
Canadian scholars and researchers are now uncovering buried nuggets in the treasure trove of Canadian library history. This latest find brings back into print a *Report on Canadian Libraries* by Charles F. McCombs of the New York Public Library made in 1941 for the Rockefeller Foundation, New York. The *Report* was written in order to discover if American aid could enable Canadian libraries to develop more effective partnerships with other scholarly institutions outside of Canada and what this might cost the Foundation. The Foundation’s mission was ‘to confine ourselves to international exchange through librarianship’ and during the period 1939-1945 the Foundation was largely cut off from Europe. It turned to projects in North and South America.

The 81-page original text of McCombs’ *Report* has been reproduced photographically from its typescript edition. A commentary precedes it in the form of a 52-page essay by William Buxton, Professor of Communication Studies at Concordia University, Montreal, and Charles Acland, Assistant Professor in the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies, Faculty of General Studies, University of Calgary. These scholars consider the *Report* as a link in the history of Canadian libraries between the earlier Carnegie Corporation study of 1929 by Black, Locke, and Riddington published by the Ryerson Press, Toronto, and ALA, Chicago, in 1933, and the later Massey Commission *Report* of 1951 which dealt in part with the establishment of the National Library of Canada.

How did the McCombs *Report* of 1941 play its role in the politics of American philanthropy and Canadian libraries? Buxton and Acland state that their essay will ‘provide a perspective on the origins and content of the *Report* along with its ultimate impact and significance.’ The reason for the *Report* was quite straightforward. The Rockefeller Foundation wished to stimulate Canadian action in international humanistic cultural exchanges with the United States and other countries. Between 1927 and 1934 the Foundation had become interested in the role of microfilm which had been used to capture and bring to the USA more than 2 million pages of manuscripts and printed books from the British Museum and other foreign institutions. Should the same be done by Canada? In order to have a report on this matter the Foundation secured the service for six months of Charles McCombs, the superintendent of the New York Public Library’s Main Reading Room. Although McCombs had not much previous experience with Canada, he spoke French and in 1935 had prepared an exhibition at the NYPL for the 400th anniversary of Jacques Cartier.
The Foundation, as well as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, were constantly receiving requests for financial assistance from Canadian libraries for a wide range of projects. What better solution for them both than a study that would clear the way for rationalizing their financial support to Canadian libraries. Both Foundations were aware of the somewhat torturous history of attempts since 1900 by Canadian librarians to establish a national library association. The 1929 Carnegie study in its concluding chapter was largely devoted to this matter. Other Canadian demands to the Foundations in 1941 included funds for regional studies in various provinces, assistance to library extension services, and financial assistance for purchasing academic and scholarly book collections in libraries.

John Marshall, the assistant director of the Rockefeller Foundation Humanities Division, was particularly keen on encouraging the involvement of Canadian library services in international contacts. The Foundation had funded the ALA International Relations Office in Chicago in 1942, and its influence in library matters in Canada was not insignificant. Marshall, who personally made five visits to Canada in 1941-1942, was able to put pressure on the Canadian Library Council to have Léo Paul Desrosiers replace Hélène Grenier as a member of the Council from Québec. His report is also being edited by Buxton and Acland for publication.

Charles McCombs begins his Report: 'During the early summer and autumn I spent approximately two months visiting Canadian libraries from Halifax to Victoria.' The written details in 81 pages and four Appendices provide a mid-20th Century Domesday Record of Canadian libraries and library leaders. Very few libraries of consequence were omitted, and many interesting, personal snapshots were included. Winifred Snider of Mount Allison University Library appealed to McCombs for the appointment of a field worker for libraries in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and Charles Sanderson of Toronto wanted funding to bring into Canada more materials from the United States and abroad.

Dozens of memorable observations on the state of libraries may be found. At McGill University, where library funding had been seriously cut, salaries were shockingly low, and the head cataloguer (probably with the highest staff salary) received $1,560.00. The whole picture that emerges must have made the staff of the Foundation smile. How could such conditions, although better than those reported in the Carnegie study of 1929, really be helped by philanthropic giving from the USA? In the end, the two Foundations joined forces to provide seed money for national library endeavours that Canada promised to support after the Foundation money was used. Over the years 1944-1948, the Carnegie Corporation made five annual payments to the Canadian Library Council totalling $20,000. This paid for the hiring of Elizabeth Morton and for an office in Ottawa. Rockefeller provided $17,500 for microfilming and field visits. The Canadian Library Association finally acquired its microfilm camera in
February 1947 and published a list of the microfilmed Canadian newspapers in 1948. By 1955 approximately 100 newspaper titles had been filmed. Prime Minister King received a leather box containing a microfilm copy of the full run of the Colonial Advocate.

As one reads the McCombs Report in 1999 one recognizes the distance that has been travelled by Canadian libraries in the areas of international relations, library technology, and national bibliographic projects. Buxton, Acland and McCombs help us to appreciate the role that the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations played in Canadian library development in the 1940s, and the way they went about it. I am sure that they received a very good return on their investment.

HARRY CAMPBELL
Brampton, Ontario


When the Act to found the British Museum was given Royal Assent on 7 June 1753 it consisted of the large collections of books, manuscripts, drawings, antiquities, and natural history specimens belonging to Sir Hans Sloane, for which £20,000 was paid. The Trustees also acquired, for £10,000, the Harleian Manuscripts and were able to add the Cottonian Manuscripts, which had been a public collection since 1700. By 1973, when the British Library was separated from the Museum, it had become an internationally renowned research resource, affectionately known to thousands of scholars as ‘the B.M.’ Although many books have been written about the B.M. and the B.L. (Harris gives six pages of secondary sources), this is the first comprehensive history to be based on archival sources. In many ways its author, P.R. Harris, typifies the men and women about whom he writes. He served on the staff from 1947 to 1986 and this long tenure seems often to have been a norm: A.W. Pollard served 41 ½ years and remarked in his memoir that he couldn’t ‘imagine any other means of living out of which I should have got so much interest and pleasure;’ Richard Garnett put in 48 years; and the great Panizzi, starting late, served for 35 years. Another characteristic of long-term B.L. employees, also exemplified by Harris, is that they never really seem to retire, and carry on their research and publication much as they always did.

This large book is jammed with facts; delicious nuggets of information previously unrecorded about books and manuscripts and collectors and