

EARLY PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NOVA SCOTIA

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DURING the last three years as archivist for Nova Scotia, while collecting and organizing our records, I have been trying to digest and assimilate those newspapers and documents that throw some light upon our intellectual and cultural growth. On other occasions I have spoken or written on that intellectual awakening of Nova Scotia which took place between 1800 and 1835. For the *Journal of Education* I have been trying to estimate the effects of those Acts of 1811 which were designed to encourage the establishment of common and grammar schools throughout the province; and in carrying on these investigations I have been impressed by the number and variety of activities that sprang into life at this time, giving mutual support in the heroic struggle of Nova Scotians to emerge from the intellectual log-hut of the pioneer into the more elevated and spacious dwelling of his descendants.

An increase in the number of newspapers was a sign not only of greater economic prosperity, but also of greater intellectual activity. The organization of a central agricultural society with branches in every county aimed at both agricultural improvement and intellectual emancipation. The establishment of Bible Schools and societies meant both spiritual development and social intercourse. The organization of debating societies meant both the cultivation of the forensic art and the quickening of political interest. All these events find place in the second decade of the 19th century, and demonstrate a conscious effort on the part of Nova Scotians to obtain economic self-sufficiency and to acquire an intellectual and cultural status.

But agricultural, debating and literary societies, grammar schools and colleges all needed books, however technical or limited in range, and thus was born the idea of libraries; first institutional, then general; first literature of knowledge, then literature as such.

It should be noted, also, that all these movements began from above and were fostered by leading Nova Scotians in the government, on the bench, in the pulpit or the counting-house. Democracy was not yet. Agricola provided the philosophy of an agricultural society, Lord Dalhousie became its patron. The legislature of Nova Scotia financed the grammar schools and contributed towards

the support of common schools. Bible societies were formed by clergymen as an aid to both religious and adult education. Debating societies were organized by ambitious young lawyers and merchants to discuss the political situation on the eve of a great election. The chief figure in the literary society of Truro was James Irving, A.M., master of Colchester Grammar School, who early began to publish a series of articles on English poetry, in the *Acadian Recorder*. The *Acadian Recorder* lent its columns to every aspiring correspondent, and gave able editorial support to every upward movement. Chief-Justice Strange gave his private library to the province to found a library for the legal profession. The professors of King's College and Pictou Academy wrought valiantly to build up adequate libraries in their respective institutions. Lord Dalhousie gave £1,000 from the Castine fund to establish the Garrison Library for the officers of the army and navy in Halifax, and from the same fund he planned to erect a college that would be open to all students without restriction as to class or creed.

All these movements had been initiated and these gifts made prior to 1821. But their significance had not yet been fully grasped. Those who needed the stimulus of books most had not yet felt their need. The majority of the people were still unread, if not illiterate. In 1819, when Mr. Atcheson, the provincial agent in London, sent out a complete set of the Transactions of the *Society for Encouragement of the Arts* to add to the library of the Central Agricultural Society, Agricola thought it necessary to publish the following exhortation:—

Without doubt the formation of an agricultural library is indispensable to the success of our whole plans; and to this subject I would have much earlier turned the attention of my readers, had I not been confounded by the open and unblushing avowal of sentiments unfriendly to books. Some appear to have thought that agriculture required nothing save the brawny arm and the sweaty brow, and that any application of the funds to procure these writings, which have laid the basis and directed the practice of this art, would be vain and unprofitable waste of the public money. . . .

I hope that this costly gift—the first to our infant library—will awake in our minds better feelings, and teach us that by a perusal of such works joined to a diligent pursuit of physical knowledge we can alone expect to become enlightened and scientific farmers. An ignorant boor may *turn up* the ground, but it is only a wise man who can cultivate it.

It is clear from what has been said so far that prior to 1819 there was nothing in Nova Scotia that could be called a public library and little that would indicate a wide demand for books. But

the new organizations and activities of the period, accompanied as they were by discussion and publicity, were not without effect upon the scattered communities; and, though the efforts of the leaders in each movement seemed to be directed along parallel lines, the results converged, were cumulative and far-reaching. In the older communities particularly, there gradually arose a general desire to obtain for themselves that college of the people, a community library. But, as all these early libraries were financed by subscription, they were public only in the sense that no one was excluded from membership who was able and willing to pay his entrance fee and annual dues.

In this sense, then, the first public library of which I can find any trace in Nova Scotia was organized in Newport, on April 18, 1821. This information may be found in a long anonymous letter to the *Acadian Recorder*, written at Newport on May 4, 1821, apparently by Rev. John Sprott. The letter states that Mr. Sprott presided at the organization meeting, that Elias Dimock submitted a constitution, and that nearly thirty members paid an entrance fee of ten shillings and annual dues of five shillings each. A management committee of seven members was chosen, comprising John Allison, Daniel Wier, Elias Dimock, Archibald Smith, Rev. Wm. Bennett, Wm. Wier, Jr., Treasurer, and Rev. John Sprott, Secretary. At a subsequent meeting of this committee, Rev. Wm. Bennett presided and recommended "the choice of an agreeable variety of books of merit suited to the different tastes and capacities of the readers". How far their tastes and capacities would be agreeable to modern readers may be gathered from their first list, which comprised Rollin's Ancient History, the Rambler, Paley's Evidences of Christianity, Park's Travels in Africa, Bishop Horn's Sermons, Robertson's Charles V, Thomson's Seasons, Logan's Sermons, Parry's Expedition to the North Pole, Delome on the British Constitution, the Cottagers of Glenburnie, the Letters of Agricola, Reviews and Magazines.

As further evidence of the exalted hopes of the founders of this library, the writer goes on to say that these beginnings "are the risings of a spirit of enquiry which we trust shall neither slumber nor sleep till the spectres of ignorance and superstition are fairly put to flight". He does not feel much hope of sudden improvement, nor any hope for the slothful and careless, but the inquisitive and industrious may increase their intellectual treasures; and he regards it as a good sign of the times to see "the high churchman, the humble, the modest and the stern Presbyterian rallying round the unforbidden tree of knowledge and scrambling for its fruit".

He concluded with an expression of faith in the necessity of self-education, in these words:

It is not in the power of ministers of the gospel to effectually enlighten the lower order of society, even though they were able and willing to do their duty, and had souls of fire and frames of adamant: they should put the people upon the plan of teaching themselves; and the forming of small libraries has done much to diffuse general knowledge in the Mother Country and in the States of America.

This account of the first public library in Nova Scotia appeared in the *Acadian Recorder* for May 26, 1821. The following extracts from an editorial in the same issue of the *Recorder* show that the editor hoped much from the movement and gave it his warmest support:

A library has been recently established in one of our most active and respectable townships—that of Newport; and we publish to-day an account of its origin with more than ordinary pleasure. There are already several institutions of the same kind in country places within the province—particularly at Truro, where there is one connected with a society, which is producing, we understand, a very sensible effect on the habits and opinions of the young. They are to be found in every village throughout the mother country, and open up a source of pure and innocent enjoyment. . . . We consider these libraries as a decisive and gratifying proof of that excellent spirit and temper which is now so active throughout Nova Scotia, and we trust that by the efforts of our leading characters they will soon become general. We respectfully and warmly recommend it to them, as the most essential benefit they can bestow upon a young country. Books impart knowledge; knowledge is power; and power, acting upon natural objects and skilfully directing them to our ease and profit, brings in its train wealth, prosperity and independence.

The second subscription library to be formed in Nova Scotia was organized at Amherst in the autumn of 1821, as the Cumberland Library Society. Mr. R. M. G. Dickey was president and Thomas Logan secretary. These officers petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor, in the following year, to be allowed to import American reprints of English works, to the value of £10 annually, from Boston or New York, via Passamaquoddy, as prices in England were prohibitive. His Excellency denied the prayer of the petition and the Library Society, having to struggle on without such assistance, apparently did not prosper greatly.

On January 1, 1822, the Yarmouth Book Society was formed, with 20 members and an annual membership fee of \$3.00. The

first president was John Moody and the first librarian Herbert Huntington, who afterwards rose to fame as a champion of responsible government. This library had a movable site for many years, and later changed its name; but it still persists, and in a building of its own gives both social and intellectual facilities to Yarmouth and the surrounding neighbourhood.

The *Acadian Recorder* for November 2, 1822, contains a long letter from Pictou by Perdiccas, who described the formation of a subscription library in that town during the winter of 1822. Dr. McCulloch had just completed a series of lectures to his congregation on the benefits to be derived from reading good books, and they had decided to form a library. Dr. McCulloch presided at the first meeting, and advised as to the selection of books. The latter arrived in the spring of 1822 from Great Britain, and comprised "history, moral disquisitions, poetry and the more approved novels—selected however with a principal care towards the interests of religion and virtue". According to Perdiccas, the project was a complete success, as the librarian seldom had a volume left in his charge, "except those of the Spectator and some others of the same kind which are already in almost everyone's hands". "The benefits of the institution too are becoming every day more widely acknowledged; so that there is now scarcely a young man in town who is able to afford the requisite sum that has not added his name to the list of subscribers". Perdiccas states further that his chief object in writing to the *Recorder* was "to hold up an example to the Province worthy in the highest degree of imitation." "There is not a village in the whole extent of Nova Scotia which presents any obstacle to the institution of a library". He calls on the leading men of every community, and especially the clergy, to step forward and endeavour to introduce a system so pregnant with advantages. He points to the zealous exertions of the Rev. John Sprott at Rawdon in forming an establishment of this kind "as proof of the influence which a pastor has in directing the views of his parishioners", and he adds that it is "here admitted unquestionably that the formation of the library is entirely owing to the representations of Dr. McCulloch".

But Perdiccas seems to have been a bit of a humbug, or at least over optimistic, if we can judge from the comments of Dr. McCulloch himself, in his letters of Mephibosheth Stepsure to the *Acadian Recorder*. In one of these letters he discusses the library at Pictou in the following pungent sentences, which give more than a hint as to the weaknesses of this early library movement:

Here, again, I must introduce you to our worthy old parson, the Rev. Mr. Drone. The old gentleman has often told me that,

next to my lame legs, my acquaintance with Widow Scant was the best gift which I ever received from a bountiful Providence. He says, and from experience I know it to be true, that an inclination to read is an incalculable gain: that, beside the information and enjoyment which reading affords, it leads to those steady habits which constitute character, and qualify persons for the duties of the social life.

At one time, I recollect, the parson was so impressed with the importance of this point that he exerted himself to get a small library among us; and he so far succeeded as to induce a number in the town, after grumbling a good deal and abusing the parson, to give a trifle for the sake of the youth. It was no use, they said; the boys of this country had no inclination to read; and it was needless to throw away good money upon Parson Drone's nonsense. Accordingly, when the books were bought, those who had paid for them recounted their predictions: and those who had abused the clergyman most and given nothing laughed at their neighbours, for not a youngster would look at them. In the selection of the books the parson's voice had no influence. Every man who gave anything was determined to have a book to his own taste. Deacon Scruple, who had found the benefit of hymns when he was smuggling, insisted upon getting a great many hymn books; some of the magistrates wanted Bunn's Justice; and Mrs. Grumble's husband Job voted for the Crook in the Lot. Mr. Drone told them that they were doing wrong; that, if they wished the youth to read, they must provide books which are engaging to youth; and that, if they did not render amusement an introduction to rational and religious information, they would not succeed.

As the parson predicted, so it fared with the library. The only readers are a few religious old people, who still make it a point of conscience to read so many pages to their family, upon the Sunday evening; and it generally happens that the young people, when the reading begins, lay themselves back upon their chairs and are soon fast asleep. Saunders Scantocreech says that there is no wonder, though the young people in our town be as ignorant as his stots, for the most of their parents have just as little sense; they encourage their children in card playing and frolicking, and every kind of folly; but where is there one of them that even bought for them a diverting story book to entice them to read? Saunders farther affirms that almost every village in Scotland has its library, and that the thing speaks for itself. Everybody, he says, reads, except ne'er do well vagabonds; and that, not only diverting stories, but the Bible too. For myself, I can only say that the disposition to read was acquired exactly as the parson stated, and also that, by means of it, I have passed many an hour in the evening with pleasure, when my neighbours were in Tipple's.

To the editor of the *Recorder* the letter of Perdiccas afforded an opportunity to express his views not only on libraries in general,

but also on the great need of one in Halifax. This editorial of November 2, 1822, deserves to be quoted in full:

We are glad that our Pictou correspondent has addressed us on a subject of great interest and importance—the establishment of a Public Library. We are satisfied that such an institution, on a respectable scale and properly conducted, would be an incalculable acquisition to this town. Facilities of cultivating and indulging a taste for reading are indispensable to a virtuous education: and a young person sent abroad into the world without any relish for books is so dependent on society, so utterly incapable of employing his leisure hours to rational improvement, that he becomes the mere slave of company and frivolous pursuits. Nay more, he is drawn into expenses injurious to his fortune, and seduced into such scenes as are often fatal to his constitution and success in life. The power of deriving amusement from books is one of the most valuable habits which a parent can communicate to his children. It not only enriches their understanding, exercises and sharpens the faculties of the mind and enlarges their conceptions; but it has a powerful tendency to create and preserve a virtuous, moral character. It makes them domestic, because they are independent of foreign amusements and can be happy at home. Reading is the most instructive, the most innocent, and the most delightful method of spending that leisure which more active avocations allow. Of all the sources of entertainments, it is the noblest, the least costly, the most independent. Nor in these opinions are we by any means singular. We are merely echoing the sentiments of every sensible man in the community. Indeed such an host of arguments may be advanced in favour of a public library and so few in opposition, that in private conversation there appears scarce any difference of opinion. Most men express their anxiety to see it in operation; and yet no one steps forward and makes the first move. If two or three gentlemen of influence would take a little pains to organize it, we do not believe they would find any serious difficulty in obtaining subscribers and carrying the whole plan into effect. The appeal made by our correspondent to the clergy is well timed; as they are peculiarly fitted by their influence in society and their literary education to undertake this pious labour, and to originate and mature the scheme. The garrison have set us a most excellent example; and have founded a library, the value and pleasures of which the officers of the British army can well appreciate. There is not a town in Great Britain or in the Eastern States so lamentably deficient as Halifax in the command of books and of all intellectual enjoyments. Surely this is a reproach which ought not to remain. The want of a library and of other facilities for mental improvement is but too apparent in the general tone of manners and society. No intelligent stranger comes among us who does not remark it, not so much as a privation to himself, but by its effects on ourselves, on the style of conversation, and our general pursuits and modes of thinking. A good library would operate a rapid and most

beneficial change: and we put it as a serious question to our leading characters and to all parents, whether they are discharging their duty to the community and to their offspring in neglecting the only means of inspiring that taste which is acknowledged to be the best safeguard of morals—which is satisfied with the most enlightened and the most economical of all pleasures—which dissolves prejudice, invigorates the intellect, and purifies the affections.

By the middle of 1822, then, four more or less public libraries had been founded in Nova Scotia and in the following order; Newport, Amherst, Yarmouth and Pictou. But Halifax and Windsor, the commercial and educational capitals of the province, still lagged behind.

On November 16, 1822, a letter appeared in the *Recorder* from the pen of A-W-M of Windsor. The author comments at length on the effusion of Perdiccas, and discourses on the value and necessity of reading. He refers to the library at Newport, and states that, although the fees are very low, the members already have access to more than one hundred volumes. He deplors the fact that neither Halifax nor Windsor has a public library.

His letter brought forth, during the following week, a defence of Halifax, from a gentleman under the pseudonym of *Literatus*. The latter is rather specious in his claim that Halifax already had three public libraries in the Garrison Library and the Presbyterian and Wesleyan Libraries. However, he illustrates the growing interest in the movement, and may be quoted in part to establish the dates on which the last two libraries were started. He respectfully informs A-W-M that "Beside the Garrison Library, which contains several hundred volumes, there are two congregational libraries which have been formed *within the last three months*: one connected with the second Presbyterian church and the other belonging to the Wesleyan Society. The former contains, I believe, about one hundred and the latter about two hundred volumes, and both are rapidly increasing. The subscription, I understand, is very low, not more than one dollar per annum, in order that the benefits of the institutions may be extended to the poorest of the people who are desirous of improving their minds by reading".

In spite of this self-satisfied letter, steps were taken a year later to form a library in Halifax. On October 10, 1823, a meeting was held in the Exchange Coffee House with Hon. Michael Wallace in the chair. It was arranged that the rate of subscription should be £5 for a transferable share, and that the annual fee should be 30 shillings. A second meeting was held on November 19th. and

a committee of nine was chosen to manage the new library. The committee comprised Hon. Michael Wallace, Rev. Dr. Inglis, H. H. Cogswell, Samuel Head, John Young, Wm. B. Bliss, J. W. Nutting, W. B. Almon and Wm. Minns. It found that 100 shares had been subscribed, the Lieutenant-Governor having taken five. A call was made for payment by December first, and Hon. Michael Wallace was made Treasurer. At a meeting of the association on December 3rd, Hon. Judge Stewart presented the infant institution with a complete set of Fathers Catrou and Roulie's *Histoire Romaine* in nineteen volumes, quarto, embellished with cuts. But the library was not ready to serve its members until August, 1824. In his issue of August 7, 1824, the editor of the *Recorder* writes: "We are happy to announce that the books of the Halifax Library are now ready for distribution to subscribers. A number of standard works of great merit, comprising history, poetry, travels, etc., have been received, and the committee are in expectation of obtaining shortly an additional supply".

From the first this Halifax Library enjoyed special favor. Because of the prominent positions held by its leading subscribers, it was able to obtain the use of a room in the Province House, and, for the same reason, it was able to procure a grant from the provincial funds of £50 a year for two or three years, until other libraries protested or demanded the same consideration. At the same time it took over the library of the Central Agricultural Society, and thereby rapidly increased the number of its volumes. At its annual meeting on December 3, 1825, it was reported that "since our last meeting the Agricultural Library has been united, under certain restrictions to this; thus affording, to those desirous of availing themselves of the advantage, the use of a well selected collection of books on agriculture and the sciences connected with it".

In the meantime a public reading-room and exchange library was formed at Lunenburg in December, 1824, when 50 or 60 persons associated to that end. Then, in March, 1826, the Bridgetown Reading Society was formed, and, in July, The King's County Library at Kentville. The Society at Bridgetown had a membership of 50 who subscribed a guinea each. Rev. Wm. Elder was President, Alex. H. Troop, Secretary, Stephen Bromley, Librarian, and Mr. Benj. Reed, Treasurer. The King's County Library alone was modelled on that of Halifax. It sold shares at 40 shillings each, and charged annual dues of 10 shillings. From a membership of 30, John Whidden was elected President, C. H. Rand Secretary and Treasurer, and Andrew Black Librarian.

While these activities were in progress, a lively controversy was waged between the *Free Press* and the *Recorder* over the aristocratic and exclusive character of the Halifax Library and its petition for provincial aid. The *Free Press* championed the Halifax Library, and the *Recorder* took the reasonable ground that while anxious for the prosperity of this library, as of all libraries in Nova Scotia, and favoring public grants to all county libraries, it could not justify a grant to an exclusive private association such as the Halifax Library without insisting that its doors should be thrown open to the poor as well as the rich.

In 1825, when the first application for a grant in aid had been reported to its subscribers by the Halifax Library, the *Recorder* had written as follows:

The zeal with which the Halifax Library has been supported entitles its promoters to the cordial thanks of all who wish well to this country. Whatever we may be permitted to think of the system on which this and many other of our local institutions are organized, we can have no difficulty in deciding that very great benefit must be derived by Halifax from the circulation of a mass of useful works, many of which had not before found their way into Nova Scotia, and others were rarely to be met with. If anything can be obtained from the public funds in aid of this establishment, it will be certainly well bestowed. The legislature, if applied to on this subject, will, we trust, take also into consideration the destitute situation of their constituents in other parts of the province in this respect. A very small grant to each county town would lay the foundation of a library; and those settlements that have already formed libraries should come forward and petition for aid to their funds, particularly as they cannot be supposed to possess the same means of obtaining subscriptions that Halifax does.

It might be made a necessary condition in order to obtain legislative aid, that the settlement claiming it should previously have expended a certain sum in the purchase of books, and the sum granted by the province might bear a relative value to that raised by the people of the settlement. This subject must be considered as a branch of the system of education, as it would be frivolous to buy books for those who are condemned to remain ignorant of the meaning of their contents. There can be no doubt, as it is demonstrated by experience, that the introduction of books into a place produces a habit of reading which continues to augment steadily.

Halifax has improved surprisingly in a literary point of view within a very few years. Education has been spread among the poorer classes to a great extent, chiefly by the exertions of one individual, and the habits of reading as an amusement, that are now becoming very general, must have a good tendency. They

will enlarge the understandings and rectify the views of the public, especially of that portion who are not by long custom enured to error.

While we thus far coincide with the editor of the *Free Press* on this interesting question, we cannot possibly agree with him in the idea that the Halifax Library is a public institution. It is highly useful, so is the Halifax Banking Company, but the one as much as the other is private in its nature, being under private direction; and even were the library to receive its entire support from the Treasury, it would be still private while regulated by private individuals.

The plan too restricts its use within very narrow limits. One hundred or one hundred and fifty members only have access to it. A public library, to be entitled to that name, must be open to the public, as is the case in France. This then is a private society, in which the members derive a personal benefit in return for their subscriptions.

There can be, however, no argument justly drawn from this circumstance against such a library receiving public aid. It is for the general interest that such institutions should be cherished in every possible way, and the legislature would be completely justified in expending the public funds in fostering it; but we can hardly think that public money will be thus voted to aid the researches and refined amusements of men of learning and leisure, until our country schools for the education of the people shall have been provided for. To begin to educate at the top of society and to neglect the humbler classes, is a most mistaken policy. It is the interest of a government that its people in general should possess the rudiments of knowledge, and it would be cruel in the extreme to suffer them to remain in their present state of destitution, receiving no assistance from the public Treasury, and to give money to institutions beneficial to the rich only.

In 1829 the attitude of the editor of the *Recorder* was still the same, but the facts of the situation had become clearer; and, when he saw a group of 120 subscribers, who were able to pay from £5 to £8 entrance fee to the exclusion of many taxpayers of equal intellectual parts, asking these same taxpayers to assist them in building up a private library, he spoke in no uncertain terms against such monopoly and privilege. After pointing out that he could easily name 500 citizens who were fit for the privilege of the library but unable to become members both because of the exorbitant price of a share and the restricted number of shareholders, he concludes with the following eloquent plea for a genuine public library:

We would fain open the principal library to our fellow citizens—the library established by our President—patronized by our late Governor—endowed by our Legislature—held in the

Province Building—selected by taste and discernment—a fund for research and reference—this is the library which we would fondly wish that the studious part of our community might have access to,—unrestricted by a fine unmeaningly called a share; and unlimited by anything, except correctness of deportment and punctuality in paying yearly subscriptions.

This attack on the exclusiveness of the Halifax Library, when read with Mephibosheth Stepsure's criticism of the stodginess of the Pictou Library, reveals some of the defects of the early library movement. The number of readers was too small, and the selection of books was too narrow. There was nothing for the poor either in pocket or in mind; and, above all, nothing to allure the youth from the village store, the blacksmith's shop or the tavern. There was no literature of escape for the care-worn or bed-ridden citizen; little to gratify the curiosity of the armchair traveller or adventurer. Furthermore, those who lived far from the few library centres had no books of any description whatever.

To meet the needs of those who were far from library centres or widely scattered throughout the province, a plan for co-operative circulating libraries was suggested as early as 1826 by a Scottish immigrant to Cape Breton who wrote under the pen-name of Peregrinus. In the *Novascotian* of September 28th, he cited the example of Scotland, where the several villages of a parish were wont to combine for the purchase of a library and move it from village to village in turn throughout the year, thus enabling the whole parish to enjoy a larger selection of books than if eight or ten villages had each tried to form a small library.

In the following year, though not as a result of this letter, a circulating library was actually presented to Merigomish by the Society formed in Glasgow for the promotion of religious knowledge in British North America. It comprised 245 volumes of ancient and modern history and biography, religious works and magazines. Readers had to pay an annual subscription of two shillings and six pence, which sum was to be used by the Glasgow Society for the purchase of additional books. Unfortunately, no township or county in Nova Scotia imitated this Society. In fact, the Merigomish missionary library was the last that was formed under this early library movement, unless account be taken of the Halifax Mechanics' Library which was organized as a protest against the aristocratic exclusiveness of the Halifax Subscription Library, and may be regarded either as the last of an old order or the forerunner of a new movement. Between 1830 and 1850, interest seems to have centred in Mechanics' Institutes as the new way of satisfying intellectual and social needs. These institutes coincided

with a movement for the popularization of scientific knowledge and natural philosophy, and tended to overshadow the more general aims of the library associations. When the new movement started in Halifax, it was hailed with delight by Howe in the *Novascotian*; and the editor of the *Recorder* wrote, "Our former remarks on Literary Institutions are all met with increased interest by a Mechanics' Institute".

The first Mechanics' Institute in the world had been organized in Glasgow in 1823, and from there the idea spread throughout the British Isles and to America. It is worthy of note that Nova Scotia at this time looked to Scotland rather than New England for its models in both adolescent and adult education. Though the Legislature studied the statutes of Massachusetts before making its famous report on education in 1825 and referred in general terms to other countries, it cited Scotland specifically as worthy of imitation in the education of youth. Scottish divines had been leaders in the early library movement in Nova Scotia—a movement for adult education—and Scottish examples had been set forth in regard to itinerating libraries. A Scottish society had presented a model library to Merigomish, and from Scotland again came the Mechanics' Institutes.

The Halifax Mechanics' Institute was founded in 1831, and during the next few years rapidly built up an active membership and a scientific library and apparatus. In this it was aided by grants from the provincial government. With the example of Halifax before it, a number of these institutions were formed in other parts of the province. From Pictou, where Dr. McCulloch took the lead in both literary and scientific work and built up both a library and scientific equipment, a suggestion was made to the Provincial Assembly whereby the library movement could be saved from extinction by an aggressive method of expansion.

In 1834, the officers of the Pictou subscription library petitioned for aid to make their library of service to the whole county. A committee of the House, of which Jotham Blanchard was chairman, reported sympathetically and elaborated the idea of itinerating libraries as a means whereby the number of available books could be multiplied ten-fold, by the simple process of selective buying and interchange among local centres. The itinerating plan they described as follows:

Take a County for example in which ten places for the deposit of Books would accommodate all the inhabitants. One hundred pounds worth of Books would purchase ten small libraries of at least forty volumes each, an abundance for one

year's reading. By an annual interchange of these libraries, the whole county would be supplied with the reading of 400 volumes in the course of ten years, by which time another generation of readers would be ready to go over the same ground; but the especially beauty of the system is that, when once it is commenced, it contains within itself the principle of perpetuation. It could be no hardship to any settlement to pay for the use of forty volumes, twenty shillings a year, to be collected by a farthing or halfpenny for reading a volume, or otherwise as might best suit, and by this trifling contribution at the end of the ten years, ten more Libraries of forty volumes each, of four hundred volumes in all, would be ready to add to the first stock, or to make inroads upon destitute places.

The committee then recommended a grant of £20 to Pictou, to assist in an experiment that might furnish an example of its working to the rest of the province. But the Assembly rejected the report, 14-12.

In 1836 both the Lunenburg Public Library Association and the Pictou Library petitioned for aid. A Committee of the House, with Jotham Blanchard again as chairman, made a second report. This time they suggested that the plan of itinerating libraries might be introduced in connection with schools; and that if the public funds were not sufficient to permit of a special grant for school libraries, 10% of the provincial grant should be diverted to the establishment of such libraries. In this report there is a very striking passage that deserves to be quoted:

The Committee acknowledge that the claim of schools upon the public bounty may be fairly argued, as a prior but not as a superior one, because by their means the use of the necessary tools for acquiring general knowledge is chiefly obtained. But the ability to use the instruments of any art, if not put into operation, is of little advantage to the possessor. Without access to books, from which nearly all general and useful knowledge comes, the utility of schools is fearfully lessened.

This able report also was rejected by the Assembly, and henceforth the libraries are left to their own resources. In the intervening years enthusiasm waned; and to-day of the 10 or 11 libraries formed between 1821 and 1827 only two remain that can trace a continuous history of more than a hundred years. The others ceased to exist, and allowed their books to be dispersed or destroyed. To-day, according to the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, there are only 15 public libraries in all Nova Scotia. If we compare our economic status, our population, and our costs of education respectively with those of 1821-27, we cannot but feel that from the

point of view of public libraries we have not made any progress. In fact, our needs are greater than ever, and we are doing relatively less to meet them, despite our recognition of the fact that an intelligent democracy can rest secure on the one foundation of a well-informed electorate.

The recent report by the Carnegie Commission of Enquiry on *Libraries in Canada* has this to say on the subject of itinerating or circulating libraries operating on a co-operative basis:

The realization that, by ten thousand people each paying the cost of a single book, to be kept available for all in a general collection, each contributor would have access to ten thousand volumes, long ago commended itself to general public judgment as a worth while piece of co-operation. This realization is the foundation on which the public library is built—and that foundation is as broad and as strong as democracy itself.

The same report gives the following outline of library development since the time of which I have been writing, and suggests a high ideal of library service for this generation:

Public libraries have gone through many interesting phases of development in the last hundred years. In the first place, and indeed for many years, they were accessible to adult subscribers only, to people who recognized their need of books and could pay for them. Then people began to understand that everyone needed books, whether or not he could afford to buy them, and so municipalities assumed the responsibility of financially assisting the communities which desired book service. It was this same feeling of community responsibility that started the travelling library systems in the various Extension Divisions of the governmental departments, and in some of the universities. These organizations are doing an excellent work, of a kind, but they reach only those comparatively few people who know their own need, and have a sufficient desire for books to make an effort to get them.

Gradually, those interested in books for the people realized that neither the depository nor the travelling library was going to solve the problem, for they saw that the people who most needed books were unconscious of their lack, and that a human medium must be provided to bring the book and the reader into contact.

So the modern public librarian came into being, with the present interpretation of library service, namely, that a library is not simply a building, nor is it a collection of books only; it is a public service, whereby the right book is brought to the right reader at the least cost, by a person who has been trained for the work.