

SUBSCRIPTION PUBLISHING AND THE BOOKTRADE IN THE EIGHTIES: THE INVASION OF ONTARIO¹

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The systematic examination of publishers' imprints as a guide to publishing history is not a pursuit new to bibliographers. It has long been the custom in the investigation of *STC* or *Wing* titles and has extended, during the last fifty years I believe, to the literary productions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is, however, much leeway to be made up in the study of Canadian bibliography. We have indeed been presented in the past with interesting studies of individual firms (Professor George L. Parker's paper on Lovell of Montreal, presented during the 1974 session of ACUTE, will still be remembered with pleasure in this connection), but studies of the Canadian booktrade as a whole, such as Dr. Allan Smith's *American Publications in Nineteenth Century English Canada* (PBSC, 9, 1970), concentrate either on the invasion of Canada by the, usually pirated, productions of American houses or, as in the case of Dr. Parker's *The British North American Booktrade in the 1840's* (PBSC, 12, 1973), focus on the undeclared legal war which the then Colonial Legislatures before Confederation were obliged to wage on two fronts, British and American, in order to protect their budding printing and publishing industries, if such they can be called, from economic strangleholds.

There is, however, yet another aspect of Canadian publishing history which, apparently overlooked so far, led to the establishment of a, at one time vigorous, Canadian publishing industry, which may be said to constitute in many respects the germ of twentieth century publishing structure. This development took place after Confederation and was, possibly unwittingly, fostered by Federal legislation. It has been overlooked because its productions do not, in the academic sense, constitute "literature." The vast majority of these titles prove to be ephemeral, and were produced merely to satisfy a temporary demand for reading matter amongst that section of Canadian society which, immigrant or not, tended to reject standard belles-lettres in the form of novels or history with suspicions based on religious and possible social prejudices and which, at the same time, was geographically remote from traditional sources of supply. I am referring here to that segment of the trade known as subscription or colportage publishing, often contemptuously dismissed, and whose productions, as I discovered with little surprise, have increasingly been consigned to the limbo of librarianship. Copies are therefore rare unless the contents are of specifically Canadian interest, and the necessary evidence of the incipient Canadian booktrade between 1870 and 1900 (approximately) which they offer has to be gathered laboriously.

¹Editors' Note: This essay, prepared for oral address, forms only a small part of a much larger study of publishing and the booktrade in nineteenth-century Canada on which Professor Brodie was working before his death on 23 December 1975. We are pleased to have the opportunity to publish the work of such a dedicated scholar.

The subscription method of bookselling is not unfamiliar to us and is still being practised. Tebbel, in his monumental *A History of Bookpublishing in the United States*, pays some attention to this sales method in the section devoted to "Specialised Publishing"; Pearson Gundy refers to it fleetingly in *Book Publishing and Publishers in Canada before 1900*. But, whilst Tebbel is concerned with subscription bookpublishing in the U.S.A., which culminated in the marketing of complete sets and series of publications, often very beautifully produced and by no means as questionable in quality and punitive in price as he at times implies, and Gundy, in the text of an already short monograph, has occasion to mention only one indigenous firm, The Methodist Book and Publishing House under William Briggs, as representative of the subscription trade, I have found ample evidence that the Canadian ramifications of this trade were of far greater significance for the development of the trade than we have hitherto suspected. We will have to recognize that this development proved itself to be fundamentally beneficial to the growth of indigenous publishing houses during the period of time stated.

The title that so fortuitously started the present research into this aspect of Canadian booktrade was A. C. Harris's *Alaska and the Klondike Goldfields*, a fringe item amongst Canadiana and not a particularly rare book, but it attracted my attention for several reasons: it bore the imprint of the, to me then, unknown Canadian firm of Bradley-Garretson of Brantford, Ontario; it proved, on examination, to contain only about a quarter of the original pagination, numbered most irregularly, and, to whet my curiosity further, the Canadian titlepage, bearing on its verso a Library of Congress registration of 1897, was a cancel. The Public Library of Guelph fortunately possessed another copy of the same title which, to my surprise, contained the full number of pages numbered consecutively, had the same titlepage, not as cancel, but bore no imprint whatever. I had, by merest chance and blessed by my then utter ignorance, stumbled across two manifestations of the Canadian Booktrade during the last century — namely, a book-agent's copy of a sample book used to solicit subscriptions from unwary and, one suspects, often unwilling customers and an example of the invasion of the Canadian market by U.S. publishers under the disguise of indigenous productions. The title in question had originated from the National Book Publishing Co. of Philadelphia for which the Brantford firm acted as Canadian agent.

Several questions then arose from the find:

What was the method of marketing publications of this type, which were obviously not part of the stock-in-trade of regular booksellers, if indeed such booksellers were to be found in rural Ontario?

Are we here possibly confronted by a chapter of Canadian bookpublishing history which, not being Toronto or Montreal based, has so far escaped more detailed investigation?

Were there indeed other firms which, having noticed a possibly lucrative form of income, followed the same pattern?

Why was this method of marketing under the disguise of Canadian imprints chosen?

I believe that my, albeit somewhat sporadic, investigations can provide some answers to these questions, although I must stress that these investigations are by no means completed and that fresh and supplementary evidence turns up practically everytime I examine appropriate titles in a library. Much work remains indeed to be done. Let me now, however, deal with my questions systematically.

In the selling process the actual book-agent, as the man who carried the sample, was the smallest cog in the sales machine. Whether amateur or professional, he was equipped with sample volumes, either as single specimens or severally bound together. Each sample exhibits the best features of the offered publication, contained all illustrations, a list of contents, and samples of the actual text. Moreover, each agent's copy also shows at least two of the available binding styles which determined the price, in such a manner that the prospective purchaser could visualize the thickness of the finished volume and the amount of shelf-space it would occupy. Attached to each sample copy was the subscription list for the agent to complete with name and address of subscriber, binding style required, price and space for signature. Some specimens in my collection have fortunately also retained the instruction sheets for the agent as early examples of the high-pressure approach to cold selling. In contrast to American developments, which had already reached the more sophisticated "literary" stage, the spiritual fare offered was simple and appealed to the lowest common literary denominator possible. As a small choice of specially attractive titles I can offer the following:

Beautiful Gems of Thought and Sentiment, by Henry Davenport Northrop
Character Building, or Principles, Precepts and Practices which make Life a Success, by the same author

The Royal Path of Life, or, Aims and Aids to Success and Happiness, by T. L. Haines and L. W. Yaggy

The Happy Home, Its Entertainment, Instruction and Amusement, embracing eight instructive books in one volume

Treasures of Use and Beauty, or, The Popular Art and Literary Educator, by a Corps of Special Authors

Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" in Words of One Syllable.

Somewhat more interesting were probably the following:

Indian Horrors, or, Massacres by the Red Men, again by the rather ubiquitous Northrop

An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson, "Uncle Tom," edited by John Lobb, F.R.G.S.

The Life of Barnum, The World-Renowned Showman, written by Himself or

Heroes of Unknown Seas and Savage Lands, by J. W. Buel

On the whole, however, I am glad that the pursuit of bibliography does not invariably necessitate the actual reading of the raw-material with which the investigator has to deal.

An outstanding feature is the length of the actual titles and the wordiness of the titlepages which present in fact a synopsis of the contents. The titlepages of the samples can be found in three different states: either with the imprint of the original publisher, or devoid of any imprint, or provided

with a Canadian imprint, often of an otherwise unknown firm. I shall presently deal with these points. In the case of the second example, titlepage devoid of imprint, the titlepage *may* be a cancel; in the case of a Canadian imprint it usually is. Copies of the full text may be found either with an imprint-less titlepage or with the Canadian cancels. Copies found in Canada that bear the original U.S. imprint must have found their way north fortuitously. Though I cannot, at this stage, be perfectly certain that no U.S. imprinted copies were sold north of the border, the organization of the trade and the legislation governing import of books make it appear unlikely. In most cases, however, the provenance of the title may be recognized by the L.C. registration on the verso which, curiously, has been retained even on the cancels. Though the registration remark in later examples may name an individual rather than a company, the regular re-occurrence of certain names enables identification with a particular publishing house to be made.

The individual agent received samples and stock from his local distributing agency whose imprint usually appears on the titlepage. Though I have come across a number of these agencies masquerading as publishers, detailed investigation has so far been possible of only four of these firms. By chance these four happen to represent the consecutive stages in the development of the trade. The central distributing house for a territory was commonly a local printer or stationer, a small-town man with enough acumen and local connections to perceive the financial possibilities of the business. He was situated at times in unexpected places. Thus nobody would have expected the presence of a "publishing firm" in the insignificant little town of Paris, Ontario. Indeed, the existence of such a firm was denied even by the oldest inhabitants till I presented the evidence. [A slide of a titlepage was shown at this point.] Even from the illustration, it can be seen that the John S. Brown imprint was added later; neither typography nor ink matches the original. Moreover, this particular titlepage is a cancel. I have traced no fewer than fourteen titles bearing Brown's imprint, all dated between eighteen-eighty-something — the exact year was usually made unreadable — and 1898. Most of these titles were traced to the National Publishing Company of Philadelphia. Information obtained from independent sources agrees with the approximate dating of the volumes. The first mentioning of J. S. Brown in Paris has been traced to 1883; in 1887 the firm advertised itself as "Stationery and Fancy Goods Store"; in 1896 it called itself "Bookstore." Its last traceable appearance dates to 1901.

A second, better, example is the firm of Schuyler, Smith and Co. of London, Ontario. The earliest imprint found so far dates to 1872 in an anonymous publication which has not otherwise been traced. In *The London City Directory* of 1874/75 the firm advertises itself as "Subscription Book Publishers and Dealers in all kinds of Engravings, Lithographs, Chromos, Photographs and Frames, Charts, Maps, etc." In 1875 an advertisement calls for "100 Men and Women wanted to travel with Books . . ." An interesting imprint may be found on a title, registered L.C. in 1872, issued by Hubbard Bros. of Philadelphia, which shows Schuyler, Smith & Co. as very much the junior partner of a "publishing combine" comprising firms in Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis, Chicago, San Francisco, Detroit and Davenport. Other titles in my collection show the Schuyler, Smith & Co. imprint alone, which changes to that of McDermid and Logan of the same address after 1884/7, when Schuyler, Smith had disappeared from local records. McDermid and Logan seem to have applied themselves vigorously to the development of the trade. Their imprint is found not only in *The Life*

of *Barnum*, a title also offered by John S. Brown and traceable to The National Publishing Company, but also in conjunction with the Toronto-based Rose Publishing Company and above all with C. R. Parish & Co. of Philadelphia, a major influence in the subscription trade with twelve ascertained titles so far. In addition, McDermid and Logan undertook original publishing ventures jointly with the two firms Bradley-Garretson of Brantford and the World Publishing Company of Guelph, to which I am going to refer next. They thus participated in a fresh development of the Canadian booktrade which owed nothing to American influence.

The firm of Bradley-Garretson & Co. had been the starting point of my investigations. It may be seen from the imprint that its chief locale was originally in Philadelphia, but that it must have belonged to a larger association of publishers straddling the American continent. According to the *History of Brant County* (p. 294) the Brantford branch of the company was established in 1876. Some time after 1879 the Canadian interests of Bradley-Garretson were bought by its then manager, the Rev. Thomas S. Linscott, who continued the Brantford operation under the firm's name, but added a Toronto sister-company under the name of Linscott Publishing Company. Bradley-Garretson were not, at first, publishers of original works. The earliest titles I have come across originated from the National Publishing Co. of Philadelphia which, to judge by the frequency of occurrence of its titles, seems to have attempted some sort of monopoly in Western Ontario. Linscott, however, struck out on his own, the first non-Toronto firm to do so, and published a number of titles of specifically Canadian interest. Thus his *Canadian Album, Men of Canada* of 1891, in which he included himself, appears to have been his very own publication; I have not found it with another imprint. This set of five volumes also included photographs of his contemporaries and chief competitors, James Walter Lyon of the World Publishing Co. of Guelph and William Briggs of The Methodist Publishing House, Toronto. These three men are therefore the first Canadian publishers of the period to whom we can affix faces. Briggs, however, does not concern us here, although he appears to have been an enterprising character who, as Methodist Book Stewart, thought nothing of bringing out his community's publications over his personal imprint. I have encountered the identical titles over both imprints.

James Walter Lyon, a Pennsylvanian, came to Guelph in 1872 from Toledo where he is said to have been in the employ of a publishing house owned by O. A. Browning. No such house or name is, however, mentioned by Tebbel. Judging by the L.C. registration of his earliest traceable publication, Hartwick's *The Polar and Tropical Worlds* of 1874, which bears his own name and not yet that of the later World Publishing Company, his connection seems rather to have been with C. A. Nichols of Springfield, Mass., than with the ubiquitous National Publishing Co. The title had originated with Longman's of London and thus affords a glimpse of British export trade to the U.S.A. Lyon was, however, astute enough not to limit himself to titles obtained from already established American houses, but apparently obtained the agency for the then (1874) newly founded Western Publishing House of Chicago from L. W. Yaggy, its founder. Tebbel, in discussing Western's sales methods, states: "Western's business abroad was conducted through a branch house in Guelph, Ontario, which had duplicate plates of all the firm's books and manufactured them for the European market" (II, p. 429). Such manufacturing must have been done in Toronto or Montreal and would facilitate Lyon's later joint publishing ventures. Tebbel's state-

ment may be supported by the fact, admittedly still needing corroboration, that the titlepages of such Western publications which I have seen were not cancels, though the imprint of the World Publishing Company on them differs typographically from the rest of the page.

The World Publishing Company imprint is found on a wide range of titles by various U.S. houses, indicating that Lyon cast his net as widely as possible. His first title of Canadian interest found so far is Macoun's *Manitoba and the Great North-West*, which was entered to him in 1882. I have not yet found this particular title over another imprint. More interesting bibliographically is *Canada's Sons on Kopje and Veldt* by T. G. Marquis, a book with which most Canadiana collectors will be familiar. It was apparently a joint venture of the Brantford and Guelph firms over the imprint of The Canada's Son Publishing Company. It was entered in 1900 to Bradley-Garretson Co. Ltd., but gives places of publications as Toronto, Guelph, Brantford. This is supported by a copy in my collection which bears the imprint World Publishing Company, Guelph, Canada, on a cancelled titlepage. We have, therefore, evidence that at least two of the Canadian subscription houses, Bradley-Garretson-Linscott and the World Publishing Company of Guelph, co-operated in original publications. Signs that this co-operation extended itself to other firms are not missing. Linscott published another title of Canadian interest, *Life and Work of the Rt. Hon. John Thompson*, in 1895 over the imprint of United Publishing House, Toronto, London and Brantford, thus bringing McDermid and Logan into the fold. I am still looking for a combined Brantford-Guelph-London imprint, which I feel must exist somewhere. It seems clear therefore that none of the Canadian houses did, as yet, venture to undertake unaidedly the risk of a specifically Canadian publication for a comparatively limited market. Similar associations of localized publishing houses publishing titles over temporary combination imprints may be found in the case of William Briggs and Associates, thus showing that this risk-sharing method was a definite feature of the Canadian trade.

It is now time to attempt an answer to the last and most important of my questions: why was this method of marketing American titles over Canadian imprints chosen? I can, at this moment, offer no positive evidence based on business correspondence or documents. Whilst I am therefore hesitant to make definitive statements, certain conclusions seem plausible to me. Contrary to my first expectations and to those of one of my librarian friends whom I consulted, the various Canadian copyright acts had little or no influence on the matter. Apart from the aforementioned *Polar and Tropical Worlds*, all titles discovered were original American publications, written often at great speed by professional hacks whose task it was to capitalize on interest caused by recent events such as the Chicago fire or the San Francisco earthquake. Alternately, as my previously mentioned list of titles indicates, the more "literary" offerings consisted of unctuous effusions by academic gentlemen little known to the history of scholarship now. I believe that the key to the problem does not lie in the copyright acts and their amendments, but rather in the various amendments to the federal Duties of Customs acts and their schedules. Unfortunately, however, these, to us all-important, schedules are not always attached to the various copies of the acts available in the libraries. Nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to note the following: In 1879 the duty on "Book printed, periodicals and pamphlets, bound or in sheets, etc. etc. . . ." amounted to six cents per pound (weight). In 1880 that wording was altered significantly in that the phrase "bound or

in sheets" was to be struck and the rate of duty was raised to *fifteen per cent ad valorem*, a significant increase. In the same amendment the privileged rate of duty of only one cent "for every two ounces in weight . . ." for "Books, Periodicals and Pamphlets, imported through the Post Office" was cancelled, thus closing a possible loophole by bringing items thus imported into the fifteen per cent range. These dates, 1879 and 1880, coincide with the beginning of systematic colportage sales over Canadian imprints, surely no chance happening. Might it have been possible that, by some freak legalistic interpretation, books without titlepages were no longer classed as books but as some other printed matter subject to lower tariff rates? I have as yet no definitive information, but such an interpretation would offer a possible explanation for the outbreak of spurious Canadian imprints on titlepages obviously affixed later.

Some light on the curious phenomenon of the deliberately erased dates, mentioned before in the titles of the books marketed by John S. Brown of Paris, is thrown by an amendment to a fresh Customs Act of 1883, in which "Books, bound, which shall have been printed more than seven years at date of publication" could in future be imported duty free. In 1897 the concession of duty-free import was extended to "Books, bound or unbound, which have been printed and manufactured more than twelve years," but the American subscription publishers were no longer able to take advantage of the apparent concession by marketing out-of-date publications in Canada. Examination of titles has shown that subscribers' tastes had matured sufficiently by 1897 to demand up-to-date material of Canadian or British origin and that a lack of taste for the unctuous effusions of the 1880's appears to have made further marketing of trash unprofitable. Moreover, the 1897 Duties of Customs Act finally put an end to the import of such reading matter by raising the rate of duty on any but books for scientific or industrial purposes, or books for instructional institutions at any academic level, to a crippling rate of *twenty per cent ad valorem*. In consequence the rate of registration, incorporation, or at least of licensing of U.S. publishers by federal or provincial legislatures shows an astonishing increase. From about 1900 onwards, we find that the imprint of every important American publishing house includes a Toronto address, so that these houses became integral parts of the Canadian publishing scene and its normal trade channels.

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