, and will ship microfilm around the countryside on interlibrary loan. We will be advisers and consultants to those who have time to publish. And someday, we will have sufficient staff, money, and time, to enter the field ourselves.