“A Grand Old House:”¹ Canadian Educational Publisher Copp Clark, 1841–2004

Penney Clark*

Figure 1. Vancouver School Board Education Week, 1966. Courtesy of
The Province and the Vancouver Public Library, VPL 68958A.

¹ “And the Strangest Part,” *Books and Notions* 2, no. 1 (August 1885): 10.

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Publisher Copp Clark occupied a central place among Canadian educational publishing firms for about a century. This 1966 publicity photo for Education Week in the Vancouver, British Columbia, school district was indicative of Copp Clark's influence (see fig. 1).²

The young student is holding *Stories Old and New, Book One*, published by Copp Clark in 1964. The fact that this book is front and centre in a publicity photo demonstrates the prominence of Copp Clark textbooks. It was authorized as a grade two reader in the province of British Columbia for fourteen years, from 1965 to 1979, and in Ontario, Canada's most populous English-speaking province and therefore its largest textbook market, from 1964 to 1974.

Copp Clark has had little scholarly attention. One important factor here is the limited availability of primary sources beyond the actual publications of the firm. There is no memoir by a key figure, as is the case with John Gray of Macmillan. Nor is there a voluminous collection of correspondence, as well as personally authored and edited publications, as with Lorne Pierce of Ryerson. There are the Copp Clark fonds at the William Ready Division, Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Libraries; however, these materials are "fragmentary and incomplete."³ There are Department of Education correspondence, contracts, and other materials deposited in the Archives of Ontario. There is Copp Clark's hagiographic 1941 publication, *One Hundred Years of Progress*. There is the valuable testimony of Copp Clark's President, Henry Leggatt Thompson, and Vice-President, Arnold Thomas, during the proceedings of the 1907 Ontario Textbook Commission. We also have industry analyst Roy MacSkimming's interview with Robin Farr, who worked for Copp Clark for a decade, in another collection at McMaster. Then there is what can be gleaned from the journals *Books and Notions* (later *Bookseller and Stationer*) and *Quill & Quire*; as well as items from newspapers, including articles, advertisements, and obituaries. Finally,

² The Copp Clark imprint continued to be used after the sale of the firm to Sir Isaac Pitman in 1963.

³ Copp Clark Company Finding Aid, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library, Hamilton, ON, accessed 10 October 2016, <https://library.mcmaster.ca/archives/findaid/fonds/cl/copp-c.htm>. The fonds were acquired from Copp Clark Professional in 1998, thanks to the efforts of Carl Spadoni, who was Director of Archives and Research at the time. Most of the documents date from the latter half of the twentieth century and relate to financial matters (ledgers, author royalty records). There is a very limited volume of correspondence, and therefore little material that is helpful as an aid to lending insight into the firm's decision-making processes.

there are the textbooks themselves, including both those published by Copp Clark and those for which the firm took on the role of agency for American firms.

A second contributing factor may be the paucity of colourful figures like those who represented some other prominent educational publishers. Ryerson Press had the much beloved Lorne Pierce, who has been described as “Canada’s longest-serving and most remarkable mid-twentieth-century publisher of Canadian books.”⁴ The Macmillan Company of Canada had President Hugh Eayrs, “a man of undeniable charm,”⁵ who was a fixture in Toronto publishing and social circles until his untimely death in 1940 at age 46.⁶ Later, McClelland & Stewart had Jack McClelland, who was the definition of “colourful.” Although Copp Clark’s owners and managers spoke out when they needed to, for the most part they chose to fly under the radar. It is hard to imagine someone from that dignified firm wearing a Roman toga while walking down Toronto’s Yonge Street in a blizzard, accompanied by author Sylvia Fraser in a silver gown, as Jack McClelland did in 1980 to promote her novel *The Emperor’s Virgin*.⁷

For many years educational publishing was the “brightest star on the publishing horizon.”⁸ It served as the bread and butter that allowed major firms to also publish in the less financially reliable area of Canadian fiction. This situation came to a grinding halt after 1968, when Ontario cancelled its textbook stimulation grant, allowing school districts to distribute the funds to general revenues.

In Canada, publishing has been considered a cultural industry from early on. The 1951 Massey-Levesque Commission, which

⁴ Sandra Campbell, *Both Hands: A Life of Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013), 503; Ruth Bradley St-Cyr, “The Downfall of The Ryerson Press” (unpublished doctoral diss., University of Ottawa, 2014).

⁵ William Tyrell, “To a Young Publisher,” *Quill & Quire* 6 (May 1940): 26.

⁶ John Morgan Gray, *Fun Tomorrow: Learning to be a Publisher and Much Else* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978); Ruth Panofsky, *The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

⁷ James King, *Jack, A Life with Writers: The Story of Jack McClelland* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1999): 343–46. The intention was to travel in a gold and scarlet chariot, but the axle turned out to be in a sorry state.

⁸ Jack McClelland, “Publishing General: (A Condensation of Lecture 5 by J.G. McClelland),” *Quill & Quire* 22 (April 1956): 16–18; 24–32 (32).

examined Canadian culture, supported this concept.⁹ The 1973 Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing, a report that had national implications, also supported this central notion.¹⁰ Secretary of State Hugh Faulkner expressed the idea aptly at a 1975 conference on the state of English language publishing in Canada (where he was pilloried by publishers for not providing more assistance). He said “[a]ll of us realize that our shared concern is not only with the health of the publishing industry but with the industry’s contribution to the nation’s integrity. Our development as a nation is as directly linked to matters of the mind and spirit as it is to the more immediate questions of economic and industrial strategy.”¹¹ However, despite its good intentions, the federal government has not taken a particularly strong stance in favour of the industry of book publishing over time, from either an economic or a cultural standpoint. In 1971, Graeme Gibson, Chairman of the Writers’ Union of Canada, rather aptly referred to the government’s stance as “encouragement rather than muscle.”¹²

This article traces the history of one major textbook publishing firm from its beginnings to its ultimate demise. As was the case with many other companies, Copp Clark moved through three stages. It began as a retail bookstore with printing and lithography services offered on the side. It moved on to publish textbooks, functioning as an agency for foreign firms in addition to developing its own books. Finally, it was purchased by a foreign firm, and was subsequently merged and repurchased, until Copp Clark as an educational publisher disappeared from view. This sad ending is typical of all major Canadian publishing firms outside Quebec over the same period. An examination of one firm sheds light on how this lack of support has affected the broader industry over time.

⁹ Canada, *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1949–1951*. (Massey Commission). Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1951.

¹⁰ Ontario, *Canadian Publishers & Canadian Publishing: Royal Commission on Book Publishing* (Toronto: Queen’s Printer, 1973).

¹¹ J. Hugh Faulkner, “On Publishing Policy,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* X (May 1975): 32–49 (42).

¹² “Twenty Statements from Writers and Publishers,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 10 (May 1975): 49.

Beginnings

Ownership in the firm of Copp Clark was convoluted for its first 28 years, from the establishment of the business by Scotsman Hugh Scobie in 1841, until its purchase by William Walter Copp and Henry J. Clark in 1869.¹³ The name of the firm at any given time did not necessarily represent actual ownership or management. Furthermore, specific dates for various changes of ownership vary across both primary and secondary sources. The loss of records in the devastating 1904 fire on Toronto's "Publishers' Row" is no doubt one key factor in the confusion.

Figure 2. Scobie Building, 16 King Street East, Toronto. The Canadian Manufacturers' Association. "The Copp Clark Publishing Co. Ltd.," *Industry '67 Centennial Perspective* (Toronto: Author, 1967), 170. Courtesy of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

Like many other printer/publishers of the period, Copp Clark began as a joint retail book and stationery store and publishing

¹³ "The Copp Clark Company Limited Celebrate Centenary October First, 1841-1941," Box 1, File 8, Copp Clark fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library.

enterprise. Scotsman Hugh Scobie, who established the firm under his own name in 1841 at 16 King Street East, Toronto, provided the services of printer, bookbinder, lithographer, and copperplate and wood engraver, in addition to his retail store (see fig. 2). He also published the *British Colonist* newspaper and the *Canadian Almanac and Directory*, an annual compilation of useful knowledge.¹⁴ John Balfour joined him as a partner in 1846 and they subsequently operated as Scobie & Balfour until 1851, when Balfour left the business. Scobie continued on his own until his death in 1853, at which time, his widow broke up the business, selling the *British Colonist*, as well as the printing press and type to Samuel Thompson, Bookseller, Stationer, and Printer. She sold the bookstore, the *Canadian Almanac* and other parts of the business in January 1854 to William Walter Copp (see fig. 3), in partnership with Dr. William Cameron Chewett and Thomas Maclear.¹⁵ Copp had worked as an employee of the firm since his arrival from England in 1842 at age 16. The three partners paid £6500 for the stock in trade of the bookstore and the lease on the property, changing the name to Maclear and Company. Maclear left the firm in 1857, with Chewett and Copp carrying on the partnership.

¹⁴ The *Canadian Almanac and Directory*, first published by Hugh Scobie in 1847, was purchased from Micromedia ProQuest by Grey House Publishing, an American company, in 2006. Grey House Publishing Canada, a wholly owned subsidiary, was formed in order to keep the business in Canada. "History of Grey House Publishing," Grey House (website), accessed 20 July 2015, www.greyhouse.ca/about.html.

¹⁵ For the date of William Walter Copp's entry into the company, as well as the dates for partnership formation, the date that Thomas Maclear left the company, and the entry of H.J. Clark, I have relied on "Men of the Time: Mr. W.W. Copp," *Books and Notions* 7 (July 1891): 6. As Donald W. McLeod points out, this source is likely the most reliable since Copp, Maclear, and Chewett were all alive at the time the article was published. Donald W. McLeod, "William Cameron Chewett and W.C. Chewett & Company of Toronto, Printers and Publishers," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 21, no. 1 (1982): 11–51. See also Elizabeth Hulse, "The Life and Times of William Walter Copp: The Book Trades in Nineteenth-Century Toronto," edited by John Gibson and Laurie Lewis, *Sticks and Stones: Some Aspects of Canadian Printing History* (Toronto: Typographic Association, 1980), 69–92. I note that the Copp Clark centennial anniversary publication, "The Copp Clark Company Limited Celebrate Centenary October First, 1841–1941," states that it was Thomas Maclear and George Elliott Thomas who purchased the bookstore and King Street lease and that Copp and Clark became members of the firm in about 1863. This is not corroborated by other sources.

Henry J. Clark joined the firm as a bookkeeper in 1859, becoming a partner in 1862.¹⁶

Figure 3. William Walter Copp. *Books and Notions*, 7 (July 1891): 10

Maclear's partner in his separate publishing business, Maclear, Thomas & Co., was printer, George Elliott Thomas. This firm worked from the same premises and printed some of the publications of Maclear and Co., including the *Canadian Almanac* of 1856, 1857, and 1858. Thomas's sister Caroline married William Walter Copp in 1851. Although George Elliott Thomas had left Maclear, Thomas & Co. by 1859, his son Arnold Thomas was Secretary-Treasurer of Copp Clark for many years. Arnold Thomas's sons, and Copp's grandnephews, Dudley and Alan Thomas, ran the firm from 1936 to the mid-1950s. One factor that likely created a bond among the Copp,

¹⁶ This information is found in the City of Toronto Tax Assessment Rolls for the Ward of St. Lawrence, 1859–1869, which are excerpted in McLeod, "William Cameron Chewett," 46–51.

Clark, and Thomas families (in addition to the marriage of Caroline Thomas and William Walter Copp) was their common involvement in the Congregational (later Zion) Church. Copp, Clark, George Elliott Thomas and others founded the Northern Congregational Church in 1867–1868.¹⁷

By 1859, the company had moved to larger premises on the other side of King Street East at 17 and 19. Although Maclear left in 1857,¹⁸ the company name was retained until 1861, when it changed to W.C. Chewett and Company.¹⁹ Copp was actually much more experienced in the business, but it is likely that Chewett became senior partner by virtue of a larger financial investment in the firm. He has been described as “the scion of one of Toronto’s most prominent and influential families.”²⁰ According to Elizabeth Hulse, Maclear’s departure reflected his discomfiture with the fact that William Chewett’s father, James Grant Chewett, had some say in the operation of the business due to his endorsement of the loan required for its purchase.²¹ However, this does not explain why Maclear also left his partnership with George Elliott Thomas.

Employee numbers increased significantly in 1863, going from three partners (Chewett, Clark, and Copp) and three employees to

¹⁷ Elizabeth Hulse, “Copp, William Walter,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto / Université Laval. Accessed 20 July, 2015. www.biographi.ca/en/bio/copp_william_walter_12E.html.

¹⁸ Frank Barrett, “Copp Clark Publishing Company,” *Quill & Quire* 33 (February/March 1967): 11. In a 1967 history of the company, Frank Barrett, Vice-President and Director of Publishing, commented that, “[f]or some reason, Clark didn’t stay in the business long, but Copp remained until his death.” Given that Clark also stayed until his death at age 70, Barrett was likely thinking of Thomas Maclear.

¹⁹ McLeod, “William Cameron Chewett,” 19n18. McLeod points to an advertisement dated September 1861 and signed “W.C. Chewett & Co., (Late Maclear & Co.)” in *Great Western Railway Gazetteer, Commercial Advertiser and Business Directory, 1861–1862*, no. 1 (Toronto: J.L. Mitchell & Co., publishers and compilers, printed by W.C. Chewett & Co., 1861), 93. William Chewett was an unusual individual because although he was trained as a medical doctor, he never practiced medicine, choosing a career in the book business instead. See McLeod for more about Chewett’s career. See also, Donald W. McLeod, “Chewett, William Cameron,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto / Université Laval, 2003–. Accessed 9 October 2016. www.biographi.ca/en/bio/chewett_william_cameron_12E.html.

²⁰ McLeod, “William Cameron Chewett,” 11.

²¹ Elizabeth Hulse, “Maclear, Thomas,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto / Université Laval 2003–. Accessed 15 July 2015. www.biographi.ca/en/bio/maclear_thomas_12E.html.

three partners and twenty-one employees. Seven printers, five binders, and six lithographers joined the bookkeeper, clerk, and porter already employed by the firm. Chewett retired from active involvement in the business in about 1865, selling his share to Copp and Clark in 1869, at which time the firm was renamed Copp, Clark & Co.²² In 1873, the pair sold the bookstore to Samuel Hart and Thomas Rawlinson, in order to concentrate on the printing, publishing, and wholesaling end of the business.²³ Rawlinson had worked as a clerk for the company since 1862. According to publishing historian H. Pearson Gundy, it was typical for bookseller-publishers in the third quarter of the nineteenth century to relinquish their retail bookstores to focus on the publishing arm of their businesses, keeping the wholesale book and stationery trade as an adjunct to publishing.²⁴ W.J. Gage, another prominent firm, had similar beginnings, followed by a similar organizational process.²⁵

The firm expanded rapidly, and in 1880 the wholesaling and jobbing departments were moved to 9 Front Street West (see fig. 4) and the printing, lithography, and binding departments to 67–69 Colborne Street. The impressive Colborne premises were described as follows: “a double building of white brick containing four flats, the first being occupied by offices, storeroom, engine, power presses, lithographic and printing machines. The Composing Room and lithographic and Copperplate Developments were on the second floor. The third floor was devoted to the manufacture of blank books, letterpress, bookbinding and similar work with rooms for artists and engravers. On the fourth floor a number of girls were employed in folding, stitching, and generally making ready for the binders below.”²⁶

²² H. Pearson Gundy, *Book Publishing and Publishers in Canada Before 1900* (Toronto: The Bibliographical Society of Canada, 1965), 27. Gundy states that Henry Copp purchased the firm along with William Walter Copp and Henry J. Clark. This is not supported by the City of Toronto Tax Assessment Roll for 1869, which shows H. Copp was employed by the firm as a bookbinder.

²³ The City of Toronto Tax Assessment Rolls for the Ward of St. Lawrence, 1859–1869, excerpted in McLeod, “William Cameron Chewett,” 46–51.

²⁴ Gundy, *Book Publishing and Publishers*, 32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

²⁶ Quoted in Barrett, “Copp Clark Publishing Company,” 11.

Figure 4. 9 Front Street West, Toronto.
williamfuld.com/Ouija_factories_coppclark.html.

In 1881, William Walter Copp and Henry J. Clark made a logical expansion by purchasing shares in the Toronto Paper Manufacturing Company, which had mills in Cornwall, Ontario. Other prominent shareholders included archrival W.J. Gage and old friend Richard Brown of Brown Brothers, a bookbinder and manufacturer of stationery.²⁷

In 1885, the business was incorporated under the name of The Copp Clark Co. Limited with a capital of \$200,000. The shareholders were William Walter Copp, President; Henry James Clark, Vice-President;

²⁷ Elizabeth Hulse, *A Dictionary of Toronto Printers, Publishers, Booksellers and the Allied Trades, 1708–1900* (Toronto: Anson-Cartwright Editions, 1982), 262.

Charles Fuller, merchant;²⁸ Arnold William Thomas, George Elliott Thomas's son and Copp's wife's nephew, accountant; William Walter's son, William Copp, salesman; and long-time employee Henry Leggatt Thompson, Manager.²⁹ Copp's attention centred on the financial side of the business and Clark saw to general oversight of day-to-day affairs. Fuller supervised the workshops. Staff employed at this time in the workshops ranged from eighty to one hundred and another twenty were employed in the warehouse.³⁰

Henry James Clark died in 1892 and William Walter Copp in 1894. By the time of their deaths, both principals were highly regarded in the Toronto business community and the firm itself had become a major player in Canadian publishing. Clark was described in *Books and Notions* as "shrewd, and especially in the management of the house ... But his shrewdness never exceeded his uprightness and his life was a model socially and commercially. The influence of his life was great as the influence of such a man must be."³¹ According to the *Empire*, "[t]he great success and financial strength which has characterized the career of the firm was chiefly due to the confidence which Mr. Copp inspired in his numerous customers, his great business ability and sound judgment."³²

At the time of William Walter Copp's death, Henry Leggatt Thompson, who had been in charge of the wholesale and schoolbook publishing departments, became president, a position he was to hold for 40 years. William H. Copp, William Walter's son, and his cousin Arnold Thomas were moving up the company ladder (see fig. 5). William Copp became vice-president and manager of the trade book department and Arnold Thomas, son of George Elliott Thomas, became secretary-treasurer of the company.³³

²⁸ Hulse, *Dictionary*, 102. Chewett and Company purchased a major lithographic firm, Fuller and Bencke, in about 1862. Fuller became manager of Chewett's lithographic department. He then became a partner, manager of manufactory, director, and finally vice-president of Copp Clark for one year before his death in 1894.

²⁹ "A New Incorporation," *Books and Notions* 1 (October 1885): 40–41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

³¹ "The Late Henry J. Clark," *Books and Notions* 8 (April 1892): 8.

³² "The Late W.W. Copp," *Empire*, 21 August 1894, 8.

³³ "The Copp Clark Company Limited," 2 (see note 13).

Figure 5. William H. Copp, Vice-President and Manager, General Book Publishing, *Bookseller and Stationer* 21 (August 1905): 297

Evidence indicates that, over its history, Copp Clark was a generous employer and good corporate citizen when it came to the broader community. (However, I note that, as the “*Ontario Readers Contract*” section later in this article will indicate, this was not necessarily the case when operating in business mode.) While it is not possible to pinpoint the roots of this corporate ethos, Henry J. Clark was involved in the campaign for shorter working hours for the retail labour force during the period when he was co-owner of the bookstore purchased from Hugh Scobie’s widow.³⁴ Clark was also active in the temperance movement and the movement to promote Sunday Schools. It seems logical that someone who was so interested in social welfare would apply that philosophy in his own firm and perhaps influence those who followed him as owners and managers.

³⁴ “The Late Henry J. Clark,” 8.

Figure 6. Copp Clark Ltd. Excursion and Picnic, Queenston Heights Park, 17 July, 1924. Copp Clark fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library, Map Cabinet 22.

The firm made an effort over the years to promote employee cohesion through participation in social and recreational activities such as hockey. As early as 1885, there are reports in *The Globe* of baseball and lacrosse games between employees of W.J. Gage and Copp, Clark, with William Copp listed as a baseball player. The company held the first of its elaborate annual picnics in 1897. An 1898 *Globe* article describes a boat trip that ushered 300 attendees from Toronto to a park in Oshawa. There they spent the morning visiting places of interest around town, and then after a mid-day dinner, the afternoon was spent in foot races, baseball games, and long-jumping, followed by supper. According to *The Globe*, "the day was all that could be desired."³⁵

Figure 7. Front Street after the Toronto Fire, 19 April, 1904. Archives of Ontario F 2178-I-O-22. S5198, 10006700. Edwin C. Guillet Collection.

The firm moved its warehouse to 64 Front Street West in 1900. Four years later, in April 1904, the devastating Toronto fire destroyed

³⁵ "Copp, Clark Co.'s Picnic: The Employees of the Firm Spend a Very Pleasant Day at Oshawa – The Sports," *The Globe*, 15 August 1898, 7. See also "Prospect Park and the Lake Park Entertain Merrymakers-Copp, Clark's Co's Employees Outing," *The Globe*, 10 July 1899, 3.

the building, which included stock and most of the early records of the firm (see fig. 7). The building of a new warehouse began almost immediately on the same site and by May 1905, the company had settled into a new four-floor building, described as a “handsome warehouse.”³⁶ However, by 1909, the firm had outgrown these premises and accordingly, it built a new factory at 495 Wellington Street West, expanding to 517 Wellington Street West, with a new warehouse in 1912,³⁷ other additions in 1924, 1928, and the last in 1943 (see fig. 8). This building remains standing.

Figure 8a. Copp Clark Building, Wellington and Portland, Toronto, 1913. *Bookseller and Stationer* 29 (March 1913): 10.

Figure 8b. The same building in 2017. Photo by author.

At the time of the move in 1909, the firm placed a full-page advertisement in *Bookseller and Stationer* with the title “At Your Service in our New Home.” The advertisement called the new premises “the most modern and thoroughly equipped wholesale book and stationery warehouse in the Dominion ... the word EFFICIENCY has been practically spelled out in its construction, its equipment, in the stock arrangement, the shipping facilities and the business offices.”³⁸

Entrance into Educational Publishing

According to George Parker, three survival strategies were available to publishers in the period between Confederation and the turn

³⁶ “A Handsome Warehouse,” *Bookseller and Stationer* 21 (May 1905): 196–97.

³⁷ “Copp Clark Co.’s New Home,” *Bookseller and Stationer* 29 (March 1913): 24.

³⁸ “At Your Service in our New Home,” [Advertisement] *Bookseller and Stationer* 29 (March 1913): 10.

of the century: becoming fiction reprint houses, using innovative merchandising involving distribution of books by mail and by subscription, or developing monopolies as textbook printers.³⁹ Most early Toronto publishers chose the third option. Schoolbook publishing was reliably lucrative because, unlike trade publishing, it catered to a captive consumer. Parents were required to supply their children with authorized textbooks and indigent students were supplied with books by the Department of Education. Either way, publishers would receive their payments.

Copp Clark became aware of the revenue possibilities of educational publishing very early on, in fact before it actually *was* Copp Clark. Chewett & Co. referred to itself as “Educational Booksellers”⁴⁰ as early as 1865, and the firm continued on in that vein. Rival Canadian textbook publishers before and around the turn of the twentieth century included Morang, the Methodist Book and Publishing House, W.J. Gage, Hunter Rose, and Warwick Brothers and Rutter, all of which were located in Toronto.

Educational publishing was central to the firm’s success. According to a 1908 *Bookseller and Stationer* article, “[t]he company for the last twenty-five years has given special attention to the publication of school books. The textbooks issued by them have secured adoptions in every province of the Dominion from British Columbia in the far west to Prince Edward Island in the east.”⁴¹ The firm also produced a limited number of trade books,⁴² as well as stationery and games.⁴³ The Canada Games Company, a subsidiary, produced board and card games, including *Monopoly*, “the most talked-of and best-selling game on the market,”⁴⁴ and the famous (or infamous) *Ouija Board*. In spite of its limited trade book output, Copp Clark, and William Copp in particular, were praised in a 1905 *Canadian Magazine* article, as one of only three firms who supported “native writers ... [even

³⁹ George L. Parker, *The Beginnings of the Book Trade in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985): 166–67.

⁴⁰ McLeod, “William Cameron Chewett,” 29.

⁴¹ “A Forward Step in the Career of a Big Canadian Company,” *Bookseller and Stationer* 24 (June 1908): 14.

⁴² “About New Books,” *The Canadian Magazine* 25 (October 1905): 582–86.

⁴³ “The Copp Clark Co. Has Long History,” *Bookseller and Stationer* 53 (April 15, 1937): 29.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

though] some of the prominent people in the country tried to throw cold water on the attempt to build up a native literature.”⁴⁵

By 1894, the year of William Walter Copp’s death, the firm was becoming increasingly successful. Between 1894 and 1905, it published 1,048,337 copies of authorized textbooks, a similar number to its closest rival W.J. Gage’s total of 967,813.⁴⁶ The firm produced textbooks of all kinds including spellers, readers, mathematics, and French texts. *French Grammar and Reader Series* by Fraser and Squair was an early publication. Other examples are Stevenson’s *Canadian School Shakespeare Series*, Clement’s *History of the Canadian People*, Wrong’s *Britain’s History*, the *Copp Clark Literature Series*, and the *Ontario Readers*. A 1908 *Bookseller and Stationer* article declared that, “The Copp Clark Company is known from one end of the Dominion to the other as one of the largest publishing houses in Canada.”⁴⁷

The *Ontario Readers* Contract and the Toronto Textbook Monopoly, 1884–1907

The chief source of Copp Clark’s income from textbook sales at the turn of the twentieth century arose from a lucrative contract with the Ontario Department of Education, whereby Copp Clark, W.J. Gage, and the Canada Publishing Company, collectively and informally known as the Toronto Textbook Ring, effectively held a monopoly over publication of the *Ontario Readers*.⁴⁸ This situation, one that caused an outcry from other publishers who dearly wished to enter the market, resulted in a textbook commission initiated by newly elected Conservative Premier James Whitney in 1906. The *Ontario Readers* question, which focused on the high cost of the readers and the disproportionate profits to the publishers, had been a prominent issue in the 1905 election campaign and Whitney had committed to investigate it once elected. He appointed four prominent and well

⁴⁵ “About New Books,” 583.

⁴⁶ Ontario, Text Book Commission, *Report of the Text Book Commission 1907* (Toronto: L.K. Cameron, 1907), 384–89.

⁴⁷ “A Forward Step,” 13.

⁴⁸ See Penney Clark, “Reckless Extravagance and Utter Incompetence’: George Ross and the Toronto Textbook Ring, 1883–1907,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 46 (2008): 185–235. This article examines the actions of Minister of Education George Ross and shines a spotlight on W.J. Gage and his role as the ringleader of the “ring.”

respected commissioners. The Chairman and official examiner was T.W. Crothers, a lawyer and Conservative supporter. The second commissioner, John A. Cooper, was a journalist and editor for several MacLean Publishing Co. publications, including *Bookseller and Stationer*. Alexander Clark Casselman, Secretary to the Commission, was Assistant Master of the Toronto Normal School and a textbook author whose books had been published by Gage. George Lynch Staunton, K.C., Commission Legal Counsel, was a Hamilton lawyer. The commission subpoenaed various stakeholders, including all of the prominent educational publishers in Toronto. Copp Clark was represented by its President, H.L. Thompson, and Secretary Treasurer, A.W. Thomas. As a result of the Commission's damning 1907 report, the Department of Education declined to renew the reader contract.

This story begins in November 1884, when W.J. Gage, the Canada Publishing Company, and Thomas Nelson of Scotland, were together awarded the lucrative *Ontario Readers* contract for a ten-year period by the Ontario Department of Education.⁴⁹ Nelson, after considering offers, sold its interest to Copp Clark for a payment of \$3000 per year for the ten-year duration of the contract.⁵⁰

For the firms of Copp Clark and Gage, the *Ontario Readers* contract was even more lucrative than it appeared. The third member of the ring, the Canada Publishing Company, did not function as a separate company. In fact, Copp Clark President H.L. Thompson and William Gage were majority shareholders, each owning about one-third of the issued capital of the company. The other shareholders were George Warwick, Charles Warwick, and A.F. Rutter of Warwick Brothers and Rutter.⁵¹ The Board of Directors was composed of President S.G. Beatty (Gage's former partner), Vice-President William Gage, H.L. Thompson, and George Warwick. Therefore, anything that benefitted

⁴⁹ See Oisín Patrick Rafferty, "Balancing the Books: Brokerage Politics and the 'Ontario Readers Question,'" *Historical Studies in Education* 4 (Spring 1992): 79–95.

⁵⁰ "The School Book Commission," *Bookseller and Stationer* 22 (November 1906): 2.

⁵¹ The Textbook Commission examiners made several attempts to evoke a confession from various witnesses to the effect that the firm of Warwick Brothers and Rutter had been offered the shares as a bribe in return for not competing for the *Readers* contract. William Warwick applied to the Department of Education to publish the *Readers* in 1901, the same year he acquired shares in the Canada Publishing Company. He was granted permission to publish, but did not do so. The commissioners' attempts to elicit a confession were unsuccessful.

the Canada Publishing Company benefitted Copp Clark and W.J. Gage as well. The three firms each received a one-third share of the profits from the readers, but William Gage and H.L. Thompson of Copp Clark also received a one-third share each of the Canada Publishing Company's third share, putting them in a position where, between the two as individuals and their respective companies, each received close to half of the total profits.⁵² This was not a fact that was widely known at the time.⁵³

The *Ontario Readers* contract expired in January 1895, but was not renewed for a second ten-year period until March 1896. It was generally assumed at this time that Minister of Education George Ross would award the right to publish the readers to other firms. However, as H.L. Thompson put it to the 1907 Textbook Commission, "[w]e did not propose to let them do that if we could help it."⁵⁴ The three publishers, who were desperate to retain their lucrative contract, engaged in five clever, manipulative, and even underhanded tactics to achieve this end. First, Copp Clark and W.J. Gage took the position that their contracts had not actually expired. H.L. Thompson wrote Minister of Education George Ross, saying, "[w]e fear you are under some misapprehension as to the termination of our rights to the publication of the *Ontario Readers*."⁵⁵ Given that their contracts specifically stated that they were for ten years, the basis for this claim is unclear.⁵⁶

Their second tactic was to surreptitiously obtain copyright permission for some of the selections in the readers, so that they could threaten lawsuits if the Department of Education chose to grant publishing rights to other firms. By 1893, the publishers had realized that the Department did not hold copyright over every single selection in the readers and furthermore, that the Department was apparently unaware of the situation. There were, for example, a number of

⁵² *Textbook Commission, 1907*, 281, 301–302, 378.

⁵³ Gage Love, of Gage Educational Publishing, purchased all the shares, including the twenty-eight then owned by Copp Clark, in 1943. See Minutes, meeting of the Directors of The Copp Clark Co. Limited, 4 February 1943, Bound Minute Book #3, Box 1, Copp Clark fonds.

⁵⁴ *Text Book Commission, 1907*, 266.

⁵⁵ H.L. Thompson to Hon. G.W. Ross, 13 November 1894, Archives of Ontario, MS 2639, RG 2-29-3-3.

⁵⁶ "Bond as to the printing and publishing of the 'Ontario Series of Readers,' November 26, 1884," *A Brief History of Public and High School Text-Books Authorized for the Province of Ontario, 1846–1889*, Prepared by the Education Department (Toronto: Warwick, 1890), 66–67.

selections owned by Macmillan of London for which the Department had never held copyright or for which the copyright was about to expire. The firms decided amongst themselves to send a representative to London to meet with Macmillan in order to secure copyright, the cost to be shared among them. Accordingly, in the spring of 1893, H.L. Thompson (who was to become president of Copp Clark in 1894) travelled to London and made it known to Macmillan that, for the past nine years, excerpts from that firm's publications had been included in the *Ontario Readers* without copyright approval. He arranged to pay Macmillan £50 a year for the right, going forward, to publish those selections. In addition, and this was hugely beneficial to the firms, Macmillan agreed that it would not permit any other firm in Canada to publish the selections during the period in which the three firms continued to publish the readers.

William J. Gage apparently decided that Thompson's trip was not sufficiently productive because he made his own trip to London in December 1893, visiting several publishers. Ever the cagey businessman, although Gage secured some copyrights for the three firms collectively, he secured others solely for his own firm.⁵⁷ For example, the British firm Smith, Elder & Co. granted Gage the sole right to reprint selections from the poems of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The 1907 Commission Report noted that, in the case of the selections for which Gage alone held the copyright, "Copp Clark and The Canada Publishing Company were publishing these selections without authority from the authors or the British publishers. Further, the privilege of using some selections was granted only for a stated term which has expired several years ago."⁵⁸

A third tactic involved the initiation of a bogus lawsuit, with the Department of Education as defendant. Gage managed to convince the London publisher Charles Burnett & Company to initiate legal proceedings against George Ross, as Minister of Education, for the unauthorized use of a poem called "The Squirrel" in the *Second Ontario Reader*. Gage later acknowledged, in his testimony to the Textbook Commission, that the lawsuit was a "bluff."⁵⁹

The fourth tactic involved a successful effort to prevent Minister of Education George Ross from offering the contracts to publishers

⁵⁷ "Report as to Copyright of Selections in Ontario Readers Compiled from Evidence Given Before the Commission and Correspondence in the Education Department," *Textbook Commission, 1907*, 29–31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁹ *Textbook Commission, 1907*, 295.

outside the ring. The ring refused to provide him with a list of the works for which they now held copyright and, as a result, the other publishers were not willing to risk being sued by the copyright holders. Edward Caswell of the Methodist Book Room testified to this effect:

Q – You were simply in this position if you wanted to get what you considered the right of other publishing houses in this country to tender in open competition for the books published by the Government you had to do it with this sword hanging over you, that you might be sued?

A – Yes.⁶⁰

Finally, the three publishers failed to inform Ross that the copyrights they had purchased were actually only in effect as long as they were the ones publishing the books. If the contracts had been offered to other firms, the members of the ring would not have had the legal right to sue. H.L. Thompson's testimony to the Commission makes this clear. It is also an indication of how evasive their responses were to the Commissioners' questions.

Q – And you only secured the right to use those selections as long as you published the Readers?

A – Whatever the letter says.

Q – That is the fact, is it not; only while you publish them. Did you tell the Government that before the renewal?

A – No.

Q – We have not anything to prevent anybody else publishing them after the ten years; we have only the right to use these selections as long as we publish the book?

A – No, we did not give them anything.

Q – Did you then lead the Government to believe that they could not go on publishing these books afterwards, or get any one else to publish them by reason of the rights you had in the copyrights?

A – The Government would know that. I do not remember giving them to understand that.

Q – Is it not very probable that you did, because unless you did that there was no reason in it at all?

A – No.⁶¹

When the Department of Education learned of the subterfuge, it threatened to not renew the contracts, but eventually was forced to do so because it did not control the copyrights. The new contracts, issued in 1896, stipulated that the publishers were each to pay \$9000 for

⁶⁰ Ibid., 192.

⁶¹ Ibid., 290.

continued rights to publish, improve the book bindings, reduce some book prices by 15 to 25 percent, and increase discounts to booksellers. This was a good deal that was of enormous benefit to Copp Clark and the others at the end of the nineteenth century, during the worst recession that North America had experienced in years.

However, when the truth about the ring's various tactics were revealed in 1907, the Commission's conclusions were damning: "[t]extbook publishing in Ontario has fallen behind the times. Most of the books produced to-day are no better than those produced twenty years ago."⁶² The books were "inferior in material and workmanship and exorbitant in price."⁶³ It concluded that parents of school children had paid about \$200,000 more than what was a fair price over the twenty-two years the contracts were in place.⁶⁴

Following the publication of the 1907 Commission Report, publishers submitted tenders for printing and the Eaton's Department store, which owned its own presses for publication of its catalogues and advertising flyers, won the contract.⁶⁵ With the exception of the primer, which was replaced in 1933 by a new primer, again printed by Eaton's, the *Eaton's Readers* were authorized from 1909 to the late 1930s. Copp Clark and the other two members of the Ring encountered a major setback when they lost the lucrative *Ontario Readers* contract.

Copybooks, 1912–1940s

By the time Copp Clark began to publish them in 1912, copybooks had been an important commodity in the education market for over 30 years. (*Copybooks* was but one term for what were also variously called workbooks, notebooks, scribblers, blank books, or exercise

⁶² Ibid., 8.

⁶³ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁵ From a contemporary perspective, it seems odd that a department store would be awarded a textbook publishing contract. However, the only requirement was that the readers be printed; the Department of Education determined the content. Eaton's had certain advantages over the publishers since it could sell the readers in its stores across the country, advertise them in its catalogues, and use the distribution system in place for its other goods. Eaton's published its first *Readers* in 1909. See Penney Clark, "Great Chorus of Protest: A Case Study of Conflict over the 1909 Eaton's Readers," *History of Education Journal* (UK) 38, no. 5 (2009): 681–703.

books.) Parents were required to provide such school supplies for their children and firms competed to produce books with visual appeal for prospective purchasers. It is surprising that the firm did not publish copybooks earlier. The loss of the lucrative *Ontario Readers* contract may have provided some impetus to seek out a new market, although it was not an urgent one, given the five-year gap between the Commission Report and the publication of copybooks. Copp Clark's rival, W.J. Gage, had been producing copybooks for many years.⁶⁶ When a writer for the trade journal, *Books and Notions*, visited W.J. Gage & Co. in 1891 in order to investigate the place of copybooks in the educational publishing market, he was informed that Gage had sold 200,000 copies of one particular scribbler in the previous year. He concluded the article with these thoughts:

BOOKS AND NOTIONS left the warehouse of W.J. Gage & Co., contrasting in his mind the trade of to-day with that of fifteen years ago, when exercise books were unknown, except as ugly marble-covered affairs, and 20 and 25 cents the average retail price; when manufacturers were not so prolific in kindly and temptingly tasty suggestions to try both the dealer and consumer; and when an edition of 200,000 of a practice book for one season's trade, would have been considered the suggestion of one better fitted for a straight jacket, than to be engaged in the school book trade of this Dominion.⁶⁷

Between 1894 and 1905, W.J. Gage published about 500,000 copybooks while Copp Clark published none.⁶⁸ However, when the firm finally began to publish them, it was with a flourish. A 1912 advertisement for Copp Clark scribblers, workbooks, notebooks, and exercise books states, "It pays to satisfy your customers." It adds "especially does it pay when your customer is a boy or girl, and bound

⁶⁶ One factor in Gage's early involvement in the printing of copybooks may have been that it owned the Kinleith Paper Company, a mill in St. Catharines, Ontario. However, this cannot be the entire explanation because Copp and Clark, along with Gage and others, owned shares in the Toronto Paper Manufacturing Company.

⁶⁷ "School Note Books for the New Term," *Books and Notions* 7 (August 1891): 16.

⁶⁸ *Text Book Commission 1907*, 386–87. In Barrett, "Copp Clark Publishing Company," 1967, Frank Barrett, Vice-President and Director of Publishing incorporates an unattributed quote which states that blank books were manufactured on the third floor of the Colborne Street premises in 1880. A possible explanation for this is that Copp Clark was manufacturing them on behalf of the Canada Publishing Company, which according to the 1907 *Textbook Commission Report*, published even more of these (588,000) than did Gage.

for school.”⁶⁹ At the time, parents typically had to purchase all of their children’s school supplies, as well as their textbooks. Consumers had no choice in terms of textbook purchase, but the firm realized that it had to appeal to the end-user when it came to copybooks. Thus, the firm exploited its expertise in lithography to produce covers that would “win the children to your store,”⁷⁰ as a 1917 Copp Clark advertisement put it. The covers offered an array of images from animals, both tame and wild; to maple leaves; wilderness adventures; cozy domestic scenes; and patriotic war motifs (see fig. 9). During the Second World War, the firm published its “There’ll Always be an England” series, which featured live action war scenes. On the back cover, the chorus of “There’ll Always be an England” was accompanied by a description of the event depicted on the front cover. It was the most popular series the company had ever produced. *Bookseller and Stationer* assured its readers in 1941, that “the pictures were painted expressly for the series, not hackney [*sic*] reproductions that every one has seen, and they are packed with the action that appeals to young Canadians.”⁷¹

Figure 9. Copybook covers, *Bookseller and Stationer* 28 (May 1912): 8.

⁶⁹ “School Work Books of Merit That Will Win Trade!” *Bookseller and Stationer* 28 (May 1912): 8–9.

⁷⁰ “New Scribblers and Exercise Books [Advertisement],” *Bookseller and Stationer* 33 (April 1917): 6.

⁷¹ “Copp Clark has Series of Colorful Patriotic Covers,” *Bookseller and Stationer* 57 (April 1941): 13.

Heyday of the Firm

With third generation involvement, the firm continued to be very much a family affair through the first half of the twentieth century. Although Henry Leggatt Thompson, a non-family member, was President for 40 years, G. Dudley Thomas, son of Arnold Thomas, had a long career with the firm. He began working in the shipping room in 1904 (see fig. 10). He served overseas during World War One, and rejoined the firm as Assistant Factory Superintendent in 1919, becoming Vice-President and General Manager in 1936, and then President and General Manager in 1937, when he and his younger brother, Alan, purchased the firm. Brigadier Alan Thomas, who had joined the firm in 1922, was promoted to Vice-President and Superintendent of Manufacturing in 1936, and in 1938, he became Supervisor of the Textbook Department (see fig. 11). William H. Copp, who was a Vice-President until 1937, became Chairman of the Board of Directors at that time.⁷² William Frederick Thomas, a cousin, was appointed Second Vice-President and Manager of the Text Book Department in the same period.⁷³

The firm encountered a number of challenges during the Second World War. Provincial governments reduced their textbook orders; the price of paper went up in tandem with paper shortages; and the labour force was drastically reduced, with two principals and sixty employees leaving to serve in the armed forces.⁷⁴ Although these challenges were not easily overcome, they were no different than those experienced by other firms.⁷⁵

⁷² "Copp Clark Announces Changes in Organization," *Bookseller and Stationer* 53 (February 1937): 10; "Brigadier Alan M. Thomas Killed," *Quill & Quire* 23 (February 1937): 12, 18.

⁷³ "Copp Clark Vice-President Dead," *Bookseller and Stationer* 54 (15 March 1938): 26.

⁷⁴ "Blame Labor Lack for Textbook Shortage," *Bookseller and Stationer* 60 (September 1944): 18.

⁷⁵ "Books May Undergo Changes Ere Present War Comes to End," *Bookseller and Stationer* 58 (October 1942): 20; "Publishers Issue Text Book Warning," *Bookseller and Stationer* 58 (October 1942): 20.

Figure 10. Dudley Thomas, circa 1939. Box 1, File 10, Copp Clark fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library.

Figure 11. Alan Thomas, circa 1937.
Bookseller and Stationer 53
(February 15, 1937), 10.

Dudley Thomas was a Major and second in command of the Governor-General's Horse Guards. He saw active service early in the war, but by 1941, he was back in the business and his brother Alan Thomas was on active duty. Dudley was promoted to Lieutenant-

Colonel and took over Command of the Horse Guard 3rd (Reserve) in 1943.⁷⁶ Alan Thomas became Colonel of the Canadian 6th Brigade in 1939 and in 1940 became commander of the Canadian 11th Infantry Brigade of the Canadian Active Army. He was promoted to Brigadier at this time.⁷⁷ As *Bookseller and Stationer* put it, he “has forsaken his desk to offer his services in the destruction of Hitlerism.”⁷⁸ Alan was awarded the Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) and the Volunteer Officers’ Decoration (VD).

In spite of the privations demanded by the war, the firm continued to hold its annual Christmas party. In 1944, inclement weather resulted in cancellation, so a Valentine’s party was held in its stead. The ninety-two people in attendance sat down to a filet mignon dinner,

followed by a rousing sing-song, and a “Klondike Hour” at which fabulous sums of money changed hands at the gaming tables. Each guest was supplied at the outset with \$50,000 in currency that might not be honoured at the Bank of Canada, but which was instrumental in providing plenty of excitement during the course of the evening. Prizes were provided for those lucky winners who ended the evening’s fun up in the billion-dollar class ...

[Alan] Thomas’ “Toast to the Ladies” proved to be one of the highlights of the evening.

The party concluded with dancing for all as guests of the company in the [Royal York Hotel’s] Imperial Room.⁷⁹

Bookseller and Stationer reported that many attendees considered the party to be every bit as good as a Christmas party – hardly surprising, given its lavish nature.

The company was also generous in the broader community. In 1956, at the height of the baby boom when teachers were hard to find, it established a scholarship fund for students who wished to enter the profession. These scholarships provided \$500 per year for two students for a total of five years.⁸⁰ Ontario’s Minister of Education, Dr. W.J. Dunlop, “was moved to comment that the publishing company

⁷⁶ “Takes Over Command,” *Bookseller and Stationer* 59 (February 1942): 36.

⁷⁷ “Brigadier,” *Quill & Quire* (February 1957), 12, 18.

⁷⁸ “Copp Clark Vice-President Called on Active Service,” *Bookseller and Stationer* 57 (September 1941): 17.

⁷⁹ “Copp Clark Entertains Staff at Valentine Party,” *Bookseller and Stationer* 61 (February 1945): 16.

⁸⁰ “Copp Clark Credited with ‘Showing Way’ to Industry,” *Quill & Quire* 22 (December 1956): 9.

was showing the way for all industry, business and commerce in the alleviation of the critical shortage of professional and trained personnel in Canada, and particularly the shortage of teachers to educate others.”⁸¹ Such generosity toward the community on the part of a publishing firm does not seem particularly unusual. The irascible businessman, W.J. Gage, was knighted in 1917 for his generosity to the cause of tuberculosis patient care and research.⁸²

Still, while the firm was viewed as a good corporate citizen, some in the industry considered the Thomas brothers to be ineffective managers.⁸³ Robin Farr, who worked for the firm for a decade from 1950 to 1960, commented in a 1998 interview with Roy MacSkimming that Alan “had no real interest in books or in publishing,”⁸⁴ which is an interesting comment to make about someone who made a career of those endeavours. Farr referred to both men as “good examples of the Toronto establishment.”⁸⁵ Presumably he was referring to something similar to George Parker’s remarks in his entry on the publishing industry in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, about the “firms and their families [who] dominated Toronto publishing for three quarters of a century. Protestant, British, and northern European in background, upper-middle-class in their lifestyles, these astute businessmen broadly reflected the values of middle-class Canada and the political establishment.”⁸⁶ Although the phrase “astute businessmen” may not have been applicable to Dudley and Alan Thomas, the remainder of the description was no doubt apt. Further to this, Alan Thomas was described by Farr as follows:

R.F.: He was an inventor, a military man, a brigadier-general – he liked to be called “the Brig” – we all called him Brigadier. It was a little amusing. When he left the company’s offices each day, he had a chauffeur-driven car draw up in front of his office and

⁸¹ “Brigadier,” *Quill & Quire* (February 1957), 18.

⁸² “Sir William Gage: Head of Big Toronto Wholesale Stationery House Has Been Knighted,” *Bookseller and Stationer* (January 1918): 42. See also “People Profiles: sir William J. Gage (1848–1921), An History of the Fight Against Tuberculosis in Canada,” *Lung.ca*, www.lung.ca/tb/tbhistory/people/gage.html. Accessed 22 February, 2017.

⁸³ Interview, Roy MacSkimming with Robin Farr, 21 October 1998, Roy MacSkimming fonds, Box 2, File 5, interview #5, William Ready Division, McMaster University Library.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ George Parker, “Publishing Industry,” *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, edited by W.H. New (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 905.

when he got into the car, the man raised a little pennant on a
flagstaff on the fender – flew the company's flag.
R.M.: [both laugh] As if it was a staff car!
R.G.: As if it was a staff car – exactly.⁸⁷

Three Point Policy: Agency and Home-Grown Publishing

In 1941, Copp Clark's Text Book Department published its "three point policy." Two of the three points involved acting as an agency for the American firms D.C. Heath and Row, Peterson. The third was to publish its own textbooks for elementary and secondary schools "whenever it becomes possible to offer an outstanding work of Canadian authorship."⁸⁸ This policy was very successful for a time. A 1945 advertisement informed Copp Clark's readers that, "[t]extbooks more than ever in recent years, are essential to the cultural and technical growth of a country. Copp Clark is proud of the contribution they, as leading publishers of Canadian textbooks, have made to the development of Canada during the past century."⁸⁹

This "three point policy" captures the two revenue streams available to Canadian educational publishers at the time: acting as agencies for American publishers and publishing their own books. Agency contracts were attractive because the Canadian firm took on none of the expensive development costs unique to textbooks. According to Paul Audley, author of a study commissioned by the Canadian Institute for Economic Policy, in the early 1950s and through the 1960s, "without exception the major successful Canadian-controlled book publishers all acted as exclusive agents in the Canadian market for books published by the leading American and British publishers, while also actively producing Canadian textbooks."⁹⁰ However, as Rowland Lorimer has pointed out, "[w]ithin this business was a ticking time bomb. By monitoring the sales of such Canadian agents, some U.S. publishers recognized a growing market for their books and, in response, cancelled agency agreements and set up branch

⁸⁷ MacSkimming with Farr, 1998.

⁸⁸ "The Three Point Policy of the Copp Clark Text Book Department," *Bookseller and Stationer* 57 (September 1941): 18.

⁸⁹ Copp Clark advertisement, *Bookseller and Stationer* 61 (September 1945): 56–57.

⁹⁰ Paul Audley, *Canada's Cultural Industries: Broadcasting, Publishing, Records and Film* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1983), 99.

plants to serve the Canadian market directly. This trend was especially strong among educational publishers.”⁹¹

Figure 12. *Alice and Jerry Readers*, Row, Peterson. Mabel O'Donnell and Alice Carey, *Here and There* (1936, 1941). Mary Geisler Phillips and Mabel O'Donnell, *Anything Can Happen* (1940). Courtesy of Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Figure 13. *Alice and Jerry Readers*, Row Peterson. *Here and There*, pp. 2–3. Courtesy of Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

⁹¹ Rowland Lorimer, *Ultra Libris: Policy, Technology, and the Creative Economy of Book Publishing in Canada* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2012), 84.

In 1938, Copp Clark began acting as an agent for the *Alice and Jerry* series of readers published by Row, Peterson of Evanston, Illinois, after convincing that firm to cancel its existing contracts with W.J. Gage (see figs. 12 and 13).⁹² These books represent the contemporary trend to graduated reading series, with controlled vocabularies. In this particular series, sixty-seven words were introduced in the Basic Pre-Primer. The Second Pre-Primer, *Here and There*, repeats those words and adds eleven new ones.

Originally, Copp Clark simply imported Row, Peterson's books, promising to limit sales to Canada, to work towards provincial authorizations, and to pay Row, Peterson a royalty of two cents on some books and three cents on others. In 1954, a new contract required Row, Peterson to "furnish at cost such films and patterns of its existing books as may prove useful to Copp." In this contract a royalty of 10 percent is identified on all sales above the first run of 30,000 copies for the readers and for all copies of the workbooks developed for the readers. Copp Clark sold Row, Peterson's arithmetic texts and their accompanying workbooks, with the same royalty arrangement.⁹³

Copp Clark is not named in the early editions of the *Alice and Jerry Readers*, even though the firm had been acting as agent to Row, Peterson since 1938. In 1948, Copp Clark published a new edition, with the title of each book preceded by "New;" i.e., *Day in and Day Out* became *The New Day In and Day Out*. In this version of the series Row, Peterson remained the copyright holder, but Copp Clark is listed in large letters on the title page, with Row Peterson listed below in smaller letters. On the copyright page, there appears the statement, written in italics, "*Lithographed in Canada by the Copp Clark Press.*" This is a significant departure from the original series, in which the Copp Clark name is nowhere to be found.

The original readers were not authorized in Ontario, but the "new" set of eight books was authorized in 1950 and remained on *Circular 14*, Ontario's list of authorized textbooks, until 1960. The approach to authorization for the readers was unusual in that they were listed under the category, "Books Approved for Permissive Use." Teachers were advised that one basic reading series was to be selected from a list of five options offered by W.J. Gage, John C. Winston, Ginn, Copp

⁹² W.L. Cossens (President, Row, Peterson) to A.M. Thomas, November 21, 1938, Box 11, File 40, Copp Clark fonds.

⁹³ Contract, Row, Peterson & Company and The Copp Clark Company, April 20, 1954, Box 11, File 40, Copp Clark fonds.

Clark (Row, Peterson is not mentioned.), and Thos. Nelson & Sons (Canada). There is no indication of the later emphasis on privileging Canadian firms. W.J. Gage and Copp Clark were the only Canadian publishers on the list and both were acting as agencies for reading series developed by American firms, Gage with its *Dick and Jane* series from Scott Foresman and Copp Clark with its *Alice and Jerry* series from Row, Peterson. The remaining firms John C. Winston, Ginn, and Thos. Nelson & Sons (Canada) were branch plants, with the parent companies of the first two located in the United States and the latter in Scotland. Sales figures from Gage and Copp Clark are not available, so it is not possible to be certain which series was more successful. What can be said is that they had an even field on which to compete from 1950 through to the end of the 1959–60 school year. It is also fair to say that Gage's *Dick and Jane* series achieved an iconic status not enjoyed by the *Alice and Jerry* series. That iconic status would seem to indicate that they were more widely used in classrooms.

Over time, the Row, Peterson books were slightly Canadianized. In one instance, the American firm agreed to substitute an American flag with a Red Cross flag, so as not to offend Canadian sensibilities or impact book sales.⁹⁴ Traveller Robin Farr⁹⁵ later recalled sitting in his hotel room in Regina, Saskatchewan, "cutting out all the American coins and pasting in the Canadian coins before I took it [the Row, Peterson sample reader] to show"⁹⁶ to teachers.

The *Alice and Jerry* contract remained in effect until Row Peterson merged with Harper & Brothers in 1962, to become Harper & Row.⁹⁷ The contracts were then sold by Harper & Row to Fitzhenry & Whiteside, a Canadian firm begun by Robert Fitzhenry, who had worked for Harper & Row in its Trade Department. F.L. Barrett, Manager of the Copp Clark Textbook Department, was not satisfied with the final payments received from Fitzhenry & Whiteside, insisting that they were about \$3600.00 short of what was owed. Fitzhenry paid what he considered was due and then stopped responding to Barrett's letters. Barrett commented: "I must say, as I have said so often that when a principal changes his agent, he has

⁹⁴ G.M. Jones (President, Row Peterson) to T.E. Lindsay, November 7, 1956, Box 11, File 40, Copp Clark Fonds.

⁹⁵ Salespeople were called travellers.

⁹⁶ MacSkimming with Farr, 1998.

⁹⁷ "Harper (publisher)," Wikipedia, last modified 26 August 2016, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harper_%28publisher%29.

a moral responsibility to be certain that the old agent, especially a competent and faithful one, does not suffer in any way as a result of the change. We have suffered loss of interest on money owing to us and loss of inventory value on books turned over.”⁹⁸

However, Copp Clark’s legal counsel advised Barrett against pursuing the matter because of the cost of doing so in the state of New York, particularly given that the question of liability was not clear cut.⁹⁹ In the end, in spite of his previous bitterness, Barrett seemed sanguine. He noted in a letter to Michael Pitman, President of the firm, that:

We were hurt and annoyed at Harper, Row’s action in taking their list from us and we charged them heavily for transportation and for discount on the dollar. Further, we gathered up books from our sample shelves and books from the outside offices and claimed recompense no matter how old the books were or how dirty and battered.

It seems to me that despite the figures on our books showing a loss, we may not have come out of the situation so badly as seems.¹⁰⁰

It seems clear from this account that, while Canadian firms were not in a position of power in their agency relationships with much larger American firms, as one would expect, they still actively sought ways to achieve their own ends as far as was feasible and possible.

Publishing the Firm’s Own Textbooks

Copp Clark was described in 1957 as “the biggest in Canada dealing with the elementary and high schools division.”¹⁰¹ The decades of the 1950s and 1960s were the heyday of educational publishing in Canada and Copp Clark was very much a part of this. The firm’s *The Story of Canada* (1949), written by George Williams Brown, Eleanor Harman, and Marsh Jeanneret, was authorized in most provinces and sold about 1,000,000 copies, an astonishing number even for this period.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ “Statement Covering Payment for Copp Clark Books Delivered to Fitzhenry & Whiteside,” n.d., Box 41, File 11, Copp Clark fonds.

⁹⁹ J. Paul Terry to F.L. Barrett, 29 June, 1970, Box 11, File 40, Copp Clark fonds.

¹⁰⁰ F.L. Barrett to Mr. Michael Pitman, 20 October, 1970, Box 11, File 40, Copp Clark Fonds.

¹⁰¹ “Brigadier,” *Quill & Quire* (February 1957), 12.

¹⁰² Roy MacSkimming, *The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada, 1946–2006* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), 94.

In 1960, Copp Clark had a substantial presence on *Circular 14*. In fact, fifty of the three hundred prescribed textbooks on the 1960 *Circular 14* were published by the firm. These included elementary and secondary arithmetic texts, in both English and French; social studies, history and geography texts; French and Latin texts; the *Canadian Reading Development Series* readers (grades four to six); and high school English texts, as well as others. The *Canadian Reading Development Series*, a graduated series of elementary school readers (i.e., with new and increasingly more demanding vocabulary introduced in each succeeding book), was authorized in many provinces.

The graph below, which appeared in the report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing, represents the presence of various textbook publishers on Ontario's 1971 *Circular 14* (see fig. 14). It is interesting to note that Copp Clark has the fourth largest representation and is the only firm in the top four that was not owned by an American publisher, the British firm Pitman being its owner at this time. A look at the list itself reveals that the range of subject areas represented is as broad as in 1960. The *Canadian Reading Development Series* has expanded, with readers at the primary (grades one to three) as well as the junior (grades four to six) levels. The early grade texts in this series included *Off to School*, *Stories of Fun and Adventure*, and *Stories Old and New*, titles familiar to many Canadian members of the baby boom generation.

Figure 14. Number of Titles per Publisher in *Circular 14* (1971). Adapted from Royal Commission on Book Publishing, 1973. *Canadian Publishers and Canadian Publishing*. © Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1973, 190. Courtesy of Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Ontario.

Final Years

In 1955, Copp Clark went public, and the controlling interest passed to Masters, Smith & Co., a holding company. Dudley Thomas retired at this time and Alan Thomas took over as President and General Manager,¹⁰³ stepping down as President in January 1957, at the age of 62. Eight days before his retirement he had become president of Winter Hydrocraft Ltd., which was engaged in production of snow scooters for the Department of National Defence.¹⁰⁴ He died tragically that same month at (military) Camp Borden, where he was demonstrating a snow scooter that he had helped to design and build. The propeller stuck, “so like an airplane mechanic used to do, he went around to start it – pulling down on the propeller – and it came down and decapitated him. Killed him instantly. That’s how Alan Thomas met his death. It was astonishing.”¹⁰⁵ Chairman of the Board, Gordon Keith Master, took on additional duties as President and Secretary, in 1958.

In 1963, Sir Isaac Pitman (Canada), a branch of a British firm, purchased Copp Clark and amalgamated it with Hunter Rose, another old Canadian firm it had purchased previously. The loss of the *Alice and Jerry* agency contract the previous year was likely a factor in the sale. Other lucrative options were not available to Copp Clark because, since the war, American firms had increasingly been choosing to establish their own branch plants rather than using Canadian firms as agencies.

Copp Clark continued to publish as a Pitman imprint after the sale. Longman, another British publisher, which had been owned by Pearson PLC¹⁰⁶ since 1968, acquired Pitman in 1986. In 1994, Pearson merged Longman with another subsidiary, Addison-Wesley, to form Addison-Wesley Longman. In 1998, Pearson acquired the educational publishing division of Simon and Schuster and merged it with Addison-Wesley Longman to form Pearson Education. In 2004, Addison-Wesley Longman took over distribution of all trade and education titles previously handled by Copp Clark. At this point, Copp Clark disappeared as a separate textbook publishing

¹⁰³ “Masters Smith Buys Copp Clark Publishing Firm,” *The Globe and Mail*, 20 October, 1955, 36.

¹⁰⁴ “Brigadier,” *Quill & Quire* (February 1957), 12, 18.

¹⁰⁵ MacSkimming with Farr, 1998.

¹⁰⁶ Public Limited Company (PLC) refers to a company that has offered shares to the general public and has limited liability.

entity. Copp Clark Limited, the trading name since 1996, is currently part of Pearson Canada, a wholly owned division of Pearson PLC. Today, Copp Clark is the “leading publisher of financial trading and settlement calendars in the world ... the authoritative source for information on holiday observances affecting global financial markets.” It is described as “the oldest continuously active publisher in Canada.”¹⁰⁷ Copp Clark, began as a bookstore, became a very successful educational publisher, and ended as a minor division of a multinational conglomerate, producing financial trading calendars. Copp Clark, the educational publisher, vanished.

Changing Times for Publishers

By 1970, Canadian educational publishers’ profits were dropping significantly. Changing Department of Education policies in Ontario had a huge influence because this was the major market in the country for educational texts. Therefore, the cancellation in 1968 of Ontario’s textbook stimulation grant, which involved funding earmarked for textbook purchases, had a significant effect on textbook purchases. A related factor was the provision of greater autonomy to local school boards. The boards typically decided to divert funds to expenses such as teacher salaries and building maintenance rather than to textbooks. As a result textbook expenditures went from 2.5 percent of budgets in 1967 to 1 percent in 1978.¹⁰⁸

The establishment of branch plants by American firms created powerful competition for Canadian firms. Production costs were much lower for the American firms because they were often able to simply adapt existing materials for the Canadian market rather than produce completely new materials, as the Canadian firms had to do. Pedagogical changes, involving reduced reliance on textbooks, also influenced textbook purchases. Lists of authorized textbooks increased in size, giving school boards much greater choice. For example, between 1950 and 1971, Ontario’s list had a thirtyfold increase from 61 books to 1648.¹⁰⁹ Prescribed curricula, which had

¹⁰⁷ “About Us,” Copp Clark, www.coppclark.com/about-CompanyHistory.aspx. Accessed 30 June 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Delores Broten and Peter Birdsall, *Paper Phoenix: A History of Book Publishing in English Canada* (Victoria: Canlit, 1980), 31.

¹⁰⁹ Viola E. Parvin Day, “The Authorization of Textbooks for the Schools of Ontario from 1846 to the Present,” in *Royal Commission on Book Publishing: Background*

formerly provided the specifications for the development of textbooks, became broader and more flexible, which opened the door to a wider variety of classroom resources. In addition, the abandonment of provincial exams in many provinces increased teachers' freedom to diverge from prescribed curricula and to use a wide range of classroom resources, including new multimedia resources. Furthermore, many elementary school teachers were beginning to use storybooks and novels rather than prescribed reading series. Publishers could no longer count on a textbook authorization to guarantee high sales figures, since teachers now had so many more options. Because films, filmstrips, audiotapes and picture sets were more expensive than textbooks, funds did not stretch as far. Textbooks were also expected to be more visually appealing than previously. This factor contributed to higher manufacturing costs, which made them less affordable. The final nail in the coffin was the stabilization of school enrolment. By 1968, the bulk of the postwar baby boom had moved through the kindergarten to grade twelve system and was crowding into postsecondary institutions, where there were no provincially authorized textbooks.

Copp Clark had a long history, beginning as a book and stationery store in 1841 and continuing to publish as a Copp Clark imprint after its sale to the British firm Pitman in 1963. This history represents a typical path for Canadian publishers, with the firm beginning as a printer/publisher and retail store before focusing solely on publishing. Like the Canadian firms W.J. Gage and Clarke Irwin,¹¹⁰ much of Copp Clark's ownership and management stayed within the family. Like those firms, its main source of revenue was educational publishing, deliberately chosen because that was the most lucrative option. As an educational publisher, millions of Canadian school children read Copp Clark textbooks over the course of more than a century. Again, like other Canadian firms, it became part of a multinational corporation.

The Copp Clark sale was only one of a long string of similar sales. The President and CEO of McGraw-Hill Ryerson left at this time and oversight of the Canadian branch is now carried out from the United States. The iconic Canadian firm McClelland & Stewart, established in 1906 as McClelland & Goodchild, was also a successful educational publisher for a time. By 2003, 25 percent of the firm was

Papers (Province of Ontario: Queen's Printer and Publisher, 1972), 311–39 (326, 328).

¹¹⁰ Clarke Irwin, a Canadian-owned family firm, was established in 1930 and went into receivership in 1983.

owned by Random House Canada and 75 percent by the University of Toronto Press. On January 10, 2012, it was sold in its entirety to Random House Canada, a division of Random House, which is in turn a division of the international book publishing division of German media giant Bertelsmann. It was described at the time as “a [multinational] subsidiary of a [multinational] subsidiary.”¹¹¹ Penguin and Random House merged in 2013, so it is now an imprint of Penguin Random House. At the time of the sale of McClelland & Stewart to Random House, the Association of Canadian Publishers issued a press release lamenting the loss of the firm, referring to it as “Canada’s most storied book publisher [which] will be downgraded to an imprint of a foreign-owned multinational corporation. Today’s announcement marks the end of a long and illustrious history of a Canadian cultural institution.”¹¹² ACP President Margie Wolfe was quoted as saying, “I want to cry ... It’s a sad day for Canada, and the end of a long and glorious chapter in Canadian publishing.”¹¹³

Conclusion

A key dilemma of Canadian educational publishing is whether it is culture or economics that is more important. For many Canadians, culture trumps economics, which is why there has been so much public anguish whenever a publisher has been sold to a foreign or multinational firm. It is not merely about the sale of a business, but rather the sale (and disappearance) of an important vehicle for the transmission of Canadian culture. This takes on greater weight in educational publishing than in other branches of the industry due to the desire to inculcate a sense of national identity in the young.

Solely from a nationalistic perspective it would be ideal for all publishing companies to be wholly Canadian-owned. But Canadian firms have not had access to sufficient levels of capital to make this happen. Consequently, they have been subsumed by global entities that are only as responsive as they are forced to be to Canadian concerns. As a result, educational publishing in Canada is no longer “the brightest star on the publishing horizon.”

¹¹¹ Quoted in Robert Fulford, “Jack McClelland’s Canada Isn’t Going Anywhere,” *National Post*, 4 February 2012, A19.

¹¹² Press Release: “Publishers Mourn the Loss of McClelland & Stewart,” Association of Canadian Publishers, 10 January, 2012, 1–2 (1).

¹¹³ Ibid.

Figure 15. George W. Brown, Eleanor Harman, and Marsh Jeanneret, *The Story of Canada*. Toronto: Copp Clark, 1949.

Figure 16. Two examples from the The Canadian Reading Development Series, Copp Clark: F.C. Biehl, Marian D. James, and Barbara I. Sibbald (Consultants), *Off to School*, 1960; and F.C. Biehl, *Stories Old and New*, 1965.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, l'auteure examine le cas de la maison d'édition canadienne Copp Clark et sa contribution à l'approvisionnement de manuels scolaires sur le territoire canadien. Marquée par trois grandes phases, l'histoire de la firme est représentative de la triste histoire des éditeurs de manuels scolaires en général. L'entreprise fit ses débuts en tant que librairie de détail. Elle s'acquittait parallèlement de travaux d'impression et de lithographie. Progressivement, elle se mit à l'édition de manuels scolaires, devenant une agence pour des maisons d'édition étrangères tout en développant et en produisant ses propres titres. Finalement, Copp Clark fut racheté par une firme établie à l'étranger. Après plusieurs rachats et fusions commerciales et éditoriales, la maison d'édition de manuels scolaires disparut complètement. L'auteure de cette contribution se penche sur trois aspects du programme éditorial de l'entreprise : d'abord, les *Ontario Readers*, un contrat que Copp Clark partageait avec deux autres firmes; ensuite, la publication de cahiers d'écriture; enfin, le rôle de la maison d'édition en tant que représentante pour la firme américaine Row Peterson. Dans son étude, l'auteure analyse également les facteurs économiques, politiques, administratifs, démographiques et pédagogiques qui ont contribué à la disparition de ce fleuron de l'édition canadienne. En fait, la trajectoire de la maison d'édition est située dans un contexte plus large : celui de l'édition canadienne en général.