

OUR NEED OF LIBRARY SERVICE*

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THE aim of this paper is to set forth the present conditions and problems of public libraries in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, to assess the scope of the service now given, and to formulate suggestions for an adequate public library service. Time did not permit a detailed examination of the situation in New Brunswick, but it seems that in spite of at least three excellent public libraries in urban centres, the majority of the population there is quite as much in need of an efficient provincial library service as in the sister province. In the similarity of needs, at least, the conditions in the two provinces are parallel. The third Maritime province, Prince Edward Island, offers an example of what an organized library service can do for an essentially rural people. The demonstration there has been watched with deep interest by the neighbouring provinces, and it is to be hoped that the interest will be more than academic.

We have been severely criticized for our lack of interest in public libraries, and often our resentment has been based on the old adage that the truth hurts. We have failed to maintain the interest in libraries that was everywhere apparent over one hundred years ago. Then the foundations were laid for the Law Library, the Garrison Library, the King's College and Pictou Academy libraries. Between 1821 and 1827 at least eight subscription libraries were established. Moreover, a circulating library was carried on at Merigomish, a plan for a circulating library within the county of Pictou was suggested, and a committee of the Assembly advocated a plan for "itinerating" libraries in connection with the schools of the province.¹ But the necessary financial support for the last two ventures was never granted. An early enthusiast for the success of libraries may look down upon us sadly, reflecting on the over-optimism of his statement that these beginnings were the "risings of a spirit of enquiry which we trust will neither slumber nor sleep till the spectres of ignorance and superstition are fairly put to flight".

* (Read at a meeting of the Maritime Library Institute, May 29, 1936, under the title *Standards for Library Organization, Equipment, and Cooperation in the Maritime Provinces*).

1. D. C. Harvey, "Early Public Libraries in Nova Scotia", *Dalhousie Review*, January, 1935.

Since that time, many countries have experienced a development in community responsibility which recognized that even those who could not afford to buy books should not be denied access to them. Moreover, there has been a growing consciousness of the necessity of books to provide a wide outlook for the average man and woman as well as the student. The new view of education, that it is a process prolonged throughout adult life, boasts that "old dogs can learn new tricks," and that "the time for learning anything is the time you need it". But if the sources of knowledge are not accessible, the capacity to learn is useless, for food is essential to growth.

The value of a library service has been recognized by a number of men in public life; but so far it has not captured the popular imagination. Perhaps a little judicious propaganda would not be amiss, for there is no doubt that a public library can be a powerful force in the development of any community. The practical benefits which a library offers to individuals, even those unaccustomed to reading, is brought out by the director of the Carnegie demonstration in Prince Edward Island. She writes: "The enterprising fox farmer will wrestle with a scientific treatise on Genetics if he has been led to believe that it may yield some new light on the breeding of foxes. A book on "Creative Design" might find few readers were it not that there are many women trying to evolve new designs for their hooked rugs".¹ The library, through its enrichment of rural life, should do much in stemming the tide of emigration to the towns and cities, which has marred the development of the Maritime Provinces in the last fifty years. This exodus bore a direct ratio to the paucity of diverting recreation and intellectual stimulus. In that it would render the rural life more attractive, especially during the winter, the benefits of a regional library system far outweigh the costs. An ex-premier of Nova Scotia has said:

Education must not stop at preparing children for life, it must accompany them through life, and one of the most useful mediums through which this process can be carried on appears to be some form of library service. This is particularly true in countries where a large proportion of the population lives in rural districts. It is possible, by means of library extension, packed and travelling libraries, for rural people to keep in touch with all forms of educational advance. By such means rural people may be given information and the inspiration to improve their own status, both as individuals and as citizens.²

1. Nora Bateson, *The Carnegie Library Demonstration in Prince Edward Island, Canada, 1933-1936*. Charlottetown, 1936.

2. Hon. G. S. Harrington. Quoted in *Libraries in Canada, Toronto, 1933*, p. 23.

In a period of depression a library becomes a refuge for those who wish and need recreation, as well as for those who desire to fit themselves for new positions when opportunity offers. In these critical times, even with reduced appropriations, libraries have responded to the need. In one city in the United States, Philadelphia, a forty per cent increase in the use of the library resulted from the depression. Educationists look to the public library to help to solve the problem of increased as well as enforced leisure, which arises from the modern industrial system. An excellent description of the scope and function of the public library has been given by the Public Libraries Committee of Great Britain in their *Report on the Public Libraries of England and Wales*:

The public library should be the centre of the intellectual life of the area which it serves. That intellectual life covers all stages, from the incipient curiosity of those whose intelligence is only beginning to awaken, to the advanced research of the highly-trained specialist. The library has to serve not only the earnest seekers after knowledge, but also those who are merely gratifying an elementary curiosity, and those who are seeking relaxation and recreation. We are far from decrying the recreational use of libraries. On the contrary, we believe it to be one of their most valuable services to supply that intelligent refreshment which we all need; and if for some that recreation is found in literature which does not appeal to more highly cultivated minds, it is to be regarded as a foundation for better things, and as, at worst, preferable to other modes of recreation which exist as alternatives.

The principle underlying the library service is that it exists for the training of the good citizen. It must aim at providing all that printed literature can provide to develop his intellectual, moral, and spiritual capabilities. If, therefore, it begins with, and always includes, a service of newspapers, it is enabling him to form an opinion on public affairs—good or bad, according to the quality of the papers he reads, but at any rate better than none; and by the variety of papers that it provides it gives him the chance of not being the slave of one. By the provision of periodicals, it provides him with harmless recreation and disseminates knowledge in popular forms; and if the proportion of indifferent fiction is high . . . it is the function of education to lead people to discriminate between the better and the worse, and to arrive at a higher standard. We have all gone through the stage of enjoying what we subsequently regard as rubbish; and a nation has to go through these stages as well as an individual. The remedy for the danger of a little knowledge is more knowledge.

Too often critics of a public library system overlook the close relationship which exists between the education of the child and the education of the adult. We spend without questioning approx-

imately 179,000,000 dollars yearly on educational institutions in Canada. Yet many suggestions for increasing or levying taxes for the support of an adequate system of public libraries are regarded as attempts to waste public money. We fail to recognize that books provide the greatest possibility of further education for the ninety-five per cent of our population who never reach universities, and that the remaining five per cent have only begun their education. The situation has been epitomized in the following pungent comment: "Some of us may think that a policy which spends millions in teaching people to read and grudges thousands on providing them with books is as short-sighted as would be the policy of a railway company which provided trains but grudged the cost of time tables."

Yet statistics reveal that nearly eighty per cent of the people of Canada have nothing that could be called library service. Even Ontario, which leads the Dominion as far as library progress is concerned, has three-quarters of a million people without any form of organized library service.¹ The situation is even more discouraging in the Maritime Provinces, where a few bright lights are insufficient to relieve the general gloom. There is no public library in Nova Scotia which is adequately supported, and less than sixty per cent of even the urban population possesses public libraries of any sort. The circulation per capita of these libraries is 1.57, in contrast with 3.33 for New Brunswick, and 5 for Canada as a whole. Expenditure for books, periodicals and binding per capita in the centres where libraries exist in Nova Scotia is just one-half that in New Brunswick; 2 and 4 cents respectively; while that for Canada as a whole is 10 cents.²

Nova Scotia has a total of fifteen public libraries with 108,321 volumes compared with nine libraries with 91,535 volumes for New Brunswick, but the number of registered borrowers in Nova Scotia at the end of 1933 was 14,468 with a circulation of 193,996 volumes, while New Brunswick reported almost eight and a half thousand more borrowers and a circulation of 293,323 volumes.³ More simply, $\frac{1}{35}$ of the population of Nova Scotia and $\frac{1}{18}$ of the population of New Brunswick are registered borrowers. The explanation probably depends upon the larger number of university libraries in Nova Scotia, as well as upon the fact that the experiments in adult education take care of a fraction of the rural population there. The university libraries, through service to alumni and teachers as well as staff and students, perform many of the

1. John Ridington, "Canada and its Libraries, 1934." *Library Journal*, June 15, 1934.

2. Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. *Survey of Libraries in Canada*, 1933.

3. *Ibid.*

functions which would otherwise be rendered by a well-organized public library.

One permanent library, the *Provincial Science Library* at Halifax, will send books anywhere in the province, the borrower paying the return postage. The librarian reports an increased use of this privilege during the last few years. It is through the services of travelling and open-shelf libraries, however, that books of more general interest reach regions which would otherwise have no library service. Although this paper cannot deal with the work of the university libraries as such, their "extra-curricular" work, undertaken in an effort to fulfil a public demand, will be included. Worthy of special note is the work done by the University of St. Francis Xavier in connection with its extension department. A library is maintained which serves over 900 study clubs. The travelling library of 25 boxes of books, each containing 30 volumes, circulates among the clubs and parish societies. Besides, there is an open-shelf library of 500 volumes, available to the inhabitants of Guysborough and Antigonish counties, and the Island of Cape Breton, the area served by the extension work, covering 20,000 sq. miles and containing a population of 197,000. The books, largely on social and economic subjects, are of the highest quality. They include a complete library on the co-operative movement, the most up-to-date information on agriculture, fisheries, education, handicrafts, as well as works of such authorities as John Maynard Keynes, G. D. H. Cole, the Webbs, Charles Beard, Sir Norman Angell, Norman Thomas, Stuart Chase, Upton Sinclair. In addition, particular attention is given to requests for information on subjects where no information is available in book form, and mimeographed sheets and pamphlets are sent out. Materials for debate and package libraries are furnished to those requesting them. The work that is being done should lead to an appreciation of books of all sorts. Already small libraries are being established in Cape Breton, where the demand has been greatest. In this way, the experiment in adult education has prepared the way for a demonstration of library service in eastern Nova Scotia, or for a whole-hearted support of a province-wide library service.

Another notable experiment in circulating books has been undertaken by the Department of Education. By 1933, thirteen of the eighteen counties were visited by travelling libraries. The 26,500 volumes are divided into boxes of 25 volumes, which are moved from the schools three times yearly. Ten of the volumes are for children, fifteen for adults, and the subjects include biography, history, travel, art and science as well as fiction. It is

unfortunate that reduced appropriations have made it impossible to complete the work; for these books should go far in arousing an interest in an adequate system of libraries among rural people. And when the demand becomes loud enough, the money for the supply can be found. In addition to these travelling libraries, the Department maintains a special "open-shelf" library, with approximately 1100 volumes, for the use of the school teachers and inspectors of the province. In 1933 the circulation was 1,943. The books are selected with great care, and an excellent pedagogical library is being built up.

The Patterson Travelling Library, established at Dalhousie University in 1929, operates on a smaller scale. It will send a box of thirty books to country schools, public libraries, reading clubs and communities possessing no public library. In 1935, twenty-two boxes of books were sent out. It is a regrettable fact that the novel service of the two Acadia bookmobiles, each of which carried 1500 books, should have had to be discontinued. Boxes of books are, however, now sent out from its store. In addition, Acadia now maintains a theological extension library. The McGill travelling libraries serve certain sections of the Maritimes, and the travelling libraries of the Rotary Club of Sydney provide boxes of books for rural and town schools as well.¹ It is hoped that in time the latter service will be extended to adults as well as school children. The Yarmouth library serves the surrounding country to some extent. In the words of the librarian: "We certainly serve the country people. They are allowed to take out as many books as they like. . . ." Practically all of the larger libraries send some duplicates and their discarded books to less fortunate institutions.

An authority on the subject of rural education has declared that "Reading of rural people—where there is an opportunity to read—is superior in quality and quantity to that of most city residents." Many of them, seeing no hope for a rural library service, think it useless to speak. Others are scarcely conscious of their need. Yet efforts undertaken in their behalf meet with ready acceptance. A nearby proof offers itself in the Prince Edward Island demonstration.

Such is the condition of the public library service in Nova Scotia at the present time. The difference between the *is* and the *ought-to-be* is a wide one. Perhaps it is only through a discussion of the latter that we can arrive at certain standards for library organization and equipment in the field of public libraries, and their co-operation with university, special and governmental

¹. Eugenie Archibald: *Adult Education in Canada*. Unpublished paper, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1931.

libraries, as well as among themselves. It is recognized to-day that any town with a population of over 20,000 can support a public library in a "reasonable state of efficiency". The minimum below which library service cannot be given, according to the Canadian commission of enquiry, is 3,000 dollars, which should serve a community of not more than 3,000 people. Any expenditure of less than 3,000 dollars, they declare, "cannot give results to warrant its use". But 63 per cent of the population of Nova Scotia and 73 per cent of the population of New Brunswick live in areas which cannot provide this financial minimum. Are these people to be excluded from library service because the necessary sum cannot be raised? And are smaller communities, where the demand for books may be as varied as in large communities, to be confined to their own small store? It is clear that library service, unlike many kinds of public service, is peculiar in the degree to which it lends itself to organization on a large scale. Elementary schools may be as good and cost less in small towns. In water, electric and gas services there is a direct ratio between the number of inhabitants and the amount of service or commodity rendered. Yet this rule does not hold in library service. As the British committee on libraries reported:

A community of 5,000 people may include readers with as great a variety of tastes as a community of 500,000 and will therefore require to have access to as wide a range of books. It is sometimes said that a small library can still be a good library. It can, if it is organized with a specific and limited group of people whose needs can be definitely formulated. But for a public composed of general readers with a variety of wants, and a variety of readers with special wants, no small library can provide an adequate service.

Solution of the problem rests on co-operation. The establishment of a library system embracing a region, a county, or a small province, has been tested with highly successful results. Since 1915, when Professor Adams advised the establishment of county units as the basis of a public library system for Great Britain, many countries have followed his counsel. Within ten years of their institution, county library schemes became practically universal in England. The idea, based on the desire to give a maximum of service at a minimum of expense, has spread to Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Russia, United States and Canada. In this last country, our own, the Fraser River demonstration has proved its worth, and the idea has spread within the province of British Columbia. Two more regional libraries were voted in plebiscites in January of this year, in the Kootenay and Okanagan regions. In a third

district, Vancouver Island, the vote was large enough to be encouraging for the future. It has been our privilege at this meeting to hear of the success of the Prince Edward Island demonstration.

The basis of the regional library system is the formation of a central collection of books and the distribution of selections of books several times a year to various branches. The books are housed in various buildings—schools, stores, houses, post offices—where there is no local library. The services of a trained librarian, who must combine a knowledge of psychology with the diplomatic skill of a foreign secretary, are of course essential. Much of the work in the branches must be done by voluntary helpers, who may or may not receive a small fee. While distribution to branches may take place by rail, a book truck or van is a most desirable auxiliary. Its usefulness is great, but it is the considered opinion of the Canadian commission that “one could not finance a book truck on the basis of one dollar *per capita*, except perhaps, in a populous and compact county, and its costs should never be allowed to encroach on the more necessary, but less showy, part of library work.” As the climate in the Maritimes makes it impossible to use such a bookmobile during the entire year, it might be dispensed with in the early stages of a demonstration. Another feature, which the English committee recommended very strongly, was the erection of a library with a permanent nucleus collection in every town and village:

One of the main objects of the county system may well be to stimulate such an appetite for reading that a local area is not satisfied till it has provided a library of the ordinary kind for itself; but the provision of such a library should, so far as finance is concerned, be the business of the locality... A general love of reading cannot be instilled without constant opportunities of access to a collection of books fairly extensive in its dimensions, affording a considerable range of selection, and enabling the reader not only to borrow books but to see them on the spot and handle them. . . A reader or lover of books can no more be created by a rare opportunity of borrowing a book from a severely limited stock than a zoologist can be created by an annual visit to the zoo.

As far as either Nova Scotia or New Brunswick is concerned, a number of regional libraries could be formed, each embracing one or more counties. A tentative plan might divide Nova Scotia into six regional areas for library service. Halifax and Hants counties would make the first unit, with a population of approximately 120,000, or 60,000 without the city of Halifax; Cape Breton, with its 132,000 people, is clearly another; the third, the counties familiarly known as “the Valley”, King’s, Annapolis and Digby;

then Yarmouth, Shelburne, Queens and Lunenburg as the fourth, and along the north shore Colchester and Cumberland would form the fifth; and Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough the last region. The division is purely arbitrary, aiming at a rough equalization of population within the five regions. Three of the last four units would include populations in the 60,000's, the other 76,000. Perhaps it is too much to hope that we should become sufficiently inter-provincial in our outlook and actions to combine Westmoreland and Cumberland in a demonstration which might inspire both provinces.

With several regional libraries within one province, there would be many opportunities for co-operation. Requests which could not be filled within the region might be transferred to a central library at Halifax. This central library in turn could co-operate with the Provincial Science Library, the university libraries, the Legislative and various other special libraries. Possibly one large central library could serve the three Maritime Provinces. And in time a Canadian counterpart of the Library of Congress might be a final source of appeal.

But a smoothly running provincial library system cannot act without supervision. Whether this is given by a special branch of the Department of Education, as in Ontario, or under the care of a special library commission financed by the provincial legislature, as in British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, there must be somebody to co-ordinate library activities, to formulate policies, to enlist public support, and to maintain certain standards with regard to libraries and librarians. If the library is to stand with the public school as an institution worthy of municipal and provincial support, librarians will have to measure up to certain qualifications, not inferior to those demanded of teachers. As far as the supervising body is concerned, various opinions are held as to whether it should or should not be under the control of the educational authorities. The Ontario libraries do not seem to be the step-sisters of the public schools, and the new plan for a state-wide system in Tennessee places responsibility for libraries on the Board of Education. However, the Public Libraries Committee for Great Britain have expressed strong disapproval of this system:

The present opinion alike of the librarians, the library authorities, and the councils themselves, is emphatically against any transfer of the libraries to the domain of the Education Committee, even with the attractive prospect of obtaining thereby a share in the grants from the Board of Education. If . . . we were legislating for a Platonic Republic with the Platonic conception of education

fully accepted by the community, it would be natural to consider the Department of Education as embracing not merely elementary and secondary schools and universities but also libraries, museums, art galleries, and perhaps also recreational organizations. It is, in short, only on the assumption of this wider conception of education. . . that we could recommend placing the public libraries under the control of the Education Committees; with the arguments against placing them under the control of authorities concerned with and interested in schools we entirely agree.

The ideal programme seems to be the one which was almost within the grasp of the province of New Brunswick a few years ago. In 1929 the Legislature appointed a library commission, with a trained librarian as executive secretary. Its object was to investigate and report upon the needs and resources of the province. The commission planned to organize a library council for consultative purposes, which would represent the various provincial interests and geographical areas. Then the two bodies, with the advice of a visiting library specialist, were to formulate a plan for a province-wide library service. The survey was to be made with the co-operation of Women's Institutes, and other clubs and organizations. The results and recommendations were to be embodied in a report, which was to be submitted to the Legislature. The final step would have been an act incorporating the policy of the commission and giving the necessary powers of taxation. Even without the survey, the commission was convinced that the solution of New Brunswick's major library problem lay in the establishment of regional library systems.

If it is the wish of the Maritime Library Institute to draw up and commend a practical program for library service in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, they might well begin with the recommendation that New Brunswick's library commission be given the power to act and the necessary financial support, and that a similar commission be appointed for Nova Scotia. In view of their common needs and in the interests of economy, one commission might serve the two provinces. An active library commission, with one or more field workers, could do much to revitalize existing libraries even before a wider system could be adopted. While the Prince Edward Island demonstration was begun before the appointment of such a commission, it is probably too much to expect that the Carnegie Foundation will undertake a similar demonstration in either of the two remaining Maritime Provinces. On our own financial support, *if necessary*, it may be thriftily added, let us advocate a policy of province-wide library service. In closing I should like

to quote a distinguished American who is interested in such a policy:

If government concerns itself with our crops, and we want it to do that; if it concerns itself with our health, and we want it to do that; if it concerns itself with our behavior, and we want it to do that; if it concerns itself with our respect for law, and we want it to do that; if it protects us in our property and we want it to do that; if it feeds us when we are hungry and clothes us when we are naked, and gives us work when we can't find work, and sees to it that we attend school, and we want it to do all these things; isn't it about time for it to be concerned with the next most important institution after the public school—the public library?¹

1. B. F. Coen: *State Leadership and Responsibility in Library Development*, A. L. A. Bulletin, September, 1935.