Books for Improvement: The Canadian Pacific Foundation Library¹

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Probably no other commercial enterprise has been so closely identified with the idea of nationhood and national identity than the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). The vision of a great transcontinental railway to bind together the British colonies of Upper and Lower Canada with the British settlements on the Pacific coast in British Columbia, while opening up the undeveloped prairies, was among the founding myths upon which the Dominion of Canada was built. Those who conceived the railway, Sir John A. MacDonald, first Canadian Prime Minister; Donald Smith, businessman; Hugh Allen, banker and shipping magnate; and most of all Sir William Van Horne, Yankee entrepreneur and engineer; saw in this undertaking both a major commercial opportunity and a way to propagate the values of a free-trade liberal democracy across what would potentially be the world's second largest nation in area, with unbounded natural resources, and potential prosperity for all citizens, consistent with the political, economic, and social aims of the British Imperium.

In the event, the railway itself took over twenty years to construct and required much government direct and indirect assistance, but in June 1886, the first train from Montreal steamed into the Pacific terminus of Port Moody on the Burrard Inlet on whose shores the city of Vancouver was rising. Already the Company's business had begun to diversify into shipping (both transatlantic and transpacific), hotels, express and banking services, telecommunications, and land management, so that very few areas of Canadian national life remained untouched by its activities. At the height of its powers in 1945, the CPR employed almost 90,000 people, or more than one in 60 of

1 A version of this paper was presented to the Bibliographical Society of Canada Annual Conference in Hamilton, June 2004.

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all Canadians in employment. In terms of national infrastructure, the CPR operated in 1945 over 20,000 miles of rail track and 85,000 locomotives and rolling stock; it carried 17 million passengers and 54 million tons of freight; it owned \$40 million of shipping, \$97 million of hotels and property, and possessed total assets of \$1.7 billion, at 1945 values, about 10% of Canada's GDP.

With such a close identification with the foundation of the country and a necessarily dominant role in the Canadian labour market, as well as much crossover between railway executives and politicians of a dominant liberal and paternalistic outlook, the CPR developed a distinctive enlightened attitude towards its workforce. Conditions of employment and wage rates on the CPR were generous when compared to related industries, and worker loyalty was encouraged. A pioneering non-contributory pension scheme was opened as early as 1902 and the Company's health, care, and disablement-compensation schemes were famously generous. CPR staff was involved in corporate decision-making at all levels, and the apprentice scheme was innovative in its approach to education and skill development. The Company positively encouraged social involvement by staff in out-of-hours activities including sports leagues, self-improvement groups, and charity work. Ice hockey and bowling teams and choirs were supported and funded by the CPR in most Canadian cities, and in overseas locations as diverse as Antwerp and Yokohama.

The CPR as a Publisher

Given the range and diversity of its activities, the CPR had a major involvement in publishing from its inception.³ At first this was severely practical: mainly timetables and route books. Very quickly, however, the Company's output extended to elaborate guide books and souvenir volumes, often examples of the highest art in printing technology (e.g., *Game Fishes of Canada*, *Westward to the Far East*, and *Legends of the Saint Lawrence*⁴). Many of the publications were

3 E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude, 1983).

4 Canadian Pacific Railway, *The Game Fishes of Canada* ([Montreal]: Canadian Pacific Railway Company, 1928); Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, *Westward to the Far East: A Guide to the Principal Cities of China and Japan with a Note on Korea*, 4th ed. (Montreal: Canadian Pacific Railway, 1893); and Katherine Hale, and Chas. W. Simpson, illus., *Legends of the Saint Lawrence* (Montreal: Canadian Pacific Railway, [1933]).

intended to encourage immigration and settlement (e.g. *British Columbia*, various editions, and *Canada for Women*⁵). By the 1930s, the CPR published a significant range of publications, covering timetables, guides to cities and recreational activities, hotel manuals, children's storybooks, handbooks on fishing, hunting, and agriculture, as well as playing cards, postcards, and picture albums. The most elaborate and impressive of their publications were the large and beautifully produced volumes presented to passengers on the Round the World and Mediterranean cruises operated by the Company's liners during the 1930s (e.g., *Storied Coasts of the Mediterranean*, *Around the World Cruise*, and *The World is Round*⁶). Publications were distributed by the CPR News Department that operated bookstalls at all major stations and made books available on trains, ships, aircraft, and in CPR hotels.

The CPR also provided, for employee use, a range of publications outlining safety procedures, working operations, and rules for all areas of CPR operations. No bibliography of the printed publications of the CPR has ever been attempted but – including ephemera such as menus, posters, calendars, telegraph forms, waybills, as well as books and brochures – it must run to tens of thousands of items. The CPR archive at Montreal's Windsor Station preserves a large proportion of this print output and is, as yet, largely untouched by book historians and bibliographical researchers.

The Canadian Pacific Foundation Library

Amid this immense output of printed matter, the CPR Foundation Library occupies a unique position. Published exclusively for employee use, and reflecting the paternalistic and enlightened liberal attitude that had typified the Company's corporate governance since its

5 Canadian Pacific Railway, *British Columbia: Canada's Most Westerly Province: Its Position, Advantages, Resources and Climate. New Fields for Mining, Farming, Lumbering, Fruit Growing and Ranching Reached by the Canadian Pacific: A Handbook of Trustworthy Information* (n.p.: [Canadian Pacific Railway], 1905) (various editions), and Canadian Pacific Railway, *Canada for Women* (n.p.: [Canadian Pacific Railway], 1912).

6 Canadian Pacific Railway, *Storied Coasts of the Mediterranean: Seventh Season: Two Mediterranean Cruises* (n.p.: [Canadian Pacific Railway], 1930), Canadian Pacific Railway *Around the World Cruise* (Montreal: Canadian Pacific Railway, 1934), and Canadian Pacific Railway *The World is Round! Seventh Annual Round the World Cruise* (Montreal: Canadian Pacific Railway, 1929).

foundation, the books in this series were not utilitarian work manuals but were intended to encourage CPR workers to improve their education or general culture. This essay is a preliminary study of this interesting publishing venture that illuminates the use of books to promote worker solidarity and loyalty and to encourage habits of ambition and self-improvement. It also throws some light on Canadian and British publishing, particularly the text-book arena of the period, while displaying some early trends in text management that have since become more significant in modern publishing practice.

The idea for the Foundation Library arose from a quintessential CPR institution, the "Suggestions Bureau" that had been established to allow employees to submit for management consideration proposals or concepts to improve working life. Among these submissions, were "a considerable number [which] indicate a desire for the encouragement of study groups and discussion clubs with the object of self-improvement, not only for increased efficiency in railway work but also to promote community spirit through the System." Accordingly in 1936, "our Chairman and President appointed a committee (under the chairmanship of E. Moore, the CPR Insurance Commissioner) which ... recommended the selection of what might be called a Foundation Library of books bearing on factors on railway life, on speaking in public, on Canadian citizenship, on relations with the public and on such movements as tend to encourage community spirit."⁷ A study of archival correspondence reveals that the main sponsors of the venture were J.C. Bonar (who himself contributed to one of the titles) and the vice-president D.C. Coleman who freed up the major investment required (almost \$70,000) and dealt with the misgivings of other CPR officers.⁸

Ten titles were selected by the Committee "to meet what appears to be a definite desire on the part of employees." In the announcement of the series to staff the CPR made it clear that they saw the series as providing a real staff benefit: "By purchasing these books in large quantities and having them bound in economical yet serviceable and attractive red limp cloth, the Committee found it possible to obtain the set at less than half the retail price. Moreover, through the sympathetic

7 *An Ideal Canadian Pacific Staff Foundation Library* (brochure), RG.4 Vice-President (CPR System), Montreal, D.C. Coleman, file 15660, 1937-1946, Canadian Pacific Railway Archive, Montreal.

8 Letters from D.C. Coleman to J.C. Bonar, RG.4, file 15660, CPR Archives.

interest of the Chairman and President, authority has been received to offer this set at a still lower price, the Company absorbing the difference in price. Thus a real bargain in books is available to those on Canadian Pacific staffs – the price authorized for the whole set of ten volumes in carton being only \$2.00 payable *either outright, or, if desired, in four monthly instalments of fifty cents each*. The Company is making the concession in the belief that such a Foundation Library would have a definite educational value” (emphasis in original).⁹ The actual cost to the Company of the publications was \$4.50 per set, based on a print run of 14,000 copies.

A brochure explaining the aims of the Library and describing the content of each title was circulated to superintendents and department heads at the end of 1936 to solicit interest and enable employees to subscribe.¹⁰ Despite the brochure’s claims, the books were not rebound publishers’ editions but special printings to the Company’s order, and the subscription system was a means to estimate print runs. By the beginning of 1937, several thousand intentions to subscribe had been received which enabled the Committee to fix print orders. Although the idea was very popular generally with CPR staff, a study of the subscription orders preserved in the CPR Archives in Montreal shows that the take-up varied markedly geographically and (hardly surprisingly) by language background.¹¹ Hardly any were bought by the largely francophone staff of the massive Angus Shops in Montreal, although the Montreal Traffic Department absorbed 1000 sets for the city’s large Anglophone community and the Ogden Shops in Calgary 200 sets.¹²

Whatever the format of the original edition, the books were printed in a uniform Demy octavo size in stiff limp covers, covered with red cloth and with the titles gold-blocked on spine and front board. A specially designed bookplate was printed on the front endpaper, incorporating drawings of a locomotive and an ocean liner with the banner slogan “Books are the Foundation of Knowledge.” The iconic significance of the trees flanking the bookplate and the adoption of the Company crest with this slogan are very apparent (Fig. 1).

9 *An Ideal Canadian Pacific Staff Foundation Library* (brochure), RG.4, file 15660, CPR Archives.

10 *An Ideal Canadian Pacific Staff Foundation Library* (brochure).

11 “Staff Foundation Library” subscription lists, RG.4, file 15660, CPR Archives.

12 Angus Shops and Ogden Shops were the CPR’s locomotive, passenger, and freight car repair shops.

Figure 1: This specially designed bookplate was printed on the front endpaper of each book published in the CPR Foundation Library series.
(Reproduced from a private collection.)

The titles selected and their provenance throw an interesting light on what CPR management understood to be improving literature to promote business efficiency and community spirit. Four titles were aimed at self-improvement for junior managers with ambitions for advancement. These included Frank Kirkpatrick's *Speaking in Public*, a standard manual first published by the Ryerson Press in Toronto in 1932.¹³ For the Foundation Library edition, the author revised his text to refer to railway operation and added a bibliography and some specimen forms and speeches. *French Self-Taught*¹⁴ was an interesting

¹³ Frank Kirkpatrick, *Speaking in Public* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1932).

¹⁴ Franz Thimm, *French Self-Taught by the Natural Method with Phonetic Pronunciation* (Toronto: Musson Book Company, 1937).

inclusion for a company that was overwhelmingly anglophone, albeit headquartered in Montreal. This was a specially edited text by the England-based language tutor J. Laffitte, based on his best-selling phonetic teaching system with the terms and phrases that would suit CPR business. This version was apparently only available in the CPR edition, although the larger text from which it was derived was published by the Musson Book Company of Toronto. It is interesting to note that apparently no attempt was made to provide a corresponding English manual for francophone employees.

The other two titles in this category come from the business textbook stable of the English publisher, Sir Isaac Pitman and Company: *A Dictionary of Correct English* by M. Alderton Pink¹⁵ and *Correspondence and Salesmanship*.¹⁶ Although both were given Toronto as the primary place of publication, they were actually printed in Bath, England, at the Pitman Press. The dictionary is a straightforward reprint of a long-established backlist standard title that is really a usage and syntax guide rather than a defining dictionary. Compared to the standard Pitman edition there appears to be virtually no change to fit the Foundation format, apart from a small adjustment to page size to fit the common CPR standard. *Correspondence and Salesmanship* is, on the other hand, a thoroughgoing modification, incorporating portions of two different Pitman titles: *Better Letters* by A.M. Kennedy, an established office-practice textbook, published in England but the examples modified to fit Canada, and *The Personality of the Salesman* by William F. Gregory, a Canadian-originated manual on practical salesmanship, first published in Toronto. The third component comprises five chapters on "Salesmanship as Applied to Railway Traffic" by Charles E. Parks, extracted from an internal staff manual on *Selling Railroad Transportation*, published by the Traffic Service Corporation, Chicago. Comparing the CPR edition with the original editions, it appears that Kennedy and Parks revised their extracts considerably to suit their CPR audience. The whole was entirely

15 M. Alderton Pink, *A Dictionary of Correct English A Manual of Information and Advice Concerning Grammar, Idiom, Use of Words, Points of Style, Punctuation, Pronunciation, and Other Practical Matters* (Toronto: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons (Canada), 1938[sic]).

16 A.M. Kennedy, William F. Gregory, and Charles E. Parks, *Correspondence and Salesmanship (compiled from 'Better Letters,' 'The Personality of the Salesman' and 'Salesmanship as Applied to Railway Traffic'* (Toronto: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1937).

Figure 2: An example of a tourist handbook published by the CPR in 1905 (from a private collection). The emphasis at this time was the CPR as the “all-red” link to the far east.

reset in uniform style and given a Pitman imprint and copyright line, but only “Copyright in Canada” (i.e., only this version). This sophisticated repackaging of texts from three different sources to fit a specific purpose is in fact an early example of “repurposing” as is practised today with on-line information delivery.

The next category included in the Foundation Library comprises titles covering economic geography, history, political institutions, and citizenship for Canadians. *The Dominion of Canada*¹⁷ is an interestingly repurposed hybrid volume comprising extracts from three different books from three different publishers: *Economic Geography* by Neil F. Morrison, published in 1937 by the Ryerson Press, (20 chapters, 162 pages); *Economic History of Canada* by Herbert Heaton, newly published in 1937 by the Canadian branch of the Scottish publisher, Thomas Nelson and Sons (4 chapters, 72 pages); and *Political Institutions* by James Charles Bonar (a 25 page-extract from a 1937 report compiled and published by the Montreal Junior Chamber of Trade). Bonar was a senior officer of the CPR and until his retirement in 1952 was a tireless proponent of employee improvement schemes, and founder of the CPR Archives. The editors of this volume had pre-publication access to the last two publications since they were not in fact published in their standard editions until after the Foundation Library edition was issued. The entire text was reset to fit the Foundation Library format, with the addition of new illustrations emphasising transportation issues. It is extremely interesting to note that although the Ryerson component was much larger than that of Nelson, and the Ryerson ship device is prominent on the title page, the Foundation Library edition was published under the joint imprint of Ryerson and Thomas Nelson and Sons.

The next title in this category is *An Introduction to Economics for Canadian Readers*¹⁸ by Duncan Alexander MacGibbon of the University of Alberta, a well-known school text first published by the Macmillan Company of Canada in 1924. Apart from a reduction in page size, the CPR edition appears to be an unaltered reprint of the second 1937 reprint of the 1935 third enlarged edition. The only change (as with the other volumes) is a list of recommended readings added

17 Neil F. Morrison, Herbert Heaton, and James Charles Bonar, *The Dominion of Canada: Economic Geography: Economic History: Political Institutions* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press and Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1937).

18 Duncan Alexander MacGibbon, *An Introduction to Economics for Canadian Readers* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1937).

to the recto of the rear endpaper. Interestingly, unlike other reading lists, this one includes publishers and prices of currently available titles. The reading list is extremely eclectic, encompassing books by Adam Smith, Henry George, and David Ricardo, as well as Charles Sanderson's controversial *Social Credit* and Geoffrey Drage's *Trade Unions*. This category is completed by W.J. Karr's *Canadian History through Biography*, published by J.M. Dent; a text comprised of the standard edition with the addition of extended biographies of the four presidents of the CPR since its foundation.

The final three volumes in the series include two titles specially compiled by the General Publicity Department of the Railway. *Canadian Pacific Facts and Figures*¹⁹ is a statistical survey of all the Company's operations written by the respective department heads and managers. *Factors in Railway and Steamship Operation*²⁰ is a broader survey considering generic issues, with chapters written by CPR managers and Canadian academics. It includes the poem "The Section Man" by the popular Saskatchewan poet Edna Jacques (identified as a "poetess"), apparently composed specifically for this book.

The third volume of the series is perhaps the most revealing of all as to the ethos behind its publication. *Canada Sings*,²¹ a special edition of a popular songbook published by Gordon V. Thompson Ltd., was described as being "ideal for the home or for those interested in formation of choral societies and glee clubs." The usual popular songs were included, along with a special railway section and a large number of songs suitable for barbershop quartet performance. Several French Canadian songs were included, as well as English, Irish, and Scots folk songs. After salesmanship, public speaking, economics, and citizenship, singing was clearly a desired skill for CPR employees.

With the outbreak of war, restrictions on materials, particularly for the books manufactured in England, led to the scheme being suspended but existing stocks were all distributed by 1942. The intention had been to revive and extend the series after the end of the War, and in January 1944 Coleman (now President) authorized

19 General Publicity Department, *Canadian Pacific Facts and Figures* (Montreal: Canadian Pacific Foundation Library, 1937); 2nd ed. 1946.

20 General Publicity Department, *Factors in Railway and Steamship Operation* (Montreal: Canadian Pacific Foundation Library, 1937).

21 Hugo Frey, *Canada Sings! Community Song Book for Schools, Clubs, Fraternities, Homes and Community Singing* (Toronto: Gordon V. Thompson, n.d.).

an allocation of \$6,247 to produce a new edition of *Canadian Pacific Facts and Figures*. The General Publicity Agent, J.L. McGibbon wrote to Coleman's chief clerk on 4 May 1945 that "distribution of the book will be somewhat similar to the method adopted in 1937 for the complete Foundation Library" with a subscription system pricing the book at 25 cents, including packing and postage, directly from the printer.

Although Coleman remained enthusiastic, he encountered much more scepticism on the part of his colleagues on the wisdom of publishing a new edition. The project was delayed and by the time it went to press at the Montreal Gazette Company the production bill was \$8,525 for 6000 copies, producing, as the assistant manager of the Press bureau gloomily noted, "a loss on the transaction of almost \$7,025." In the event, the new edition appeared at the beginning of 1946. It lacked the bookplate, was bound in a different coloured maroon cloth, and was in a larger size than the pre-war issue. Perhaps the optimistic vision of capital-labour solidarity that spawned the pre-war series and had underpinned its selection of texts, and subsidized means of delivery could not be revived in the new economic and social conditions that confronted the new world of post-war Canada. Hardly any employees purchased copies even at 25 cents and the bulk of the printing was absorbed by the General Publicity Department for promotional purposes.

This preliminary investigation into an interesting episode in corporate publishing shows that the Canadian Pacific Foundation Library, if not unique, was an unusual mechanism by a major commercial organization to support habits of reading, education, and self-improvement among its workforce. In many Canadian homes, the subsidized, well-printed, and strongly bound "redbacks" were clearly treasured and influential in shaping the national ethos and identity.

Many aspects of the development and publishing history of the Foundation Library, its impact, and its use remain to be studied. Not least, the series presents a fascinating publishing history that clearly provided the indigenous Canadian publishing industry and the Canadian branches of major British publishers with an essential lifeline of many thousands of extra unit sales at a time when they were struggling to emerge from the economic recession of the 1930s. Equally fascinating is the early manifestation of what modern publishers call "repurposing" or "slicing and dicing" – the customization of

text to meet a specific purpose.²² More research is required to learn how this editorial innovation was conceived and organized. The distribution, impact, and use of the titles would fill a boxcar of interesting questions, questions for which the archives of Canadian Pacific Railway and of the publishers who participated in this social experiment in book publishing should provide important data about an historic corporate era that has grown increasingly anachronistic.

SOMMAIRE

Cet article traite du rôle joué par la Compagnie de chemin de fer du Canadien Pacifique à titre d'éditeur. Après avoir analysé les activités générales d'édition de la Compagnie, l'article examine ensuite la « Bibliothèque (c'est-à-dire la collection) de la Fondation du Canadien Pacifique », un moyen innovateur de fournir de l'aide et des manuels sous une forme spécifique au personnel du Canadien Pacifique, à un coût faisant l'objet d'une subvention en 1937. Utilisant des documents de la Compagnie de chemin de fer du Canadien Pacifique et d'ailleurs, l'article montre comment la Bibliothèque de la Fondation fut créée, publiée et distribuée, ainsi que ses rapports avec l'industrie de l'édition canadienne et ses utilisateurs. Bien que l'économie en temps de guerre ait mis fin à ce projet et malgré l'échec d'une tentative de le ressusciter en 1947, l'édition de la Bibliothèque a constitué un moyen important d'utiliser les livres dans le but d'aider le personnel à acquérir une meilleure formation, une notion tout à fait avant-gardiste.

22 W. I. Stevenson, "Nothing New under the Sun: Repurposing Content in Publishing. Some Theoretical Perspectives and an Historical Case Study" (*International Journal of the Book* 1, C-2-C, 2004), <<http://ijb.cgpublisher.com/>>.