

THE LIBRARY MOVEMENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

In reviewing the earliest library movement in British Columbia one must cast his mind back to the days when the western portion of British North America was little more than a huge fur reserve, and the only contact with civilization was through the fur trading posts scattered at great distances throughout this vast territory.

The fur trading companies realised, just as we do today, that the supply of reading matter was an essential part of the equipment of these small communities.

The Hudson's Bay Company had so-called libraries at all their district offices, the size of the library depending largely on the situation of the district office. For instance, York Factory, Norway House, Fort Vancouver and Victoria had quite large libraries because each ship carrying settlers or servants was supplied with a library and was instructed to turn the library over to the fur trade on arrival at its destination. After these books had all been read they were passed on to other districts; for instance, those coming on ships to York Factory went to Norway House, Winnipeg, thence up the big Saskatchewan and down the McKenzie River. Those landed from ships arriving at this coast, after being read at Victoria, went on to Port Simpson and Fort St. James, after which they were distributed to smaller posts, a few here and a few there.

The classes of books supplied covered all branches of knowledge, the largest percentage being fiction. In addition to books the Hudson's Bay Company sent out the *London Times* and other leading journals for circulation among its servants, but as can be readily understood, owing to the limited means of communication, these papers were often a year old before they were received at some of the distant posts.

According to W. F. Tolmie the first circulating library on the Pacific Slope had its inception at Fort Vancouver in 1833. The idea of establishing a circulating library among the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company having been conceived by Mr. Anderson and Chief-trader Donald Manson, the suggestion was readily approved by Dr. McLaughlin and James Douglas. A subscription library was formed and successfully operated for ten years or until the year of founding Fort Victoria in 1843, the field of operations of the Hudson's Bay Company having been removed owing to the uncertainty of the outcome of the Oregon boundary dispute.

The British Government made a grant of exclusive privilege on Vancouver Island upon condition that settlement would be encouraged, but although the Crown Colony of Vancouver Island was created in 1849, there were very few inhabitants until 1858 when gold was discovered on the Fraser River, bringing about a great influx of miners and others. With this sudden rush of population and for the purpose of maintaining law and order a separate Colony was formed on the mainland. The two Colonies united under the name of Colony of British Columbia in 1866.

During all this time, or until 1860, the inhabitants of the Colony were very little better off for library facilities, than the fur traders; in fact, the first newspaper in British Columbia was not published until June 1858.

As in most places the Mechanics or Literary Institutes became the forerunner of the Public Library movement. In Victoria a Mechanics Literary Institute was opened on December 15, 1864, with about 250 volumes, the subscription being \$1 per month, \$10 per annum and \$50 life membership. As indicating the benefits to be derived from this Institute the following is quoted from an advertisement in a local paper:—

“An Institution tending to the advantage both of the individual and of the community at large to diminish crime and to diffuse a healthy moral tone among those who are the bone and muscle, the sinew and fibre of the infant Colony.”

It may be mentioned that one of the first visitors to the Institute was Charles Kean, the noted English actor, who happened to be playing in Victoria at the time.

The collection was removed to the City Hall about 1880 where it remained until the new Carnegie Library was opened in 1904.

Another Literary Institute on Vancouver Island was one located at Nanaimo, the center of the coal mining industry. It was founded in 1862 in connection with St. Paul's Church and was commonly known as “St. Paul's Literary Institute,” and the constitution called for its supervision by its officiating minister. The members considered this too denominational, and had it moved to Messrs. Gordon and Blessing's Building on Commercial Street, the name being changed to the Nanaimo Literary Institute. In November 1864, Governor Kennedy laid the foundation stone of a new building. It was a two-storied structure and was erected by money raised at concerts, lectures, etc., and by voluntary contributions of the inhabitants. It contained Reading and Committee Rooms, Public Hall for concerts, etc. Mr. Mark Bate, an early pioneer

of the district, and to whom I am indebted for much of this information, served as President for a lengthy period. Samuel Gough, late City Clerk of Nanaimo was Secretary for nearly twenty years. The Institute Building was acquired by the Corporation for Municipal purposes in 1886 and with the addition of about 20 feet to its length the building still serves as the City Hall.

In regard to the Mainland of British Columbia, the New Westminster Library has an interesting history insofar that what formed the nucleus of that library was brought out by the main body of the Royal Engineers who sailed from England on the *Thames City* in 1858. The books were selected by Sir E. Bulwer Lytton and purchased by the officers and men. Several books were donated by Queen Victoria, Lady Franklin and the Duke of Westminster. The Queen gave a handsome volume of the speeches of the Prince Consort. Lord Lytton gave a cash contribution. The collection which was valued at £500 was housed at the Club of the Royal Engineers Camp, and when this famous corps was disbanded in November, 1863, the library was handed over to the citizens of New Westminster and transferred to the old Mint Building where a Mechanics Institute was established. About 1890, the books were removed to enable the wooden building to be torn down and replaced by a brick one, where the City Hall now stands. The building had several stores on the ground floor and the library upstairs. The library continued its usefulness until the great fire of September 10, 1898, swept this building and library out of existence. Only the books in the hands of readers whose homes escaped the flames and the "Queen's Book" which Alderman Johnston rescued at some personal risk were saved. In 1899, a library committee was formed and an appeal made to start a new library. Provision was made for this when the new City Hall was built and here it was housed until the new Carnegie Building was erected.

The mining activities in the Cariboo district in the sixties attracted quite a large number of miners and others and in the natural trend of development the want of a library was soon felt. In June, 1865, a reading room and circulating library was established at Camerontown, one of the three camps on Williams Creek in the Cariboo Mining district. John Bowron was Librarian. Apparently with the intention of distinguishing this learned institution from the establishment carried on by Ben Lichtenstein who not only ran a circulating library but made public the fact that he was also the vendor of choice Havana cigars, pen knives, per-

fumery and wax matches at 75 cents per dozen, the circulating library changed its name to Cariboo Literary Institute. At the first of October, 1866, the Library contained 437 volumes and numbered 104 subscribers. The average circulation being 60 volumes per week. The reading room was supplied with 14 weekly and 2 semi-weekly newspapers, also the following magazines: and reviews:— *Blackwoods*, *Harpers*, *London Quarterly*, *North British*, *Westminster* and *Edinburgh Review*. The Government presented Black's *Atlas of the World*, Lewis' *American Sportsman* and Burton's *Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor*. (Probably the latter volume inspired Sawney to write his Cariboo rhymes).

We are informed that the Library consisted of works on Religion, Science, History, Poetry in addition to fiction and the reference section contained Worcester's *Large Pictorial Dictionary*, Ure's *Dictionary of the Arts, Manufactures and Mines*, Lippincott's *Pronouncing Gazetteer of the World* and Homan's *Cyclopaedia of Commerce*. The terms of subscription were \$2 per month or \$5 per quarter. Single volumes were loaned at 50 cents per volume with \$1 deposit. Persons not subscribers who visited the reading room and made use of books or papers were charged 25 cents for each visit. The Institute was open from 10 A.M. to 10 P.M.

In order to give some idea of the district and condition of the Community served by this mental outfit it may be mentioned that Williams Creek is two miles long with a population in 1865 of 2,000 men, divided into three camps, Richfield, Barkerville and Camerontown. The population was housed in stately dwellings ranging in size from seven feet by nine feet to eight feet by ten feet, and from eight to ten feet high, in many of which half a dozen of hardy, honest miners were domiciled. Camerontown where the Institute was located obtained its name from the well known miner "Cariboo" Cameron, who struck it rich at this point in 1862, the mine yielding \$1,000 to the foot.

In regard to the establishment of Public Libraries in Vancouver, I cannot do better than quote the account as given by Mr. Harry Cotton, who says:

"Credit for the establishment of a public library in Vancouver is mainly due to the late Father Clinton, for many years the devoted rector of St. James Church. Realizing that the young men, who, in the early days, constituted the greater portion of Vancouver's inhabitants, had no place in which to spend their leisure time, outside the numerous saloons, Father Clinton, in 1887, conceived the

idea of starting a public readingroom and library. He broached the subject to some of the leading citizens of the time, all of whom promised the movement hearty support.

"Quarters were secured on the upper floor of a two story brick building, known as 136 Cordova street west, which was then in the centre of the business section. This building, erected soon after the Great Fire of '86, was demolished last year.

"It was proposed that the library should be supported by public donations and a monthly subscription of 50 cents. At the start the institution was fortunate in securing some 400 or 500 books from the Hastings Literary Institute, whose origin dated from the early days when the only settlements on Burrard Inlet were around the old Moodyville and Hastings mills. For the benefit of the employees, each of these mills provided a reading-room.

"With the springing up of Vancouver many employees left the vicinity of the mill and usefulness of the reading-room became a thing of the past. It was accordingly agreed that the library should be donated to the new Vancouver institution.

"The opening of the library and reading-room took place early in December, 1887, and at a meeting held in that month the following officers were appointed: President, Rev. H.G.F. Clinton; Treasurer, E.V. Bodwell; Secretary, Dr. Bodington; Librarian, George Pollay; Executive Committee, J.C. Keith, M. H. Hirschberg, J. Calister, H. P. McCarney, Father Fay and Ainslie J. Mouat; Trustees H. Abbott, R.H. Alexander and F.C. Cotton.

"After a year's trial it was found that owing to the small fee the library was not patronized by those for whom it was founded. So in April, 1889, application was made to the Council for a grant and \$250 was donated, this being the first civic appropriation for library purposes.

"In 1890, Mr. George Pollay, who had gratuitously acted as Librarian from the start, resigned that position owing to business engagements, although he continued to take a deep interest in the Library and was for many years a member of the Board. Mr. Pollay died at Discovery, Atlin, in 1912. His widow is still a resident of Vancouver, and lives at 743 Eighteenth avenue east.

"The Council of this period was induced to assist the Library more liberally and an annual grant of \$2,000 was authorized. It was decided to engage a regular Librarian and the choice fortunately fell on the late Mr. Edwin Machin, an English lawyer, who had just arrived in the city with his wife and daughter, the latter being now the wife of Mr. Herbert Beeman, Assistant Secretary

of the Board of Trade. The Council also from this date appointed a library committee from citizens interested in its work.

"Too much credit cannot be given to Mr. and Mrs. Machin for their work in the early and struggling days of the library. Although the salary for several years was only a miserable pittance of \$65 per month, the Library was kept open morning, noon and night, Mr. Machin being relieved by his wife and daughter. When they assumed charge the Library shelves were almost bare and the civic appropriation was too small to permit of any extensive purchases. But by begging books from friends in this country and in England, Mr. and Mrs. Machin obtained sufficient to make the institution something more than just a library in name.

"In 1893 the City Council appointed two Aldermen to the Board, Aldermen Salsbury and Towler, which probably accounted for the increased appropriation of \$3,600. The library quarters had for some time been too small, so in June, 1893, a move was made to 169 Hastings Street west. This building is now occupied by a beer parlor and the Astor Hotel, but was originally intended for a very different purpose, having been erected by the Y.M.C.A. which, however, lost it a short time later.

"The purchase of a central site and erection of a modern library were frequently discussed. For some years the late Andrew Carnegie had been building libraries in the United States and had included a few Canadian cities in his list. A suggestion was made that Vancouver should approach the wealthy iron-master and in 1901 this was done.

"Who first made the suggestion was never really settled despite a somewhat heated newspaper controversy, but the general opinion was that Mr. A. Allayne Jones, who is still a resident here, deserved the credit. Anyway a formal request for a grant was addressed to Mr. Carnegie on February 28, 1901, to which he replied on March 6, as follows: If the city of Vancouver will furnish a suitable site and agree to spend \$5,000 a year to maintain a library, I shall be glad to give \$50,000 towards the erection of a building.

"The offer having been accepted, the next move was to secure a site and on this point a wide diversity of opinion existed. Many today, especially residents of the West End and Kitsilano, complain that the site is not central, but the matter was settled by the vote of the citizens. Two sites were voted on, the present location and lots 11, 12 and 13, blocks 26 of 541. The latter lots are at the southwest corner of Pender and Hamilton Streets and are now

occupied by the I.O.O.F. Hall and Board of Trade rooms. On election day, August 5, 1901, the East End and Mount Pleasant voters turned out in force and piled up 746 votes for the present site, while only 407 votes were mustered for the Pender street location. The plans of G.W. Grant, a well-known architect, whose death was recently recorded, were accepted and the foundation stone laid under Masonic auspices. But as everything had to be submitted to Mr. Carnegie, progress was slow and it was not until late in 1903 that the building was opened.

"Mr. Machin continued to act as Librarian until January 5, 1910, when illness resulting from a fall from a street car caused his resignation, which was received with the greatest regret. Mrs. Machin continued to hold office as Assistant Librarian for some years until ill-health compelled her to give up a task in which she had taken such a great interest. Mr. Machin was succeeded as librarian by A. E. Goodman, who held the position for a few months and he in turn by R.W. Douglas, who resigned about eighteen months ago, at which time Mr. E.S. Robinson the present librarian was appointed."

While I am only dealing with the older libraries of the Province, mention might be made of the finely equipped library housed at the University of British Columbia, and under the energetic supervision of its Librarian, Mr. John Ridington, it is destined to become a large factor in library service in the Province.

To return to the capital city, Victoria, we have the Provincial Library which really antedates all other libraries in the Province of British Columbia. We find that as far back as 1863 the Legislative Assembly of Vancouver Island voted \$1,000 for the formation of a Parliamentary Library. But as early as 1849 the first Governor of the Colony, Mr. Richard Blanshard, had brought a small library out with him from England, and the records show that it cost £51.8.6.

At first there was no regular Librarian for the Legislative Library. The books were kept in a small room adjoining the Assembly Hall and Members of the Legislature helped themselves. Such a system of course could only result in confusion and the loss of many volumes.

From 1886-1888, Mr. Wm. Atkins had charge of the Library during the Session, and from thence till 1893 Mr. Joseph Bridgman held the position. The first permanent appointment was made in 1893 when Mr. R. E. Gosnell became Provincial Librarian. The Library at this time only contained about three thousand volumes, and

these were principally Parliamentary papers. Mr. Gosnell extended the scope of the Library very much, paying particular attention to the collection of material relating to the history of the Province, and thus laying the foundation of what was destined to become later a very important department of the Government.

Mr. E.O.S. Scholefield was appointed assistant to Mr. Gosnell in 1894, and in 1898 to the chief position, which he held until his death in 1919, and was succeeded by J. Forsyth. During Mr. Scholefield's tenure of office the votes by the Legislature were larger than the early days, and he was able to add over 50,000 volumes. Like his predecessor, he also specialized in books and other material bearing on the early history of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest, and it has been asserted by experts that this great mass of materials is perhaps the finest collection extant insofar as this region is concerned.

The Library is primarily a reference institution for the use and benefit of the Legislative Assembly and Government Departments, but during recess it is thrown open to the public from 9 till 5, with the exception of Saturday, when it is closed at 1 o'clock.

The resources of the Library cover a wide range of subjects embracing over 177,000 volumes covering all departments of knowledge. In addition to books there are several thousands of pamphlets and unbound material. Of book rarities mention might be made of the Shakespeariana collection, which includes a copy of the rare original second Folio of Shakespeare, but as already stated it is in books and pamphlets relating to the history of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest that we have specialized.

So heavy have been the demands for information on points of legislative interest that it has been found necessary to appoint a special assistant in order to facilitate the gathering together and digesting of documents, papers and other materials dealing with the experiences of other governments and states with regard to legislation already in force or about to be introduced.

For several years there has been a steady increase in the number of people making use of the Library. The total number of books issued at the enquiry desk during the past year was 48,343 volumes, as compared with 44,181 in the previous year, an increase of 4,162 volumes. These figures of course do not take into account the extensive use made of the open shelf collection.

The first Libraries Act in British Columbia was passed in 1891. It was entitled "The Free Libraries Act" and made provision for the establishment of a library in any incorporated municipality

upon petition of 100 city electors and the passing of a By-law with the assent of the electors.

The control of the library was vested in a Board of Management consisting of the Mayor or Reeve, three city councillors and three appointed by the School Board, or Board of Education. The rate not to exceed one half of a mill in the dollar upon assessed value of all rateable real property.

The foregoing act as will be noted made no provision for starting libraries in the smaller districts because of the want of an organization to aid those willing and anxious to undertake such work, no library commission or organiser.

This defect was remedied by the passing of the Public Libraries Act in 1919 which provided for the appointment by the Government of a Public Libraries Commission consisting of three persons in addition to the Secretary or Organiser, who would co-operate with Library Associations and Library Boards on matters of administration of Public Libraries and operate a system of Travelling Libraries for unorganized and sparsely populated districts.

Ten or more persons in any locality in the Province may form a Public Library Association for the purpose of maintaining a Public Library in that locality. The municipal By-law can be passed upon petition of 100 electors for population over 5,000, the Board to consist of the Mayor and two, four or six other persons elected and appointed by the Municipal Council and the rate to be levied to be left to the Council.

From 1898 until the passing of the 1919 Act, the Travelling Libraries formed a department of the Provincial Library. An amendment in 1920 to the Provincial or as it was called the "Legislative Library and Bureau of Statistics Act, 1894", power was given to the Public Libraries Commission to borrow books from the Provincial Library in order to supplement their service.

A few years ago regret might have been expressed that the library movement had not been general throughout the Province but with the passing of the latest Act rapid progress has been made in establishing libraries in the smaller towns and the general improvement may be credited in a large degree to the activities of the British Columbia Library Association.

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