
In 1962, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the University of London’s Diploma of Librarianship, Katherine Freer compiled *Vancouver: A Bibliography*. Anxious to contribute usefully to the celebration of the city’s centenary in 1986, the Vancouver Historical Society decided that its centennial project should be an expansion and updating of the Freer bibliography. These four stout volumes are the result.

It was to be expected that the new bibliography would be substantially larger than the earlier study, but it is doubtful if anyone foresaw the size to which it would grow. It lists the surprising total of 15,090 titles, as compared with the 992 included in the Freer study. The latter was based on the holdings of the Special Collections Division of the Library of the University of British Columbia and of the Vancouver Public Library. In compiling the new version the holdings of other major collections in British Columbia were examined, notably those of the Legislative Library and the Provincial Archives in Victoria. In addition, the search extended to the National Library and the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa. All the 15,000 items were seen by the compilers, a precaution (in the words of the preface) ‘designed to prevent the appearance of annoying and misleading phantom entries and to minimize errors in the bibliographic descriptions.’

Comprehensiveness was the objective, and this involved problems of arrangement and access. Titles in many different formats were to be included, and the bibliography is divided into fifteen parts or sections, each devoted to a specific format. The first two, the catalogues of books and pamphlets, list over 9,000 items and fill the first of the four volumes. Sections listing theses, articles, serials, maps, manuscripts, and a variety of other formats, including microforms, sound recordings, and machine-readable data, follow in volume 2. This arrangement could have made ready access difficult, but name, title, subject, and series indexes, running in all to nearly 800 closely printed pages and filling volumes 3 and 4, greatly facilitate reference. Three area maps are included in all four volumes. Whenever possible, a minimum of three locations is given for each item.

The Society does not regard the bibliography as definitive; it is already being reviewed with corrections and additions in mind. To ensure publication in 1986, compilation could not be continued after June 1985, and the centennial itself and Expo 86 have since occasioned the publication of many new titles. In such a formidable mass of details errors both of commission and omission were bound to occur, but they are remarkably few. Botanists will note the absence of Henry’s *Flora of Southern British Columbia* and the supplement to it by J.W. Eastham. Robert Turner’s *Pacific Princesses* is listed, but Ruth Greene’s *Personality Ships of British Columbia*, which deals with many of the same vessels, has been overlooked. The many hundreds of serials listed do not include the *Journal* of the Vancouver Aquarium, and such items as its special publication on ‘Vancouver’s Old Streams,’ an interesting subject not, to my knowledge, dealt with elsewhere. But these examples do little more than indicate that this reviewer examined the bibliography with some
care. They are very small blemishes on a very substantial achievement.

A cautionary word to those preparing a revised edition: scattered through the thousands of titles there are no doubt some that could be deleted without any great loss. But this is a temptation that should be strongly resisted. Comprehensiveness is one of the great strengths of this bibliography. A good many of the minor items may well be the only copies now in existence, and even such an item as the constitution and by-laws of a long forgotten society may prove to be grist for the mill of a biographer or social historian.

Brief notes in a good many entries indicate the character of the item, if this is not obvious, and explain its relevance to Vancouver, if this is not clear. In any revision of the bibliography it would be helpful if such notes could be added to many additional entries. Fiction should always be identified as such. The entry for *The Black Robe*, by Guy Morton, includes the note, ‘Novel set in Vancouver,’ but that for *The Devil’s Butter*, by Simma Holt, merely states that it ‘Includes Vancouver references.’ To ascertain whether or not the book is a novel, one must consult the subject index, where all fiction is listed alphabetically by title. This note – ‘Includes Vancouver references’ – is used very frequently, and its vagueness can be misleading. It is applied equally to titles having little to do with Vancouver (only a single page in Malcolm Lowry’s celebrated novel *Under the Volcano* refers to Vancouver), and to such a book as Gerald Rushton’s *Echoes of the Whistle*, a history of the Union Steamship Company, whose operations centred on the port of Vancouver during the whole of the company’s seventy-year existence. And there are occasional inaccuracies. The Vancouver references in George Bowering’s novel *Burning Water* are to Captain Vancouver and his voyage, not to the city.

As the title-page indicates, the bibliography was compiled by Linda Hale, with the exception of the entries for the 550 maps, which were expertly catalogued by Frances Woodward, of the Special Collections Division of the ubc Library. But many others, including many volunteers, helped the project along its way. In her acknowledgements Miss Hale thanks by name more than fifty individuals for their contributions to the project. All advanced the objective in view, which was certainly attained and is well expressed in the last lines of the preface: ‘With broad selection, and varied and easy access, this bibliography is intended to attract and serve all, the professional, the amateur, the scholarly and the merely curious.’

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That a bibliography of 1,989 items should be considered a ‘preliminary’ one indicates the strange state of Canadian criticism vis-à-vis one of our few world-famous authors. Lucy Maud Montgomery began publishing in 1890; her best-selling *Anne of*