Sources for the Study of the Book Trades in Nineteenth-Century Toronto: Some Notes from a Work in Progress

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FOR SEVERAL YEARS I HAVE BEEN RESEARCHING THE PRINTING, PUBLISHING, bookselling, and related trades in Toronto between 1798 and 1900. In this paper I would like first to describe this project and then to comment on some of my sources. Although my research has been limited to Toronto, I suspect that these sources will have equivalents in other parts of Canada and may suggest avenues of research into the book trades elsewhere.

The aim of the project is to compile a dictionary of individuals and companies in the book trades in nineteenth-century Toronto. Each entry in the dictionary will include such basic information as dates active, type of business, addresses (with dates), names of partners (or partnerships), a brief biography (for individuals) or history (for companies), references to related companies, and a list of sources. It will summarize in fairly concise form information available from a variety of sources, both contemporary and modern.

The dictionary is intended to be a reference guide to such basic information as I have described. It is also, taken as a whole, an in-depth study of a group of related trades in a particular city over a period of approximately one hundred years. Thus cross references are essential not only for quick consultation, but also to show relationships between companies and individuals. The biographical information included has been very brief, but I have, for example, mentioned marriages within the trades such as Graeme Mercer Adam's first marriage to a daughter of John Gibson, of the firm of Lovell & Gibson; or that of David Smith, of Rolph, Smith & Co., lithographers, to a member of the Taylor family, papermakers in the Don Valley.

One hundred years is a relatively short time in the history of printing, but the changes in Toronto between 1798 and 1900 are very great: from the hand press to the typesetting machine; from Waters and Simons, King's Printers for Upper Canada in 1798, to an industry employing between 2,500 and 3,000 people a hundred years later. On the basis of the data I have compiled, I hope to be able to say something about the evolution of these trades, their size and complexity, the employer-employee relationship, and the background and practical experience of the individuals. The study is intended to provide a social history of the trades as well as a resource for bibliographical study. Thus

in the career of John J. Palmer, we can see a growing Americanization in the printing industry late in the century. Born in Toronto, Palmer went to California as an agent for Miller & Richard, the British typefounders whose Toronto office his father managed. In California he became a partner in Palmer & Rey, a company which was to merge with a number of others in the 1890s to form American Type Founders Co. About 1895 Palmer returned to Toronto, where he opened a printing machine depot. After a few years, this business merged with the recently formed Toronto Type Foundry Co., and Palmer became president of the latter company. The Toronto Type Foundry distributed American Type Founders' type exclusively and in the 1890s was offering bonuses to printers who would convert to point-sized type. It became the principal supply house in Toronto, surpassing Miller & Richard, Palmer's former employers.

What names to include in the dictionary has presented some problems. I have taken printing – any form of printing whose purpose was the communication of information – to be pivotal. Because Toronto quickly became a major commercial centre, much of the printing being done – and some of the most interesting and imaginative, though ephemeral printing – was commercial: letterheads, bill heads, advertising dodgers, and so on. Legal printing was also important in a city that was a capital and the seat of the provincial courts. All the other trades which have been included in the dictionary either supply or derive from the printing trades: the manufacture and distribution of paper, type, and presses on the one hand and the binding, publishing, and sale of books, newspapers, and stationery on the other. I have generally limited inclusion of individuals to those in business for themselves, either under their own names or as partners, managers, or proprietors of firms. The employer-employee relationship is not so clear cut, however, in the early part of the century. Thus newspapers frequently carried the name of the printer, even though he might in some sense be considered the employee of the proprietor. The imprints of the Methodist Book Room (or *Christian Guardian* office) also carried the printer's name until the 1850s, when the practice seems to have been discontinued. It is evident from contemporary advertisements that the printer at the *Christian Guardian* office also did job printing on his own. Any printer whose name appears on his work in this way has been given a separate entry in the dictionary.

What are the sources for this information? They are many and varied: directories, local histories, trade journals, legal registrations, biographical dictionaries, autobiographies and memoirs, company histories, and modern articles and monographs on particular aspects of the trades. In this paper I would like to comment on several contemporary or near-contemporary sources that I found particularly useful.

Directories

The first directory for the Toronto area was published in 1833 by Thomas Dalton, founder of the *Patriot* newspaper; with W.J. Coates he published a second directory in 1837.¹ Others appeared at irregular intervals until by the late 1860s, directories for the city of Toronto and suburbs were being published annually. For the period studied, there are also the *Canada Directories*, published by John Lovell from 1851 on, and later in the century a number of province-wide directories published by Lovell, Might, and others.² Generally I have found the local (Toronto) directories to be the most informative, but the *Canada Directories* were useful for years when there were no Toronto directories.

Every researcher who has used directories has the same complaints about them: mistakes, inconsistencies, gaps, etc. I have found all these problems in the Toronto directories, but I would also like to say something in their defense. They are, of course, invaluable sources of contemporary information, the only record for many of the names in my dictionary. The alphabetical listings provide the name (including the names of partners in partnerships), type of business, and address of individuals and firms currently in business. The classified sections, which for Toronto began with the 1856 directory, provide briefer information by types of business: printers, lithographers, engravers, bookbinders, booksellers, etc., and they are often useful in clarifying which individuals were in business for themselves and not simply employees. The advertisements – many, alas, missing from surviving copies – provide much additional information about a company's activities, actual or intended. They are also marvellous examples of typographic art. The street listings are a useful check on addresses, and they can provide a picture of the concentration of a particular trade in certain areas of the city. It is also apparent from the directories that commercial buildings containing more than one business appeared in Toronto from a fairly early date. This fact, combined with the tendency of like businesses to locate close together, should make us wary of concluding that because two businesses share a street address they are necessarily connected. In 1856 the Wellington Buildings at 57 King Street East contained, among other businesses: Henry Rowsell, bookseller, stationer, and printer; the *Old Countryman* newspaper office; and the Wesleyan Book Room.³ (It is interesting to picture the printers of Bishop Strachan and Egerton Ryerson in such close proximity.) To take another example from approximately thirty years later: in 1889 the Commercial Buildings at 65-67 Yonge Street had thirty-one tenants, of whom three are of interest to this study: Wm. E. Caiger, publisher; W.H. Billing, music dealer; and P.J. Cushman, agent for D. Appleton & Co., of New York.⁴

The directories are also useful because they could not anticipate the future,

could not know who was *going to be* important. Thus they can correct the more biased information found in memoirs and company histories. According to some accounts, Alexander Belford, of Belford Brothers (later Belford, Clarke & Co., Chicago, etc.), was a child prodigy in the publishing business. In the obituary which appeared in *Publishers' Weekly* in 1906 we read, 'There was little time for schooling, because when not quite twelve years of age Belford ... was managing the business of the Toronto *Evening Telegraph*....'⁵ These and other anecdotes in his obituary come, I suspect, from his own reminiscences to his friends. From what we know of John Ross Robertson, it is difficult to imagine him allowing anyone else – let alone a twelve-year-old – manage his business. In any case, the 1870 directory, published when Belford was sixteen, lists him as a 'clerk' in the *Telegraph* office,⁶ not quite the same thing as its business manager.

Floyd Chalmers' fine biography of J.B. Maclean, *A Gentleman of the Press* (1969), describes the launching of Maclean's first journal, the *Canadian Grocer*, in 1887 and mentions that 'Blackett Robinson, the local printer engaged to produce the publication, put in \$200....'⁷ Christopher Blackett Robinson (1837-1923) was considerably more than a 'local printer'. In 1871 he had founded the *Canada Presbyterian*, a widely read weekly newspaper. He was also the publisher of the *Canada Educational Monthly*; an influential literary journal, *The Week*; several local histories including a two-volume work on York County; and a number of weekly papers for the Presbyterian Church. Between 1879 and 1883 he had been printer to the Ontario Legislature. In the 1888 Toronto directory, he appears as president of Maclean's first company, the Grocer Publishing Co.,⁸ no doubt a figurehead position, but one that suggests that Maclean recognized his importance at the time.

Local Histories

I have included under this heading the many books and pamphlets on Toronto of an historical or descriptive character. An early example is *The City of Toronto Poll Book*, published by Lesslie Brothers in 1841 to demonstrate how people had voted in the recent election for the first parliament of the Province of Canada. Because the voters are arranged by occupation, it provides lists of booksellers, stationers, and printers active in 1841, a year for which there is no directory. Later publications include guide books (particularly for occasions when the Upper Canada Provincial Exhibition was held in the city), historical works such as Scadding's *Toronto of Old* (1873), special numbers of newspapers, and from the 1870s on, an increasing number of descriptive works with such titles as *Business Sketches of Toronto*, *Toronto: Past and Present*, and *Illustrated Toronto*. Many of these books appear to have been published by subscription; that is, companies and individuals paid to be included. Enterprises are described in the most glowing terms, even those that one

knows, with the benefit of hindsight, are soon to go bankrupt. The selection frequently seems erratic; major companies may be excluded, while more minor companies are described at length. Few of these books are indexed, and it is time-consuming to search through them, but nearly every title examined contained something of interest to this study. All such references have been included in the dictionary regardless of how directly useful they were. Paradoxically, it is easier to search these sources for a comprehensive work like mine, than for a single company or individual; and I hope to provide the groundwork for a more detailed study of some of these businesses in the future.

Many of the references proved to be very useful. The description of a company might include a picture of the building, its size and layout, the number of employees, the type of work being done, and even biographical information about the proprietor. One such description not only explained a puzzling name but suggested a facet of newspaper publishing in Canada of which I had been unaware. Mulvany's *Toronto: Past and Present* (1884) is chiefly notable for its strong pro-Liberal bias and for a sense of humour that delights in such images as that of a short-lived newspaper joining 'the great journalistic majority, who sing in other worlds the hymn

Brief life was there our portion!⁹

More useful to the researcher is the account of the Auxiliary Publishing Co. This name had puzzled me – 'auxiliary' to what? – until I read that they were the pioneers in Canada, of auxiliary printed papers.... The Company print the general literary matter for a number of country papers, supplying each publisher with his paper, and sending him his whole edition already half printed.... The papers printed by the Company include some of the soundest and most enterprising journals in the Dominion.¹⁰

Would it ever be possible to find two such papers and compare them? Unfortunately, no titles are given.

Trade Journals

I would like to describe here two trade journals that I have used extensively. Both began publication late in the nineteenth century, but so useful did they prove to be that I can only wish they had been started earlier. *Books and Notions* (later called *Bookseller and Stationer*) was founded by John J. Dyas in August 1884; in 1888 it was acquired by J.B. Maclean. It went through a number of changes in the twentieth century and now only survives as a monthly called *Stationery and Office Products*. *Canadian Printer and Publisher* was founded by Maclean in May 1892 and is still being published by Maclean-Hunter under that title, though it is now devoted almost exclusively to technical news for the printing trades.

Both these journals were based in Toronto and are, I suspect, most useful for Toronto news, but they did try to be national in coverage and carried pages devoted to Montreal, the Maritimes, and the West. They frequently provide more current or precise information than the directories: for example, the formation of the partnership of Imrie & Graham, announced in the January 1885 issue of *Books and Notions*,¹¹ but not appearing in the directories until the next year; or a move to a new location, such as that of John P. McKenna, bookseller and stationer, who in *Books and Notions* for October 1885 was reported to have moved 'next door' from 78 to 80 Yonge Street,¹² confirming that the differing addresses given in the 1885 and 1886 directories were correct. Both journals carried obituaries in the trades and feature articles on companies and individuals, with portraits and illustrations. Editorials might also include news about particular companies. In 1894 Alexander Buntin, Jr., gained control of Buntin, Reid & Co., paper dealers, and introduced a stricter policy on credit which precipitated a number of bankruptcies in the printing industry. These are described in detail in a series of moralizing editorials in the *Canadian Printer and Publisher* entitled 'In Darkest Toronto'. *Books and Notions* also reported the books and music registered for copyright during the previous months. A typical entry from November 1888 reads:

'Black Blood.' By Geo. Manville Fenn. Wm. Bryce, Toronto, 7th September, 1888.¹³

Later this periodical carried lists of the best-selling books in the major cities across Canada each month. Once again the advertisements carried by both journals are useful sources of information for individual companies.

These trade journals also provide a contemporary perspective on the book trades: how they functioned, how they related to one another, what was considered important at the time; not always information that I could use directly, but helpful in interpreting information from other sources. For example, the many small stationery businesses caused some concern. Frequently they were also fancy-goods stores – not to mention drug, grocery, or confectionery stores – and one suspects that the bookselling and stationery aspects of the business were minor indeed. However, *Books and Notions* called itself the 'organ of the book, stationery & fancy goods trade', and it is evident from reading this journal that in the nineteenth century these trades were considered properly to belong together.

Partnership Registrations

In December 1869 Ontario passed the Registration of Co-Partnerships Act (33 Vic., cap. 20) requiring 'persons associated as partners for trading purposes' to register the partnership in writing with the registrar of the county in which the business was located. They were also to register any change in the membership of the partnership or in its name. The registrar was required to enter

these declarations in a book kept for the purpose. These copybooks – those that have survived – are now in the Ontario Archives, and they are a useful source for identifying and dating partnerships in the book trades in Ontario from 1870 on. The declarations follow a formula set out in the Act and include the full names of the partners, the nature of the business, and the exact date the partnership was formed. For example, the firm of Willing & Williamson, booksellers and stationers, which took over the retail business of Adam, Stevenson & Co., was known from other sources to have been in business early in 1872. It is listed in the Toronto directory for 1872 / 73, and I had seen a catalogue issued by the firm which was dated January 1872. However, in a statement registered on 22 January 1872 at 1:45 o'clock, Willing and Williamson declared that they had been in business together since 1 August 1871.¹⁴

Some partnership registrations do not now exist, either because they have been lost or because they were never made, and registrations of dissolutions appear to be rare. George Maclean Rose, however, made no fewer than eight registrations of Hunter, Rose & Co., precisely dating the changes in the makeup of this firm until its dissolution as a partnership when the company was incorporated in 1895.

Imprints

One purpose of the dictionary is to aid the bibliographer in identifying and dating Toronto names which may appear in imprints and colophons or on binders' and booksellers' tickets. The study of the imprints themselves has provided me with much valuable information; but to attempt to examine all Toronto imprints to 1900 would be an enormous task, and there would remain the problem of citing them concisely in a work of this nature. I have, however, listed all Toronto (York) imprints in Tremaine (some dozen items printed by Waters and Simons) and in the Toronto Public Library's *Bibliography of Canadiana* by number under their printers and publishers. These bibliographies cover the period when other sources are weakest, and the TPL bibliography is, of course, particularly rich in Toronto imprints. It has supplied dates, addresses, and even names not found in other sources. I am deeply grateful to its compilers for the care and detail which went into individual entries and for the full transcription of imprints, including addresses, which has enabled me to compile this information without looking at every item. I hope that my dictionary may in its turn assist bibliographers of the future.

Notes

1. *York Commercial Directory, Street Guide, and Register, 1833-4*, compiled and arranged by George Walton (York: Thomas Dalton, 1833); *The City of Toronto and the Home District Commercial Directory and Register with Almanack and Calendar for 1837*, by George Walton (Toronto: T. Dalton and W.J. Coates).
2. For details of all these directories see Dorothy E. Ryder, *Checklist of Canadian*

- Directories, 1790-1950* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1979).
3. *Brown's Toronto General Directory. 1856* (Toronto: Printed and published for W.R. Brown by Maclear & Co.), p. 42.
 4. *The Toronto City Directory for 1889* (Toronto: R.L. Polk & Co.), p. 311.
 5. J.B.R., 'Alexander Belford – In Memoriam,' *Publishers' Weekly*, 20 October 1906, p. 1098.
 6. Robertson & Cook's *Toronto City Directory for 1870*, W.H. Irwin, compiler (Toronto: Daily Telegraph Printing House, 1870), p. 9.
 7. Floyd S. Chalmers, *A Gentleman of the Press* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1969), p. 29.
 8. *The Toronto City Directory for 1888* (Toronto: R.L. Polk & Co., 1888), p. 583.
 9. C. Pelham Mulvany, *Toronto: Past and Present. A Handbook of the City* (Toronto: W.E. Caiger, 1884), p. 194.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 288. Since writing this paper, I have discovered that this term was also in use in the United States; John Luther Ringwalt's *American Encyclopaedia of Printing* (Philadelphia: Menamin & Ringwalt, 1871) contains an article on 'auxiliary printing' and describes the activities of several American firms which parallel those of the Toronto company.
 11. *Books and Notions* 1 (January 1885): 98.
 12. *B&N* 2 (October 1885): 43.
 13. *B&N* 5 (November 1888): 73.
 14. PAO, R.G. 55, 485, Willing & Williamson, 22 January 1872.