Canadian Comic Books at Library and Archives Canada¹

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Abstract

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) has what is likely the largest collection of Canadian comic books in a Canadian library. LAC's collection has three distinct parts: comics acquired via legal deposit, the John Bell Collection of Canadian Comic Books, and the Bell Features Collection. These holdings, which span the history of the comics medium in Canada, represent a significant resource for researchers studying Canadian comics. This article looks at each of the three main parts of LAC's comic book collection, giving an overview of the contents of each part, and providing information on how researchers can discover and access these comics. The article also briefly explores other comics-related holdings at LAC. Its purpose is to provide a starting point for researchers seeking to make use of LAC's comic book collections.

Résumé

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada (BAC) recèle ce qui constitue vraisemblablement la plus vaste collection de bandes dessinées canadiennes dans une bibliothèque canadienne. La collection de BAC comporte trois parties distinctes: les bandes dessinées acquises grâce au dépôt légal, la collection de bandes dessinées canadiennes de John Bell et la collection Bell Features. Ce fonds documentaire, qui couvre l'histoire du médium bandes dessinées, représente une ressource importante pour les chercheurs qui étudient les bandes dessinées

¹ This article draws on research I have previously presented in two conference papers: "Drawn Across the Border: Canadian Comic Books at Library and Archives Canada," Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, May 27, 2014, and "Written, Drawn, and Printed in Canada—by Canadians!": Bell Features, CanCon, and the Perception of Comics in Postwar Canada," Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, Montreal, QC, July 10, 2015.

canadiennes. Cet article examine chacune des trois principales parties de la collection de bandes dessinées de BAC, offrant une vue d'ensemble du contenu de chaque partie ainsi que de l'information pour aider les chercheurs à découvrir ces bandes dessinées et à y accéder. Cet article se penche aussi brièvement sur les autres fonds de BAC reliés à la bande dessinée. Son objectif est de fournir un point de départ pour les chercheurs qui souhaitent utiliser les collections de bandes dessinées de BAC.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) has what is likely the largest collection of Canadian comic books in a Canadian library.

This statement requires some clarification.

First, what is a comic book? The umbrella term “comics,” or “bandes dessinée” in French, can refer to many different forms of graphic storytelling. For example, there are the single panel gag comics perhaps typified by the ones seen in *The New Yorker*. There are editorial cartoons, the biting political drawings traditionally printed in newspapers. There are comic strips, also found in newspapers: stories told in sequences of three or four panels, some, like Lynn Johnston's *For Better or for Worse*, running over the course of many years.

Readers tend to encounter the forms named above as subordinate works placed within larger, mostly text-based items: magazines or newspapers. A comic book, by contrast, is a standalone publication. It may include pages of text, but the most significant part of the content is comic art. Comic books are usually about 30 pages long, and are published in a pamphlet format bound with staples. They are often—but not always—serials, in both the bibliographic sense of periodical publishing, and the literary sense of serialized storytelling. The comic book's serial nature and its magazine format distinguish it from its more respected relation, the graphic novel, which is a book-length and book-format work of comic art. Librarians will note that a graphic novel is generally assigned an International Standard Book Number (ISBN), while a comic book receives an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN).

Graphic novels are now fixtures in public and school library collections, but comic books tend to be found mainly in special collections areas of research libraries. In the United States, for example, two of the most significant collections are at the Library of Congress and Michigan State University. In Canada, the major comic

book collections are the Dr. Eddy Smet Collection of Comic Books at the University of Western Ontario and the various collections at LAC.

A second point of clarification: what is a *Canadian* comic book? Canadiana, LAC's national bibliography of Canada, names two categories of material: "publications produced in Canada" and those "published elsewhere that are of special interest or significance to Canada,"² also known as "foreign Canadiana." Works published abroad by Canadians are considered foreign Canadiana, as are works about Canada created by non-Canadians and published abroad. Following the Canadiana inclusion criteria, Canadian comic books may be defined as comic books published in Canada, or published outside Canada by Canadians or about Canada.

Three distinct parts make up the majority of LAC's Canadian comic book holdings: the collection of comics acquired via legal deposit, the John Bell Collection of Canadian Comic Books, and the Bell Features Collection.³ These holdings represent a significant resource for researchers who wish to study Canadian comics. LAC's collection spans the history of the medium in Canada, incorporating material from the earliest days of Canadian comic book publishing up to the present. It contains items from all regions of the country, from mainstream and alternative presses, as well as self-publishers. The collection is not complete, but it is large and very rich: despite some limitations (explored below), legal deposit is a powerful tool that allows LAC to capture a large amount of the material published in Canada. LAC's two major special collections of Canadian comic books—the John Bell and Bell Features collections—are also outstanding in their breadth. While most of the content in its collection can be found elsewhere, LAC stands out among Canadian libraries for the sheer amount of Canadian comics material it holds. A researcher wishing to study comics publishing in Canada, specific Canadian comics creators, or any other topic related to Canadian comics has a wealth of material to draw from in LAC's collection.

This article provides an overview of each of the three main parts of LAC's comic book collection, as identified above. It concludes with

² "Canadiana: The National Bibliography of Canada," Services and Programs, Library and Archives Canada, last modified April 25, 2018, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/ENG/SERVICES/CANADIANA/Pages/canadiana-national-bibliography.aspx>.

³ The fact that "Bell" appears in the names of two of these collections is a coincidence that is often a source of confusion, as people get the two collections mixed up or mistakenly believe they are one and the same.

a brief look at other comics-related holdings in LAC's collection of published material, such as graphic novels. It does not attempt to examine current scholarship on Canadian comics. My goal is merely to provide a starting point for researchers seeking to make use of the extensive Canadian comic book holdings at LAC.

Legal Deposit Collection⁴

LAC's core collection development tool for published material is legal deposit. Since the National Library of Canada (NLC) was established in 1953, the federal government has legally required all publishers to deposit copies of every publication made available in Canada with the organization filling the national library function (from 1953–2004, the NLC; from 2004–present, LAC).⁵ LAC thus seems extremely well placed to collect comic books published in Canada. Indeed, legal deposit has enabled LAC to develop a large collection of these comic books (and graphic novels). Its holdings from the 1980s are particularly strong. This was a “boom” period for Canadian comic books,⁶ with publishers such as Vortex Comics, Aardvark-Vanaheim, and Aircel Comics all producing multiple titles and depositing them with LAC.⁷ Searches in LAC's National Union Catalogue database and international union catalogue WorldCat suggest that LAC is the only Canadian location for the physical versions of most of these publishers' titles.⁸

⁴ I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my colleagues Ivan Basar, Alison Harding-Hlady, Natalie LeBlond, Bill Leonard, Nathalie Mainville, and Kristen Wylie, who helped this special collections librarian understand and navigate the world of serials acquisitions and comic book cataloguing at LAC.

⁵ Though legal deposit at first applied only to books, it expanded to cover serials in 1965. There are still some exceptions to legal deposit; for example, publications printed in very small editions. Source: “Legal Deposit,” Services and Programs, Library and Archives Canada, last modified August 14, 2018, <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/legal-deposit/Pages/legal-deposit.aspx>.

⁶ Bell, *Invaders from the North*, 121–36.

⁷ Aardvark-Vanaheim's co-founder, Deni Loubert, left the company in April 1984 to start a new firm. Though her new company, Renegade Press, was located in California, Loubert continued to publish the work of a number of Canadian creators (see Bell, *Invaders from the North*, 128). Interestingly—and fortunately for LAC—she also continued to comply with Canadian legal deposit!

⁸ Searches conducted in August 2018 for titles such as *Cerebus* (Aardvark-Vanaheim), *Mister X* (Vortex), *Yummy Fur* (Vortex), *Black Kiss* (Vortex), *Dragonring* (Aircel), and *Elflord* (Aircel).

A lack of stability in the Canadian comic book publishing industry, however, presents challenges to LAC's ability to collect comprehensively using legal deposit as its primary means of acquisition. In his book *Invaders from the North*, John Bell lists about 30 Canadian comic book publishers that emerged between 1989 and 2006, noting that most of them "issued a handful of comics and then folded, usually after a year or two."⁹ This short life span seems to be the rule rather than the exception for Canadian comic book publishers. A search conducted in the Grand Comics Database (comics.org) showed that about 90% of the Canadian publishers listed there had released five titles or fewer.¹⁰

While legal deposit becomes almost automatic for large, established publishers, smaller start-up firms and self-publishers may not be aware of their obligations. Some self-published comics are essentially what we might think of as zines: photocopied publications printed in very small editions and often distributed through informal networks. Outreach to small press comics creators is possible, but may be difficult given the short lifespans of some companies and the small scale of many self-publishers' output.

The exercise of legal deposit by staff at LAC also depends to some degree on the fact that publishers will comply with certain established standards such as the use of ISSNs for serials. LAC is the issuing body for ISSNs in Canada. All new serials titles are registered with the ISSN office. The ISSN office sends information about new titles to the legal deposit team, which then uses it to create claims for new publications. If every comic book publisher registered all its titles with the ISSN office, LAC would have a complete list of titles published in Canada. Of course, nothing is that simple. Self-published comics in particular are highly unlikely to enter the ISSN system; zine creators tend to reject the apparatus of traditional publishing.¹¹

Still, researchers looking for comic books published in Canada have a good chance of finding what they want in LAC's collection. That said, the institution's practices in terms of description and storage of comic books place limitations on how users can discover the comics.

⁹ John Bell, *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006), 176.

¹⁰ Search conducted in August 2018 using an advanced query to search for publishers whose country of origin was listed as Canada.

¹¹ Alycia Sellie, "Backward C inside a Circle: Free Culture in Zines" (Master's thesis, City University of New York, 2013), 3, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1150&context=gc_etds.

Other than searching the catalogue for specific titles, there is no easy way to locate all of LAC's legal deposit comic book holdings. A physical assessment of the collection is impossible because there is no "legal deposit comic book collection" per se. The various comic book titles received via legal deposit are not stored together in a dedicated comic book area; rather, they are integrated with the rest of LAC's holdings. This, of course, does not necessarily mean the comic books are separated from each other: as anyone who has browsed a library's shelves is aware, many libraries use classification as a means of keeping similar materials together. LAC uses the Library of Congress (LC) classification scheme, under which the range PN6700-6790 indicates "Comic books, strips, etc." Cataloguers at LAC do generally assign numbers in the PN6700 range—specifically, PN6733 and PN6734, the numbers designated for Canadian works—to graphic novels. But the institution uses accession numbers rather than LC classification for serials, the category that includes the majority of comic books.¹² Accession numbers are assigned to items in the order in which they are processed. Unlike LC numbers, they do not provide any intellectual context about an item's subject matter, author, or genre.

There is also no one search term that will allow researchers to identify all the comic book holdings in the catalogue. Searching by call number is, obviously, a non-starter. While there are subject and genre headings that identify comic books, these headings have been applied inconsistently at LAC, mainly due to changes in cataloguing standards and policies over time. The heading "Comic books, strips, etc.," sometimes with various subdivisions attached (e.g., "Comic books, strips, etc.—Canada—Periodicals"), is present on some records, but many older titles have no subject headings at all. Around 2015, LAC's cataloguers began assigning the heading "Comics (graphic works)" from the *Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms for Library and*

¹² Serial accession numbers formerly took the format "letter-number-number" (e.g., K-12-1 for *Captain Canuck*). These numbers referred to an actual shelf location. In 1995, the format changed to numbers beginning with "PER" (short for periodicals), followed by a size classification (e.g., "REG" for regular), the year the title was first catalogued, and a number (e.g., PER.REG.2016.34 for the series *Saskatch-a-man*, published by Saskatoon's Cuckoo's Nest Press, which was presumably the 34th serial title catalogued at LAC in 2016). The older shelf list numbers are gradually being converted to the new format; for these converted numbers, the date element of the shelf list number will not refer to the date of cataloguing.

Archival Materials thesaurus to both comic books and graphic novels.¹³ Narrower terms such as “Superhero comics” have been applied as well, where appropriate. “Graphic novels” is itself a narrower term under “Comics (graphic works),” and has been applied to LAC’s graphic novels. Unfortunately, there is no narrower term to distinguish the subset of comic books within the “Comics (graphic works)” format. It is possible, however, to do a subject keyword search for “Comics (graphic works)” in Aurora, LAC’s library catalogue, and limit the result set to the “Journal/Magazine” format. This search should capture all comic books catalogued as serials at LAC since approximately 2015.

John Bell Collection of Canadian Comic Books

LAC’s second major comic book collection is the John Bell Collection of Canadian Comic Books. Comprising approximately 4,000 items, the John Bell Collection was acquired in four accessions (1994, 1996–97, 2008, and 2011). Its creator is the writer, comic book historian, and retired LAC archivist John Bell. Bell began accumulating Canadian comic books in the 1970s with the intention of creating a checklist of every comic book ever published in Canada; the checklist was ultimately published as *Canuck Comics* (Montreal: Matrix Books, 1986). Among Bell’s other major contributions to the study of Canadian comic book history are the Canadian Museum of Caricature’s 1992 exhibition *Guardians of the North: The National Superhero in Canadian Comic-Book Art*,¹⁴ the virtual exhibition *Beyond the Funnies: The History of Comics in English Canada and Quebec* (co-curated with Michel Viau),¹⁵ and the book *Invaders from the North: How Canada Conquered the Comic Book Universe*.

¹³ The translation of this term in the Université Laval’s French thesaurus, Répertoire de vedettes-matières (RVM), is “Bandes dessinées.” LAC’s current practice is to assign both English and French subject headings to all materials.

¹⁴ An exhibition catalogue for *Guardians of the North* was published by the National Archives of Canada in 1992. A web version of the exhibition was created in 2001 and can still be found online: “Guardians of the North: The National Superhero in Canadian Comic-Book Art,” Library and Archives Canada, last modified July 12, 2001, http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/lac-bac/guardians_north-ef/2009/www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/superheroes/index-e.html.

¹⁵ “Beyond the Funnies: The History of Comics in English Canada and Quebec,” Library and Archives Canada, last modified June 24, 2006, <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/comics/>.

Bell began collecting with the goal of building a complete collection of Canadian comic books. In this quest for completeness, Bell amassed a wide variety of material, including not only comics from Canadian publishers like Aircel and Vortex, but also comics published by the federal and various provincial governments, as well as self-published comics, comics published in the United States by Canadian creators, and comics issued by institutions like corporations, schools, and professional associations. These more ephemeral items—for example, the Ontario Chiropractic Association title *Inspector Spine at the Rodeo*—are not often found in other library collections.

Bell's comics are kept as a special collection within LAC's Rare Book Collection. They are currently stored alphabetically by title in numbered bins (pamphlet boxes), with the first and second accessions interfiled while the third and fourth remain discrete. At the time of writing, title-level cataloguing has been completed for approximately 7% of titles in the collection. As each title is catalogued, it is assigned an alphanumeric John Bell accession number in the format "JB-number-number," where the first set of numbers refers to the bin in which the item is stored and the second to the position of the title within its bin.¹⁶ The collection as a whole is discoverable via a catalogue record that includes a biographical sketch of John Bell as well as an overview of the collection's contents.¹⁷ Attached to the record is a shelf list in Excel format containing an inventory of the first and second accessions.¹⁸ The spreadsheet lists a single comic book per row, with columns for bin number, title, issue number, copy number, publisher, date of publication, place of publication, notes on the item (e.g., comments on condition), and language of publication.

There is some overlap between the John Bell Collection and LAC's legal deposit holdings. But Bell has helped to fill some of the gaps in LAC's collection created by the previously discussed issues with depending solely on legal deposit to collect comic books published in Canada. In particular, Bell made an effort to collect in the area of

¹⁶ For example, *New Triumph* (Montreal: Matrix Graphic Series, 1984–) has been assigned the number JB-104-03, meaning that it is the third title in the 104th bin.

¹⁷ See OCLC 1007765126.

¹⁸ The list was prepared by Rachel Richey in 2011. A list of the third and fourth accessions is in progress.

self-published and small press comics,¹⁹ which are especially likely to fall through the cracks in legal deposit. Self-published work by notable creators such as Chester Brown, Julie Doucet, and Colin Upton would likely not have found its way into LAC's collection if not for Bell.

Bell Features Collection

The third major comic book collection at LAC also consists of material that could not have been collected via legal deposit, in this case because it predates the existence of the NLC and the legal deposit regulations. The Bell Features Collection is much smaller in size than either the legal deposit collection or the John Bell Collection, but is perhaps equally significant in terms of content. It consists of 193 distinct issues of 17 titles published by the Toronto-based Second World War-era publisher Bell Features. Many of these 193 comic books are held in multiple copies; the total number of items in the collection is 382. The collection is Bell Features' own library of its publications. It was acquired by the National Archives of Canada in 1972 from filmmakers Michael Hirsh and Patrick Loubert, who in turn had acquired it in 1970 from John Ezrin, one of Bell Features' original investors.

All 382 of these comic books were published by Bell Features between approximately 1941 and 1946. In December 1940, Canada's government banned the importation of luxury goods, including comic books, from the United States.²⁰ This created an opportunity for Canadian publishers to fill the market gap left by the absence of American comics. The result was a golden age for Canadian comics, with Bell Features being one of the main content producers. When the ban on American comics was eventually lifted, the Canadian publishers could not compete. Gradually, they all disappeared. Bell Features folded in the early 1950s.

During its most significant period of activity, Bell Features published a line of six main anthology titles: *Active Comics*, *Commando*

¹⁹ "For the Greater Good," Podcasts, Library and Archives Canada, last modified May 30, 2017, <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/news/podcasts/Pages/for-the-greater-good.aspx>.

²⁰ The history of how the 1940 passage of the legislation called the War Exchange Conservation Act led to the birth of the English Canadian comic book industry has been recounted in many different sources; e.g., Bell, *Invaders from the North*, 43–56.

Comics, Dime Comics, Joke Comics, Triumph Comics, and Wow Comics. Within the pages of these comic books, the company introduced a number of distinctly Canadian heroes. The Inuit demigoddess Nelvana of the Northern Lights and the patriotic soldier Johnny Canuck are perhaps the two most well-known, both having been featured on stamps issued by Canada Post in 1995. But the company's lineup boasted these and many other characters who were specifically identified as Canadian:

- Royal Canadian Air Force pilot Crash Carson.
- Toronto-dwelling clairvoyant crime fighter The Brain.
- Dixon of the Mounted, a Nazi-fighting Mountie.
- Jimmie Clarkson, code name "The Sign of Freedom," a Canadian spy in Germany.
- Lee Pierce, "The Invisible Commando," a Canadian soldier who invents a pill that enables him to turn invisible.

And so on. Bell Features' comics were loaded with Canadian content. This "purposeful Canadianism," as Hirsh and Loubert call it, was one of the company's two dominant characteristics; the other was enthusiastic support for Canada's involvement in the Second World War.²¹ Many features in the comics' pages centred their action on the war, and the company even developed an entire title, *Commando Comics*, dedicated to war stories. Some of the comics read almost like propaganda, published for the purpose of encouraging their young readers to support Canada's war effort.²² These elements make the Bell Features Collection a fascinating pop culture relic of this moment in Canadian history.

Unfortunately, not many examples of Bell Features' work have survived. In the 1940s, comic books were treated as disposable. Printed on cheap, acidic newsprint, they were read, sometimes by many children, and then discarded. As a consequence, comics from this period tend to be quite rare. The Bell Features Collection at LAC is one of the largest public collections of Canadian wartime comics.²³

²¹ Michael Hirsh and Patrick Loubert, *The Great Canadian Comic Books* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1971), 14.

²² For selected examples of Bell Features' propaganda-like content, see Meaghan Scanlon, "Collection Spotlight: Bell Features," *Signatures: The Magazine of Library and Archives Canada* (Fall/Winter 2015): 14–15.

²³ Another notable collection is the 181-item Canadian Whites Comic Book Collection at Ryerson University (<https://archives.library.ryerson.ca/index.php/canadian-whites-comic-book-collection>). The Dr. Eddy Smet Collection of

Though the poor quality of the paper makes older comic books prone to preservation issues, the Bell Features Collection holdings are, generally speaking, in very good condition. This is partly because, as the publisher's own copies, they never found their way into the hands of children!

Like the John Bell Collection, the Bell Features Collection is kept as a special collection within LAC's Rare Book Collection. It is housed in acid-free comic book boxes, within which each comic book is kept in an archival paper envelope sealed only on the bottom and spine edges (think of an L shape) in order to minimize the risk of the fragile newsprint catching on its housing during handling. Each of the 17 titles in the collection has been catalogued and assigned an alphanumeric shelf list number beginning with the letters "BF." There is also a collection-level record in Aurora that provides contextual information about the collection as a whole.²⁴ Attached to this record is a detailed finding aid containing a series description for each title that lists the characters and creators who appear most often in the title. One copy of each of the 193 distinct issues in the collection has been digitized and is now available online in PDF form. For links to the digital issues, see the finding aid or the catalogue record for each title.

Other Comics-Related Holdings

There is a great deal of comics-related material in LAC's published holdings aside from these three main comic book collections. This material includes miscellaneous Second World War-era Canadian comic books, Canadian graphic novels and other book-length comics publications, and comics published outside Canada. What follows is a brief overview of these holdings. It should not be considered exhaustive.

Wartime Canadian Comic Books

Thanks to the Bell Features Collection, publications by Bell Features comprise the majority of LAC's holdings of the "Canadian Whites," as Canadian comic books from the 1940s have been nicknamed since most were not printed in colour. However, LAC also has

Comic Books at the University of Western Ontario also holds about 125 Second World War-era comics.

²⁴ See OCLC 1007761166.

comic books from other wartime publishers such as Montreal-based Educational Projects, Toronto-based Anglo-American Publishing, and Vancouver-based Maple Leaf Publishing. Some of these are in the John Bell Collection: in the first and second accessions are about 30 items from Anglo-American, 20 from Maple Leaf, and five from Educational Projects, as well as 30 from Bell Features, almost half of which are not in the Bell Features Collection itself.

In 2011, LAC acquired a small collection of Canadian Whites from collector Philip Fry. This collection consists of 16 comic books published by Maple Leaf Publishing (issues of *Better Comics*, *Big Bang Comics*, *Lucky Comics*, and *Rocket Comics*), along with one further Bell Features publication (*Slam-Bang Comics* no. 8). This collection has not yet been described.

Additionally, LAC has 12 issues of the Educational Projects publication *Canadian Heroes*. These comics have been catalogued,²⁵ and are stored in the Rare Book Collection.

Canadian Graphic Novels and Other Book-Length Comics

Through legal deposit, LAC receives book-length comics from traditional publishers who publish the occasional graphic novel (e.g., Bryan Lee O'Malley's *Seconds*, from Random House Canada) and from the several well-established Canadian publishers that specialize in the comics medium. The eminent Montreal-based company Drawn and Quarterly is perhaps the most well-known of these. Others include La Pastèque and Mécanique générale, serving the French market, and Conundrum Press and Koyama Press on the English side.

Comics Published Outside Canada

Foreign publishers are exempt from legal deposit, but LAC does occasionally acquire, by means of purchase or donation, the second category of material identified in the definition of Canadian comic books—works of Canadian interest published outside Canada, or foreign Canadiana. In North America, the majority of comic books are published by two mammoth U.S.-based corporations mainly known for publishing superhero comics: Marvel Comics (Spider-Man, Iron Man, Captain America, etc.) and DC Comics (Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, etc.). Marvel and DC combined account for 73.48% of all comic books shipped to stores by comic book distributor

²⁵ See OCLC 1006705165.

Figure 1. "Dixon of the Mounted" by Theodore "Tedd" Steele, from the Bell Features' *Active Comics*, no. 3, page 35 (ca. 1942), an example of the "Canadian Whites," comics published without colour because of wartime printing restrictions.

Diamond Comics in March 2018.²⁶ Though Marvel and DC are primarily focused on the U.S. market,²⁷ both have employed many Canadian writers and artists over the years, going all the way back to Superman's Toronto-born co-creator Joe Shuster, who worked for DC in the 1930s. But John Bell notes that production of comics at these companies generally takes an "assembly-line approach in which a group of creators, usually including an editor, writer, penciller, inker, colourist, and letterer, is brought together by the publisher. In most instances, the publishers. [sic] not the creators, own the characters and the superhero 'properties.'"²⁸ This approach to authorship raises the question of how much Canadian involvement is necessary in order for a work to meet the definition of Canadiana. LAC's collection does contain a small number of DC and Marvel titles with contributions from Canadian creators, where those contributions have been deemed notable using various criteria such as recognition through nominations for Canadian or American comic book awards. When LAC acquires this type of work, it generally does not acquire it in comic book format, but rather in trade paperbacks, which compile several comic books in one volume.

With other international publishers of comic books and graphic novels that do not use the "assembly line" approach of Marvel and DC, the question of what qualifies as Canadian is generally more easily settled. Still, acquisitions in this area have been sporadic and, overall, this is a gap for LAC. Some notable titles have been missed. To give an example, Guy Delisle is a French-Canadian cartoonist best known for his travel memoirs, which were originally published in France. LAC has Drawn and Quarterly's English translations of these books, but at the time of writing holds only one of the French editions.

Around 2015, a "Comics" location was created within the Rare Book Collection, and LAC began housing all foreign Canadiana

²⁶ "Industry Statistics," Diamond Comics Distributors, accessed August 23, 2018, <https://www.diamondcomics.com/Home/1/1/3/237?articleID=210844>.

²⁷ Between 1968 and 1987, the Quebec-based publisher Éditions Héritage owned the French rights to various Marvel and DC superheroes. They published translations of these characters' adventures, which LAC then received via legal deposit. The activities of Éditions Héritage have also enabled LAC to gather a significant collection of French Archie comics. For more information on Éditions Héritage, see Alain Salois et al., *Le guide des comics Héritage* ([Prévoist, Québec]: Jean-François Hébert, [2010?]).

²⁸ Bell, *Invaders from the North*, 141.

comics together in this location. Part of the rationale behind this decision was that, since the John Bell and Bell Features collections are both in the Rare Book Collection, it made sense to create a sort of “hub” for comics there. Items such as trade paperbacks of DC and Marvel titles, graphic novels published abroad by Canadian creators (including Guy Delisle), and foreign language translations of work by Canadian creators have been catalogued in this location. These titles have all been assigned LC classification numbers, many under PN6733 and PN6734.

Conclusion

Some may find it surprising to learn that Library and Archives Canada collects comic books at all, let alone that it actually has quite a large comic book collection. But to some communities of researchers, the collection is well known. I have worked as a special collections librarian at LAC since 2010, and I’m fairly certain the comic books are the most frequently requested materials under my care—despite the fact that the John Bell Collection is not completely described and the Bell Features Collection was only fully catalogued in 2014. The past virtual exhibitions created by John Bell and Michel Viau helped bring attention to LAC’s comics. More recently, I curated the exhibition *Alter Ego: Comics and Canadian Identity*, which ran at LAC in 2016 and at the Toronto Reference Library’s TD Gallery in 2018. I drew from all areas of the collection—John Bell, Bell Features, legal deposit, foreign Canadiana—in putting *Alter Ego* together. My hope is that this article will help more researchers to discover this outstanding body of material, and to make use of it.

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