



## Creating New Local Service in Canada

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THE FASCINATING THING about almost any discussion of almost any Canadian affair is that it is always puzzling to know where to start. It has also been remarked that, once started, Canadians often do not seem to know where to stop, either. It is easily understood. We inhabit so many different climates, cultural, physical, and historical—ten of them no less—that a man living in, say, Newfoundland may hesitate to discuss the motives of a man living in British Columbia, except rather tentatively and with a tremendous number of provisos—with little brevity, in short—lest he be chidden on the score of brash and misguided talk. Even a humble little scuffy bush that is no more than a common nuisance in the maritime and central provinces may travel secretly underground across the prairies to pop up again on the west coast in the guise of an immense and noble tree adorned, as likely as not, with purple flowers and an English accent. And if a little bush may undergo so startling a transformation in surmounting the nearly ninety degrees of longitude that divide Cape Race from Nootka Sound, it is not hard to imagine what may happen to an idea, and to the application of an idea, on a journey such as that.

Now, one of the ideas deep-embedded in the British North America Act is to the effect that all matters pertaining to education shall remain forever and inalienably the responsibility of the various provinces. Therefore, we librarians say, our genesis is clear. The library has its unquestionable place in public education so, naturally, it ought to have its authority from and in that department of government which is responsible for public education. This is most simple; or it would be if everybody agreed. Everybody does not. Indeed, at the very beginning of things is the curious spectacle of the public libraries being mothered, not only by departments of education, but also, in one instance, by a department of economic affairs conjointly with a provincial library; in others by such departments as public utilities or municipal affairs.

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This kind of divergence is mentioned in order to show where differences begin in our application of the library idea; that is to say, at the root. And from thence the paths spread far apart. In Prince Edward Island, for example, there is only one library which, by station wagon and through branches, covers the whole area of the province. In La Province de Québec, overwhelmingly French-speaking and Catholic, and unalterably *Canadienne*, there are twenty-one municipal libraries, many of which are supported largely by public subscription, and more than three hundred parish libraries to carry the load. In those districts in which English predominates, school and association libraries are springing up in numbers. In fact, in the whole of the province much progress has been made in the past few years. In Saskatchewan there are thirty-nine public libraries, twenty-five associations, or community libraries as they are named, and one thoroughly organized regional establishment that covers a vast territory in the north-central part of the province. Nova Scotia has five regional libraries, all under the general governance of the Provincial Library but each with its own board. In Ontario there are five hundred libraries, public and association, ranging from those of the largest cities to those of the smallest hamlets; and superimposed upon many of these, serving but not controlling them, there are one district and thirteen county library co-operatives. British Columbia has nine city libraries and forty-two associations, together with two co-operatives—a third being in process of planning—that are organized in an unusual and extremely far-sighted manner for the extension of service to small communities in immense and sparsely settled areas. There are also three large regional libraries in the province of which one, that of the Fraser Valley, was the first in Canada. Newfoundland has one city library and no fewer than twenty-five regional services. A regional library in this case is one placed in a municipality or unincorporated community, and from which books provided for agencies are within the limits of the neighborhood transportation facilities.

Nor do Canadians display much greater unanimity in the decisions as to who should be responsible for creating new local service. In British Columbia it is the Public Library Commission, appointed by the provincial government and serving without pay. It has a permanent staff of three civil servants, one of whom is its executive officer. In Alberta the Provincial Library Board is also appointed by the government, has a permanent government officer, and through his efforts is responsible for extension of library facilities. In Saskatchewan it is the provincial librarian, although in practice the first territorial library

in this province was promoted and organized by the supervisor of regional libraries. Promotion in Manitoba comes under the University Extension Library; while in Ontario the Public Libraries Branch, responsible directly to the Minister of Education, is the designated agency. Although there is no public library agency in the Province of Quebec, the government itself may be said to act in that capacity, and decisively too, as witness, along with other developments, the recent acquisition of the magnificent library of the Sulpician Order in Montreal and its conversion to use for public reference. The Legislative Library, moreover, is open to the public for the same purpose when the house is not in session. The various ministries support the specialized libraries of the institutions for which they are responsible, such as schools of music, fine arts, and commerce; while more and more the government is encouraging the development of libraries generally by the purchase and distribution of books for school libraries, by increasing the travelling library service with emphasis upon the needs of children, by special grants to public libraries and by regular grants to both the bi-lingual and the wholly French-speaking associations of librarians in the province. In all four provinces of the Maritimes there are directors whose authority derives variously from a provincial library or from a minister of education.

Legislation varies from province to province as widely as does practice, going all the way from comprehensive statutes that essay to cover all possible contingencies down to a permissive sub-section in a Department of Education Act that deals cavalierly with the matter in five short words. This leaves the door wide open for one to say almost anything he likes about government policies; but perhaps the best thing to say about them is that no provincial government, that of British Columbia excepted, has any formally announced policy concerning the extension of public library service within its boundaries; some do not seem to care one way or another; some give distant approval; and some—the majority—are well aware of its need and its importance and support it with grants that are often generous.

There is a dream that many cherish in Canada. It has to do with local service carried to the level of every citizen. They dream that they may live to see the day when, as it now is in Great Britain, a system shall be devised by means of which any man or woman in the country may find access to almost any book that is in the country. It may for a long time remain a dream but that is not to say that nothing has been done. Each in its own provincial sphere, and most notably in the West, some of the agencies concerned have accomplished much to

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provide a solution to this usually inarticulate but always present need.

The Westerners, particularly those who live beyond reach of an adequate public library, are accustomed to turn to their provincial agencies for individual help. In the Maritimes, too, particularly in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, the same service is offered; but here it is younger and not so well equipped or firmly established as in the West. In Manitoba and Ontario the Department of Education Library and the Legislative Library, respectively, lend books of all types to rural teachers; while in the latter province the Public Libraries Branch—as also do its opposite numbers in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia—offers rural teachers access by post to a fairly comprehensive professional collection.

An extension project, one not designed expressly to aid in creating new service but which does tend to aid it rather by accident, or as a sort of by-product achieved through newspaper publicity, is the workshop. In Ontario it is called an institute and is provided for in the Act. Delegates from a number of small libraries in a convenient area are invited to meet in one of the larger towns, all expenses paid, for a two-day program directed by the Public Libraries Branch. The majority of the speakers and discussion leaders are neither professional librarians nor teachers in the art, but are selected from among outstanding people who have made a name for themselves in small libraries in another part of the province. As might be supposed, the main intention is to stimulate improvement in libraries already established; but the newspapers are always interested; the word goes round; and a good many new libraries have come into being as a result. There is also in Ontario a four-weeks' course operated annually by the Public Libraries Branch and the Library School of the University of Toronto. It is elementary in character, naturally, and is offered to librarians in places of less than 4,500 population. Candidates receive financial assistance while in attendance and the successful are awarded the Class E Certificate of Librarianship, which carries an annual grant of \$100. It should be remarked that these two particular extension projects, the institute and the elementary course just mentioned, are carried on in an old province in which there are already a great many small libraries and where the improvement of "what is" may be quite as important as the promotion of "what might be."

But Ontario is not by many means alone in this kind of extension effort. Newfoundland holds a fortnight's conference and course of instruction for branch librarians every second year that serves to assist in the promotion of new libraries as well as the improvement of those

already established. Saskatchewan librarians and trustees are invited twice a year to bring their problems to a general workshop session; while in Prince Edward Island the branch librarians are offered, in addition to a two-day workshop every year, the added benefits of a correspondence course that takes about twenty-four months to complete.

Publications that originate with the provincial library authorities help greatly by carrying enlightenment to those already active in the trade and, in another way that is perhaps not fully recognized, aid promotion generally. Passed along from hand to hand, or mailed directly to people of an agitating turn of mind who are not within reach of a library, they tend to stir up discontent and provide ammunition for the attack upon inertia. The provincial librarian of Saskatchewan issues a stimulating and provocative monthly letter that goes out across the breadth of the province and is supported by a number of bright folders and annotated lists of new and interesting books. The newsletter is rather less regular in its appearance in Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland—where the radio is used extensively—but is also accompanied by lists; while the director of the Extension Library in Manitoba, drawing upon some hidden source of energy, comes up regularly with a printed catalogue of books available in the travelling libraries or the open shelf. The Provincial Library Commission of British Columbia concentrates its efforts in this direction upon special catalogues of books in many fields and an annual printed catalogue of all accessions to the open shelf. The Public Libraries Branch in Ontario publishes a quarterly review that aspires to be more than provincial in character. The branch has also a highly unprofessional handbook about establishing new libraries that is almost, but not quite, showered from airplanes upon the innocents below.

If the ways of Ah Sin were devious, they were yet as direct and innocent as sunset on a summer's eve when compared with the scheming that goes on when one of the provincial authorities sets forth upon its nefarious work of getting a new library under way. Some of the methods used are better not discussed; and of those that can be talked about, the first is negative. It consists in trying urgently to persuade people not to start a library at all. It is like this. In all parts of Canada except Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, there is a Thing. It is called a library association, or sometimes a community library. It came down to the present generation from grand-sires and great grandsires who were the pioneers within the land; and the people cannot yet be quit of it. It is not tax-supported and it starves.

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Nevertheless, it is called a library. And the difficult features about it are that, first, it is better than no library at all—although not much—and second, that it is so dreadfully easy to start. A few people write their names on a piece of paper, and there they are! No vote; no consent of council; no by-law; often no books; nothing. On occasion the most tearful pleading cannot keep some people from believing that the easy way is best. So that the task of disturbing them into establishing a genuine service for themselves has three aspects; getting an association made into a public library; getting a municipal or public library established by vote and by-law; and, by far the most difficult and most significant, getting a regional or county library organized.

Consider first the regional libraries. Since Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec have none, and Prince Edward Island is a single area covered by a provincial establishment, it remains that the regional libraries of the more familiar type are confined to the provinces of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, together with the first of eight proposed regions now being organized in New Brunswick. In all instances the promotional and missionary work that preceded establishment was carried out by a single person selected for the task; but the authority or the backing, with which that person went armed was not always the same. In New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan he or she was supported by the full authority and generous financial backing of the provincial government; while in British Columbia and Prince Edward Island she depended upon the somewhat tentative good will of government and—without which she would not have been there—a magnificent grant from the Carnegie Foundation. There was also a smaller Carnegie grant for books in Newfoundland.

In all cases success came as the result of a direct, well-planned, indomitable, and tolerably guileless frontal attack. Everything depended upon the municipal councils in the areas concerned; upon their consent and, except in Prince Edward Island and British Columbia, upon their willingness to part with a little of the taxpayers' money. Because even though the governments, four of them at any rate, were offering to aid handsomely, they insisted, as was wise and proper, that the municipalities should pay their share. So, these provincial government library agents girded up their loins, took firm grips upon the steering-wheels of their cars or the tillers of their boats and, carrying all sail, put forth to organize local interest and influence in a hundred little coastal towns and inland villages, and teach it to become articulate, and with this influence in their support—not always entirely depend-

able either—gave up the best years of their lives, or at least several of them, to getting stuck on muddy roads, to evading mountain-slides, to being lost in blizzards and almost lost at sea, and to be forever and forever and forever waiting around in stuffy council chambers, exhorting, pleading, arguing, and explaining over and over, a thousand times, the deep, unfathomable mysteries of the service they were there to advocate.

They tell—their friends tell—of one local leader who nearly scotched the game by propounding a loud and solemn truth, saying, “We don’t want no books here! Books rots peoples’ minds!” They tell of a bitter night when the librarian’s car went off the road in a blizzard and she stayed with it in the ditch till morning because there was nowhere else to go, praying that her fuel would last to keep the heater alive—and her. They tell many a tale of pluck and dogged perseverance. And none of them, it is said, was ever heard to cry “Excelsior,” although many’s the time they must have cried salt tears; and none of them ever wholly lost faith in the clumsy processes of democracy, in spite of things that councils often did to them. They hadn’t time. They just kept on. And in the end they won.

In Ontario the situation, and therefore the approach, has been different. There are as yet no regional libraries in this province, but instead there are one district and thirteen county library co-operatives, supported, not by direct taxation, but by grants from county councils and government. Under the law as it is at present, a majority of the individual library boards in a county must petition a county council for the passage of a by-law establishing a cooperative. In practice this means that somebody from the Public Libraries Branch must visit and incite all boards within the county under attack. That is no task at all. The boards incite quite easily when it is pointed out to them that they may obtain the use of several hundred extra books a year upon payment of a tiny fee. But the county council plays a different game of cards. It need not pass the by-law—and give money—unless it so desires. And the desires of any right-thinking county council are under good control when it comes to giving up money in support of some scheme, some hare-brained scheme no doubt, and propounded by a “government-man” at that—such as the members never heard of and do not understand. It is a ticklish business that is likely to come to grief, and often did come to grief, until three fundamental truths were memorized. First, it is unwise to appear before a county council unless formally invited. That can be wangled. Second, the library boards are not much help. They have little influence. Third, a council’s interest is

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best gained through the support of the county school inspectors, the Federation of Agriculture, and the Women's Institute. Above all, it is the influence of the latter that counts.

Thus, the three chief methods that have been used to achieve the establishment of regional and county libraries have been: by demonstrations backed with outside funds; by direct attack on behalf of the government; and by agitation to secure the support of strong social organizations within a county.

The bringing to birth of an independent library, one outside the orbit of a regional service, is, of course, quite another matter. Nowhere in the country can it be said that any highly organized effort, supported by adequate field staff, is being made in this direction; although the agencies in the western and central provinces certainly devote as much time, thought and effort to this aspect of their work as may be found for it. It is obviously of less importance to the people in the Maritimes, since here the objective is to obtain full coverage by adding to the units within a regional service; and the establishment of a number of small, independent libraries might prove a hindrance rather than a help in the promotion of the wider scheme.

In Ontario the most potent stimulant in furthering new establishments seems to be emulation. The example of the general improvement of the past few years among existing libraries has probably done more than anything else to fire the imaginations of people in communities that have no library at all, and those who are suffering under the starvation diet of an association. On occasion, something that might almost be called a sort of "chain reaction" takes place. For instance, a county librarian pulled a long face over a dreadful, little half-moribund association in a village of five hundred people. The chairman of the association, a lady, was insulted. She wrote an indignant letter to the Public Libraries Branch, which office immediately sent out an emissary to unruffle her feathers and make clear to her in the gentlest words that the county librarian was quite right, and that the little library never could amount to anything until it became a public one, decently supported and in a decent building of its own. He went armed with examples and with a glowing and true account of the generous government grants that could be earned if the transformation should take place. He went again and met the board of the association. They cocked their bonnets up. He went again to address a public meeting armed, this time, with a huge bundle of copies of a brief specially prepared for that village. This brief explained the proposal in short words, provided tentative budgets for the first three years of their new

public library service—blandly taking it for granted there would be one—and dared, even, to prophesy a tremendous increase in the use of books that would delight the hearts of all. He went a fourth time and met the Village Council. But he stayed away when the vote was being taken. Far away. And eight months later he had the gratification of being a humble spectator when the Premier himself, who likes libraries, opened the door of a charming, new, little, well-stocked library building and made the speech. And even there the “chain reaction” did not finish; because within six more months firm-minded people of three neighbouring villages were on the warpath too, and now have library projects well in hand. The principle of emulation is at work.

All this, of course, is an innocent little success story from the Province of Ontario. But it is the pattern. There may be four or five failures for every victory. But the pattern stands. It may be applied in a populous suburban township in a brand-new metropolitan area, or in a hamlet in a district of thriving farms, or even among some thinly peopled townships in the north, where socially awake people have been inspired by, and made envious by, the shining example of the library service in a small mining city that is their cultural and shopping capital. There is, first, the example. There is the stirring in the minds of a few. There is the contact with the agency, the many visits and meetings, there is the preparation of a special plan, devised for that case and no other and duplicated for distribution. Then there is the local programme of enlightenment, followed by the vote. That is the big thing, the vote, and the burden of it is carried entirely by the people who live there on the spot.

There is a wide divergence of opinion in the trade, or profession, in Canada concerning the ultimate value or the ultimate menace of demonstrations that are supported by outside funds; that is to say, funds provided by somebody other than the taxpayer. But the proof of the pudding continues, as of yore, to be decided in the eating; and in this case the proof—or should it be the eating?—is to be found in the three regional libraries of British Columbia and the province-wide service in Prince Edward Island. All four had their birth in the benevolence of the Carnegie Foundation. All are flourishing. And if the time has not yet come, then come it will, when those concerned are able to forget the anguish that their souls were in the day benevolence was at an end and the taxpayers, faced with the polite request that they should take the burden upon themselves, created a difficulty or two. In plain fact, the job of promoting the regional libraries had to be pretty well done all over again. In one case, the extreme one, legis-

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lators, appalled by what they had done, amended the Public Library Act by tearing it out of the book. But still they paid—and pay—and so the pudding had its proof. But in Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland on the other hand, and as has already been pointed out, the regional libraries were not achieved through this kind of demonstration, but came as the result of frontal attack by a provincial authority, offering governmental aid but requiring also the immediate application of a direct local tax. So that the people learned at once that they must pay and were persuaded that they ought to pay, and have paid, and there has never been any question as to the solidity of the foundations upon which these libraries were built. This practice is being followed also in New Brunswick.

In Ontario, demonstrations have been small, frequent, rather intimate, and quite inexpensive. In one village, for example, a dead association was raised to life and became a public library. It happens to be a village which exerts a good deal of influence over several neighbors, none of which has a library. It was important, therefore, and for more than local reasons, that the resurrection should be successful from the start. In order to ensure this end the provincial agency made special grants for the purchase of books, helped clothe the new shelves with a generous selection of titles from its travelling libraries and, most important of all, provided a qualified librarian to organize the service and instruct the local incumbent, not to mention the board. Another kind of demonstration is given the “small librarians” who attend the annual four-weeks’ course. They are driven out in busses and introduced to the workings of the best small libraries that there are for miles around. Again, a grant was made to one district library in the far north—a district in unorganized territory, it is called, and it embraces 52,000 square miles—in order that the librarian might take his bookmobile and, accompanied by a “government-man,” drive several thousand miles over roads in a neighboring district that were sometimes not very smooth, in order to show the members of five library boards, those of a dozen or so school boards, and as many municipal councillors as could be prevailed upon to look, how a two-district or regional library might serve their needs and how they might go about getting one if they so desired. They so desired. It will be in operation soon. These, of course, are very minor demonstrations, even minuscule, but, made in sufficient numbers, the total effect of them upon the minds of many citizens is probably quite significant.

So it is that in the matter of demonstrations, as in almost everything else we Canadians do and have; in the varieties of our legislation; in

the nature and authority of our agencies; in the support and attitudes of our governments; and in the means we use to extend the public book service of the country, we Canadians diverge so widely, one from another, that our national application of the library idea or ideal must seem to the stranger as if it were little better than hit-and-miss, a sort of hodge-podge of local expediencies, and nothing national about it in the least. But that is not the case, for there is a unity in the ranks. It is a unity of purpose that is deep-lying and pervasive. And it lives in the only place that unity ever counts for very much. It lives in people, in the minds and hearts of men and women in the "trade" who, arguing fiercely among themselves from time to time, few in numbers, indomitable and rather badly paid, made stubborn by their own inner strength and encouraged within the comradeship of their vigorous Dominion-wide library association, struggle on, by whatever road or by-path they may find, toward a single end.