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The Compilation of a Bibliography of the Rebellion of 1837-38

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THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

THE COMPILATION OF A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE
REBELLION OF 1837-38

BY

FRANCES STATON

I wish to bring to the notice of the Canadian Historical Association a pamphlet just issued by the Reference Division of the Toronto Public Library—an institution with which I have been connected for many years. This pamphlet is entitled "The Rebellion of 1837-38. A Bibliography of the sources of information in the Public Reference Library, Toronto."

The compiling of this work being assigned me, it is now my purpose to give a short account of the method and procedure followed in the gathering and arranging of the material contained in the bibliography, a subject which, while it may not be exactly entertaining or amusing, may at least prove of some interest to many who would wish at some time to make a special study of that important event, which was to become a powerful factor in shaping the destinies of our country, and in its development politically and socially.

A few years ago, after due consideration of the subject, Dr. Locke decided to have published at intervals a series of bibliographies of material available in the Reference Division of the Toronto Public Library, gathering together all the resources of the library on a particular subject, in this way bringing to light many of the treasures of which we were possessed, and making known to the public generally, our great wealth of material on various Canadian topics. Our object secondly was by these means to aid those who were desirous of following some particular course of historical study, and to make their fields of investigation as interesting and as fruitful as possible.

Our first attempt was a list of all the early Canadian printed books and pamphlets in the Reference Library, dating from 1764, when the first printing press was established in this country, to the year 1837, giving us a very good idea of the progress of printing and publication in Canada during that period. This, our first effort, proved very successful and we were encouraged to continue the good work.

Our next contribution to the series was more ambitious, we having decided on a bibliography of one of the most salient points in the history of our country—that of the Canadian Rebellion of 1837—both in Upper and in Lower Canada.

Having undertaken this work I was rather appalled at its magnitude and felt that it was no easy task, but it was a favourite theme in Canadian history, which made the work more congenial, and as I went on it became exceedingly fascinating and absorbing.

Having decided on the subject the next thing to consider was the plan of campaign in regard to the research work. In this respect no trouble was anticipated so far as the general material was concerned, for the Canadiana of our Reference Library as a general collection cannot be surpassed, and it is one of which Toronto, and in fact all Canada, may be justifiably proud.

It is not within the scope of this paper to enter into any of the details of the causes and agitation that led to the rebellion nor to comment on any of the events connected with it. The purpose is now to explain the nature and arrangement of the bibliography by mentioning the different sources investigated for material.

The first source to be noticed are the books—and in order for the student and others to arrive at a fair and accurate knowledge of the causes that led to the rebellion of 1837-8, it will be necessary to go back to the beginning of the history of our country and besides making a careful study of the French Régime, and the earlier history of the English period, to read, mark, learn, and digest the Quebec Act of 1774 and the Constitutional Act of 1791. In this connection too may be read, "The Seventh Report from the Select Committee of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada on Grievances, etc.," and "The ninety-two Resolutions of the House of Assembly of Lower Canada," also Lord Durham's "Report on the Affairs of Canada."

In this way, a list was made of all the histories of the rebellion, then of the most important histories of Canada which dealt in any detail on the subject. This in itself presented quite a creditable list.

After this an excursion was taken into the realm of books, seeking hither and thither for individual chapters for odds and ends, and out-of-the-way information, which search was very satisfactorily rewarded. This source proved a most interesting one, obtaining as we do the view-points of the different authors, and seeking many items of local interest that we do not find in the general history.

Next to be entered was the field of romance with the hope of gleaning there at least a few tales and stories founded on such an exciting and interesting topic as the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-8, my search being rewarded by securing several works of fiction.

I then turned my attention to pamphlets, in which we are particularly wealthy. Our collection on, and relating to, our subject is a very valuable one, containing as it does a great wealth of material on the rebellion and the causes and events connected with it. As an aid to the study of history it cannot be denied that their value is inestimable. A pamphlet is generally written on some important topic, or some event, or some question political or social, that is agitating the minds of the people at the time, and its interest is enhanced by the fact that it only relates to present day questions. As

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an instrument in shaping and moulding the opinions of the people in times of political storm and stress especially, it is as a rule very keen and convincing. Pamphlets, like some periodicals, do not enjoy a very long existence. Many of them, like human beings, are only born to die. They are seldom reprinted—hence the importance of preserving them as aids to research and the study of history for future generations.

The next source of investigation was the "Transactions of Learned Societies." Of these, of course, there were only certain ones that would be likely to contain any of the desired information. However, some very useful papers were discovered and among others entries have been made from the following: Niagara Historical Society Publications, Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Transactions of the Canadian Institute, Johns Hopkins University Studies, The Buffalo Historical Society, Lundy's Lane Historical Society, Ontario Historical Society.

From the source Government Documents the material was quite profuse, and need not be dwelt upon here, as every one is quite familiar with the nature of their contents, comprising as they do parliamentary debates and discussions, reports of committee, petitions, memorials, proclamations, etc., all of which are valuable assets in regard to historical study.

Our scrap books, too, were not to be despised as an aid to our bibliography. Among these are two which deal particularly with the rebellion. One is composed of extracts from the *Montreal Star* which deal almost entirely with the insurrection in Lower Canada. The other is one which our Chief Librarian, Dr. Locke, was fortunate enough to secure in London, England, when on a visit there several years ago. It consists of copious clippings from American papers of that period such as the *Herald and Sentinel*, Philadelphia, the *Ledger* and *Daily Transcript*, the *Rochester Democrat*, the *Pennsylvanian*, and others. These cuttings contain many items we have not found elsewhere, and are especially valuable because of the light they throw on the subject of American sympathy and opinion.

Another by-path to the highroad of history was found in the magazine literature, and though not quite so productive of results as the pamphlets, a good many valuable articles were brought to light. This literature is much akin to that of the pamphlets, the articles being written chiefly with the object of expressing the views and opinions of the writers on some vital and outstanding questions of the day. We cannot, therefore, overlook the fact of their importance, they having always proved a reliable and unfailing friend in need. It may be of some interest to mention a few of the magazines contained in the bibliography where material on the subject may be

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obtained. For instance, the *Annual Register*, *Acta-Victoriana*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Canadian Christian Examiner*, *Canadian Magazine*, the *Colonial Magazine*, *Dublin Review*, *Dublin University Magazine*, *Electric Review*, *Fortnightly Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *Littell's Living Age*, *Magazine of American History*, *Mirror of Parliament*, *New Dominion Monthly*, *Niles' Register*, *Nineteenth Century*, *North American Review*, *Quarterly Review* and *Rose Belford's Canadian Monthly*.

Last but not least, and the most interesting and prolific of our sources, were the newspapers, of which we have a very representative collection dating from 1830 to the end of the rebellion period. Their contents proved a veritable embarrassment of riches. The task of examining them was a formidable one, but on searching through the files, turning over one by one the musty yellow leaves, such a mine of wealth was revealed that I only realized for the first time the immense value of the newspaper as an historical source.

Much more so than periodicals and pamphlets are they a revealer of public sentiment and opinion. Much more vividly do they chronicle the daily events of the times, and by a thorough search one cannot fail to bring to light many important facts and much curious information which it would be impossible to find elsewhere. From the papers also we obtain a much more graphic and accurate picture of the period than we can possibly do from other sources. We find them a true mirror of past events, and their contents unusually interesting, receiving as we do a delightfully clear and vivid account and description of the occurrences of those bygone days. Some idea of the nature of the material may be gained by saying that in these may be found discussions and debates in the Houses of Parliament on many vital questions concerning the province, despatches, messages, and instructions of the Imperial Government to Governors of the provinces, the replies in return, etc.

There are the accounts of the organization of various societies, both constitutional and reform, their reports, meetings, etc. Then a wealth of very useful matter may be culled from the proceedings of the numerous public meetings that were held in every section of the province in order to attest loyalty to the Crown or otherwise. The resolutions read and adopted and the speeches, almost invariably ending with an address to the King or Queen, expressing their unyielding allegiance, or presenting a petition of grievances.

There are interesting editorials, letters from citizens and residents in the province, each voicing his opinion on the events and troubles of the day. We find also accounts of the battles and skirmishes that took place, in connection with which there is a mass of official correspondence.

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There we find also many proclamations and messages of the President of the United States, relative to the troubles on the frontier, besides addresses and militia orders, as well as detailed reports of the trials of some of the political prisoners, the charge of the judge to the jury, and his speech on passing sentence.

The following are among some of the papers examined: The *Loyalist*, the *Canadian Courant*, the *Western Mercury*, *Quebec Gazette*, *Cobourg Star*, the *Vindicator*, *British American Journal*, *Canadian Correspondent*, *Brockville Recorder*, *Upper Canada Courier*, *Dundas Weekly Post*, *Correspondent and Advocate*, *Montreal Transcript*, the *Traveller* or *Prince Edward Gazette*, *Toronto Mirror*, the *Church*, the *Examiner* and the *Globe*.

The amount of material selected from the papers is rather a formidable one, consisting as it does of several hundred entries, many of them curious and amusing. The task was no easy one but I felt rewarded for the labour by the fact of having amassed a great deal of information on the rebellion that was quite foreign to me before.

This then is the plan on which the bibliography on the rebellion was prepared, and which will also form the basis for compiling other bibliographies on special Canadian topics, which we hope to be able to issue from time to time.

In addition to the above mass of material we have in the archives of our library two unique and valuable items relating to the rebellion which I should like to mention. One is the flag that was taken from the steamer *Caroline* when she was captured by Captain Drew and sent blazing over the Falls on the 29th December, 1837. This flag was afterwards given to Lieutenant McCormick as a recognition of the prominent part he took in the skirmish, and of the severe wounds he received at the time.

A number of years afterwards Lieutenant McCormick gave the flag to Captain Drew, who subsequently presented it to the United Service Museum at Whitehall, where it hung for many years, but on the museum being removed to other quarters the flag was not rehung.

A number of years ago the Board of the Toronto Public Library, through the late Dr. Bain, then Chief Librarian, requested the transfer of the flag to that institution. After some negotiations this request was complied with, and ever since this flag has been one of our most valued possessions.

The other item consists of the original petition of the loyal inhabitants of the city of Toronto to Her Majesty the Queen against the Rebellion Losses Bill. It is written on sheets of vellum making a roll twelve feet long, containing three columns of signatures, among them the names of many of the most prominent residents of the city at that time.

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This document, just recently acquired, is especially valuable to us because of its local interest and our possession of it is to be attributed to the watchfulness and alertness of our Chief Librarian, Dr. Locke, who is always so keen to secure for our library any valuable out-of-the-way material of Canadian historical interest. The petition is a very interesting one and reads as follows:—

“TO THE QUEEN’S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY

“We, your Majesty’s most dutiful subjects, Inhabitants of your Majesty’s Loyal City of Toronto in Western Canada most humbly beg to approach your Majesty with expressions of our devoted loyalty to your Majesty’s person and government and humbly and most respectfully to represent to your Majesty—That we view with unfeigned astonishment the measures proposed by the present provincial Administration of this province for payment of losses in the Lower province consequent on the Rebellion of 1837 and 1838, whereby the consolidated revenue of the province is to be charged (already heavily burthened) with a further large amount of debt—the Upper Province having already paid all recognized claims for losses sustained in the defence of the Crown in that section of the country out of her own peculiar revenues, and now being asked to share in the additional burthen arising from the interest on the Debentures proposed to be issued.

“We beg most humbly and respectfully to declare to your Majesty that it is our positive conviction that if the proposed measure be forced through the Provincial Legislature it will be diametrically opposed to the wishes of at least four-fifths of the inhabitants of Canada West without distinction of politics; and that it will be a memorable instance of Taxation without Representation, the people by whom the present House of Assembly was elected not being consulted thereupon and a vast majority being opposed thereto.

“That independently of the palpable injustice of the measure as a question of financial burden and taxation we cannot refrain from expressing our sense of the absurdity and mockery of continuing to call ourselves subjects of the Crown of England and using your Majesty’s name in public and judicial proceedings, and yet submitting to taxation for the purposes of payment of a very large sum of money to reimburse losses alleged to have been sustained eleven years ago by a population in open insurrection against your Majesty’s authority.

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“We therefore humbly and earnestly pray that your Majesty will be graciously pleased to take this our humble representation into your Majesty’s favourable consideration and disallow any measure granting remuneration to any party implicated in the late unnatural Rebellion in these Provinces against your Majesty’s Crown and Dignity for loss sustained in consequence thereof.”

In conclusion I should like to say that all the material quoted in the bibliography is always readily available and at the service of any one who at any time may wish to consult it at the Toronto Public Reference Library.