
For those even moderately familiar with the work of Bruce Peel, wonderful intellectual promise resides in the title *Peel’s Bibliography of the Canadian Prairies to 1953*. Ernie Ingles and Merrill Distad, along with Linda Distad and an excellent team of contributors, editorial and research assistants, have produced a bibliography that will both inform research and inspire new scholarship in numerous aspects of Western Canadian studies. Bruce Braden Peel would surely have been delighted by this significant expansion to his earlier editions – including its new availability on-line at the “Peel’s Prairie Provinces” web site. The 7,429 numbered entries in this edition represent a 60% increase over the second edition. The collaboration involved in achieving this significant increase is evident from the title-page, which lists eight bibliographers of varying backgrounds, including Peel himself. It is good to see Tom Williams and Richard Spafford’s names in such a prominent place – the knowledge of these antiquarian booksellers, from Calgary and Regina respectively, significantly enhanced the contents of this bibliography, to judge from the informative and engaging Introduction by Ingles and Distad. This Introduction includes information about exclusions, subject and geographic boundaries, and other relevant matters, as well as a clear justification for the title of this new edition.

A sign of excellence in a bibliography relates to the ability of a wretchedly lazy (or desperately time-stressed) user to dive in and use it successfully while ignoring completely all of the carefully prepared explanatory materials. This bibliography, meticulously indexed and with numerical cross-references to the 1973 second edition of Peel, offers six indices which complement the primary arrangement and provide access points to specific works with varying degrees of success.
For anyone familiar with prairie history, it takes only a moment to discern that the primary arrangement is chronological by subject content. The elegant running heads throughout this volume offer in this section the year concerned, 1670 being the first. The earliest entries treat the Hudson’s Bay Company, Rupert’s Land in the seventeenth century, explorations of Henry Kelsey and Pierre Esprit Radisson, language books relating to First Nations, and so many other examples of the richness that is prairie history. This chronological arrangement follows that set by Peel in the earlier editions; however, considerable scholarly work by Ingles, Distad, and their collaborators has resulted in numerous items being moved due to more “accurate assessments” of the periods to which they refer.

The preliminary materials are highly informative. Bibliographers and book historians may delight in the inclusion of all of the forewords and prefaces from the first two editions and the supplement. A biography of Peel follows these items and includes the cheering fact (to this adoptive prairie reviewer) that his “last resting place [is] on a flat stretch of open ground … chosen for its close resemblance to the prairies he loved and did so much to celebrate.” The necessary sample entry appears on the verso of the illustrated section-title-page and is followed by a most helpful “note to the reader” concerning the primary arrangement. Many entries include short descriptive or bibliographical annotations or cross-references to other entries by number. All of these annotations are helpful, as are the English translations of all non-English titles, although the translated titles do not appear in the title index.

In addition to the primary arrangement, there are six indices: subject, title, author (including biographical notes), sources cited in biographical notes (a rich resource in itself), language, and pseudonyms. The depth of indexing, in general, is enormously helpful for users. For example, according to the Introduction, there are “1,103 additional titles mentioned in the annotations” and all of these appear in the title index. The inclusion of biographical notes within the author index is a most helpful feature for lay searchers, as well as experienced scholars of the prairies. Scanning some of the lengthiest entries in the subject index permits a newcomer to prairie studies an almost immediate insight into what defined and continues to define prairie development and society: farms and farmers; frontier and pioneer life; immigration and emigration; languages; railroads; and the Riel Rebellion to name a selection. The less dense subject entries pique interest also: “fraud” and “water power” to name but two. The
subject index itself concludes with a reproduced photograph from the Glenbow Archives of militia men asleep in the trenches in 1885.

The compilers and publisher foster here an awareness and delight in the prairies (geographically and historically) through their thoughtful use of images, ranging from the glorious spacious sunset on the cover to the numerous archival images inside. This bibliography is thus more of a feast for the eyes than is usual for this genre of research tool. A sound illustration selection policy has been followed here, and the well-produced black-and-white images cover an appropriately diverse range of prairie themes from First Nations to Nellie McClung, and from buffalo bones to Hudson Bay posts. A feature colour section in the centre of the volume includes eight plates illustrating several of the series of immigration booklets published by the Department of the Interior (and all listed under Peel 2926). Interestingly, most of the images of the outdoors are placed, without borders, at the foot of the page with only a section title in the upper part of the page. Therefore the sky appears always infinite – how fitting for a volume concerned with the prairies. This is an indication of the great care and deliberation that attended the production of this volume.

It seems positively curmudgeonly to raise more than tiny quibbles about this wonderful book, but the subject index lets users down, and that is such a great shame. The index is greatly expanded, in relative terms, from that appearing in earlier editions, and thus to be welcomed. My difficulties stem, in part, from puzzlement about how this index was constructed – as a report generated from the database or manually? For example, the entry for “Churches” appears after the entry for “Churchill.” To add to the user’s confusion, immediately after the term “Churches” a “see also” reference is followed by a listing of 18 terms and no entry numbers at all. Replacing “see also” with “see” might solve that difficulty, but would not, in fact, be accurate as “churches” is indeed a term, but only at the second level and used after geographic names. The researcher interested in items relating to prairie churches has, in essence, to read the entire index which begins with “Aberdeen, Saskatchewan” and ends with “Zelma, Saskatchewan” (with no “churches” subheading for either, as it happens). A similar example concerns “libraries.” This use of pre-coordinate indexing, without full cross-referencing, is a deterrent to efficient and comprehensive access to the entries, especially as the favouring of geographic location as the primary entry point for numerous subjects is nowhere explained to the user. However, “education” is followed by the rather vague injunction (in terms of
utility for searchers) “see under various place names.” To add to the confusion, “education” is also a subsidiary index term under non-geographic headings such as “Indians of North America” but this is not mentioned. Other types of unevenness include “see also” references going only one way, such as from “North-West Mounted Police” to “Police departments” but not vice versa. I empathize with the [di]stresses of proof-reading indexes, but it would seem that more proofing of this subject index would have caught some of these inconsistencies.

On-line editions of print bibliographies are not expected merely to mimic the print edition. The database accessible as a component of “Peel’s Prairie Provinces” (PPP) web site provides, not surprisingly, considerable additions, in terms of complex searching as well as useful options for sorting search results. Both basic and advanced searching are supported, although keyword searches do not include automatic truncation. However, the retrieval of hyphenated terms, when the user omits hyphens, is certainly user-friendly and particularly relevant for full-text searching of late nineteenth-century items. Keyword searches of the on-line bibliography, moreover, supplement items retrieved by subject searches. For example, the print and on-line bibliographies provide subject access to 43 items under “textbooks,” but an on-line keyword search adds items, almost certainly intended as textbooks, published by the School Aids and Text Book Publishing Company in Regina and Toronto.

The inclusion in the database of a good selection of items in full text greatly expands the access to Peel materials (with an attendant expansion of frustration due to “false drops,” but an even greater expansion of serendipitous finds). Due to this full-text availability, the PPP database complements Early Canadiana Online (ECO), both in the variety of materials and in their chronological spread. Searching for a typical prairie topic (wind erosion) in ECO produces no hits, but searching in PPP results in nine full-text items ranging from the perhaps obvious publication from the University of Saskatchewan’s College of Agriculture in 1944, Soil Survey of Southern Saskatchewan … to the less obvious The Tourist’s Northwest published by McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart in 1916. As with ECO, the results are displayed with standard bibliographical information followed by direct links to the facsimile images of the pages on which the searched-for term or phrase appears. Unlike ECO, the terms or phrases are highlighted—a very welcome feature. Due to this full-text access, the PPP database complements the print bibliography in very useful ways for researchers.
Wind erosion is not an index term in the volume and, while “soil conservation” is, it does not provide leads to all materials that might be of interest to an environmental historian, nor does it provide a cross-reference to another pertinent index term “droughts.”

That Peel contains references to intriguing illustrated items was attested by the very interesting paper presented by Bob Cole of the University of Alberta at the BSC conference in 2003. A small caveat in the praise of the on-line tool is that it does not permit searches for illustrated items. Terms such as “illus.,” “plan,” “port.” and “map” might be indexed and this, when coupled with the advanced search Boolean feature, would greatly expand the potential uses of this lovely site. One of the pleasures of an on-line tool, especially one created with such attention to detail in the original database (this one used ProCite®), is that additional search features may be added as time and funds for programming allow. In this instance, information about all forms of illustration are contained in one of the collation fields in the ProCite® database, thus making it feasible to add such a desired search feature eventually.

One may already search the PPP database by date of publication, and this is a particularly helpful addition to the access points offered in the print tool. However, historians of the book long also for the ability to search on those other elements of the imprint: place of publication and publisher name, especially since neither publishing nor bookselling are indexed terms. Nor, rather oddly, is “libraries.” Items about libraries (or churches!) would be located easily enough on-line if the subject search feature supported string searches anywhere within a pre-coordinate term. However, as it is, searching for either “churches” or “libraries” in the subject field produces zero hits and the unwary user might not realize that the only way to retrieve relevant items (along with numerous “false drops”) is to use the keyword search feature. Perhaps Ingles and Distad will consider these formal requests for some changes to the search and retrieval design?

My special interest in any edition of “Peel” stems both from a decade of reference work in a prairie public library and an involvement in the project for a History of the Book in Canada / L’histoire du livre et de l’imprimé au Canada. Both activities have involved extensive use of “Peel.” It is a poignant experience reviewing a scholarly reference tool relating to the Canadian prairies at a time when a significant collection of prairie materials, and the services attending them, are slated for closure. Some of the items listed in this impeccably researched and produced bibliography will be less available to prairie
 historians, geographers, genealogists, and so many others, with the closure of the renowned Prairie History Room of the Regina Public Library. It is all the more important, therefore, that this bibliography be available on numerous library shelves as testament to the rich history of publications from and about this diverse, beautiful, historically-rich, and still under-researched region of Canada.

*Peel's Bibliography of the Canadian Prairies to 1953* is a very fine work of scholarship. The "[untaxable] psychic income" from providing rich bibliographical leads, accruing to Ernie Ingles, Merrill Distad and their team will, I trust, be as sweet to them as Bruce Peel noted nearly 30 years ago. "Not in Peel" is going to be an extremely challenging epithet to attach to prairie items now that Peel's own bibliographical scholarship has been enhanced by this excellent team for the benefit of current and future researchers.

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After six years on this book, Roy MacSkimming learned the day after he finished it that his publisher Macfarlane Walter & Ross was on the auction block. He acknowledges that Macfarlane Walter & Ross's fifteen years of success could not continue uninterrupted, given "the unforgiveably narrow margins in which Canadian publishing operates, coupled with its vulnerability when adverse conditions strike" (404). Unlike other crises in this "perilous trade" that he so expertly and passionately writes about, the book was rescued by McClelland and Stewart, Canada's most celebrated publisher of the twentieth century, itself having weathered near bankruptcy at least three times. MacSkimming's long-awaited first book about the English-language publishing industry from 1950 to 2003 records the great moments of the 1960s and 1970s and the ensuing decades of takeovers and closings, only to question whether the Canadian-owned sector that gave us the likes of Atwood, Davies, Laurence, Mistry, Mowat, Munro, and Ondaatje has reached a crossroads where it could dwindle into an "enfeebled regional cultural activity" (392).