HERBERT JEFFERIE -- FIRST CANADIAN PRINTER?

It is generally acknowledged, and from considerable evidence, that Bartholomew Green, Jr. established the first printing shop in Canada. Green moved his printing equipment from Boston to Halifax in 1751¹. He located on Grafton Street overlooking the harbour in August of that year but died a few months later in October at the age of fifty-two. He arrived a little over two years after the founding of Halifax. It is unfortunate that Green, whose father and grandfather were distinguished printers, was not able to publish anything in Halifax, except perhaps, a broadside or leaflet announcing his proposals for the publishing of the newspaper The Halifax Gazette. Green, Jr. had served an apprenticeship with his father and had printed a number of works for Boston booksellers².

Green was succeeded by a former partner of his, John Bushell from Boston³. That Green published something before his death may be deduced from statements made by Bushell in the first number of The Halifax Gazette, March 23, 1752⁴. Canada was deprived of her first printer-publisher just five weeks after coming to Halifax. But was he our first printer?

The question posed in this brief bibliographical note suggests that there may have been a printer in Halifax in 1749 in the first group of settlers which landed with Cornwallis in June of that year. What is the evidence? Unfortunately there are no examples of work by a printer in Canada before Green's probable proposal to found a newspaper. But there was amongst the first settlers a man who described himself as a printer. His name was Herbert Jefferie and he and his wife and two children, a boy and a girl, are listed as passengers on the ship "Winchelsea", Thomas Cornish, Master. Also in the first delegation of newcomers to Halifax were three other persons listed as belonging to the allied trades: Robert Garner and John Marvin, both stationers, and Thomas Blackwell, bookbinder. These last three shipped aboard "Beaufort", Elias Perriman, Master.

This information is to be found in Selections from the Public Documents of the Province of Nova Scotia...edited by Thomas B. Akins, Halifax, Annand, 1869. The list of the settlers who came with Governor Cornwallis to Chebucto, in June 1749, was copied from the original Mess Book of the settlers. The Mess Book, Akins notes, "was deposited in the office of the Registrar of the Court of Vice Admiralty, at Halifax, but has been missing for several years".⁵

Did Jefferie, and indeed, his fellow settlers Garner, Marvin and Blackwell manage to survive the physical hardships of the first winters in Halifax? Did Jefferie and Blackwell, for instance, bring equipment and supplies with them? Is it possible that Herbert Jefferie did bring the first printing press to Canada? There is the possibility but evidence is lacking. Many things might have happened to stifle the hopes of these first settlers to follow their

trades in the early days of settlement.

The ties between Halifax and Boston were strong from the beginning of the new colony. It is quite possible that Jefferie and the other artisans may have moved on to Boston. Then again Jefferie may have worked in the printing houses of those pioneers Green, Bushell and later Anthony Henry.

In his article "Eighteenth-Century Halifax", Dr. C. Bruce Fergusson includes the following footnote:⁶

"Credit is sometimes given to Otis Little, a New Englander who became the first attorney-general of Nova Scotia, for the introduction of printing, since in the summer of 1751 he organized a company for the purpose of establishing a newspaper and carrying on the business of printing [P. A. N. S., Scrapbook of E. F. Hart "Early Printing in Nova Scotia", by J. T. Bulmer]. Herbert Jefferie, a printer, arrived at Halifax with the Cornwallis expedition in 1749, but it is not known if he brought type, or if he printed anything in Nova Scotia..."

Dr. Fergusson informs me that Robert "Gardner's" funeral took place at Halifax on August 31, 1751, and that of John Marvin on July 17, 1749.

Perhaps the next step is a study of the printers of England and Scotland and the Colonies of this period to see if there is any trace of the background and ultimate fate of Messrs. Jefferie and Blackwell. A cursory examination of Evans, Sabin, Thomas and The Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers, 1726 - 1775 by Plomer, Bushnell and Dix has failed to reveal anything. There is still work to be done and still some justification, I think, in keeping the question alive -- Herbert Jefferie -- First Canadian Printer?

1. Tremaine, Marie. A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1751 - 1800. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1952. p.661
2. Evans, Charles. American Bibliography... New York, Smith, 1940, v.2 (3763, 3764); Thomas, Isaiah. History of Printing in America... Albany, Munsell, 1874, v.1, p.121.
3. Tremaine, Marie. Early Printing in Canada. Toronto, The Golden Dog Press, 1934. p.1.
4. The Halifax Gazette, Monday, March 23, 1752, no. 1, p.1.
5. Akins, Thomas, ed. Selections from the Public Documents of the Province of Nova Scotia... Halifax, Annand, 1869. p. 506.
6. Canadian Historical Association. Report of the Annual Meeting.. 1949. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1949. p.36.

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