

The Carnegie Library demonstration in  
Prince Edward Island.

Nora Bateson

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CARNEGIE LIBRARY DEMONSTRATION IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

P.E.I. COLLECTION  
LIBRARY OF U.P.E.I.

There may be a few people here who are as ignorant of conditions in Prince Edward Island as I was before I went there. By way of introduction, therefore, may I remind you that Prince Edward Island is one of the oldest settlements in the Dominion. It is easy to understand why the Canadian Library Commission found it a particularly suitable area for a demonstration of library service on a larger scale. The island is a geographic and political unit with a population large enough to support a good library service and not too large to be manageable. There are no industries, the people being engaged almost entirely in agriculture and fishing. The island is well settled but, except for Charlottetown (14,000) and Summerside (4,000), there are no towns with a population of over one thousand. For a long time there has been practically no immigration but a steady exodus. I believe until the last few years that every year about five hundred young people left Prince Edward Island seeking greater opportunities in various parts of Canada and the United States. Prince Edward Island is very proud of the high standing achieved by its men and women in the universities and professions of this continent. There is no doubt that they have distinguished themselves and I think that the same rather high quality is to be found in those who have remained on the island. Geographically cut off, especially

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during the winter months from easy intercourse with their neighbours, they have developed a distinct character of their own. They are conservative and critical of new ideas but once the idea has been accepted they will stand by it. Their Women's Institutes, for example, which have only been established a few years have made remarkable progress and their high sense of responsibility and the amount of work they do in their communities is a revelation. It was a simple matter in Prince Edward Island to get in touch with all organizations working in the same direction as the library: education authorities, Women's Institutes, the press, the Churches (more influential here than in most places). The Demonstration started in June 1933 and I think that by September, through the press, through the various Provincial and County Fairs where we had an exhibit of books, the news of the Demonstration had been spread over the island.

The people of Prince Edward Island have, except in Charlottetown and Summerside, had little acquaintance with books. The contrast in this sense, with the Fraser Valley is very marked. There was a very considerable element in the Fraser Valley which had been brought up with books: When the library came they knew what it meant and they knew what they wanted. I think particularly of one man who twenty years before had read Darwin's Origin of Species. It had impressed him greatly and when the library came there, with the accumulated hunger of twenty years, he literally fell upon



everything that we brought to him on modern developments in biology and anthropology. There were many others who came armed with lists of books they had long wanted to read. Prince Edward Island approaches the library from a different angle. They have been floundering a little this winter and many have asked modestly if they couldn't have reviews of every book; or if there isn't some way in which they could know something of the books. A successful fox-farmer in one of our branches, a man with little schooling took a great interest in the library from the beginning. As the chairman of the local committee he was subjected to all the publicity of meetings, etc. which preceded the opening of the branch. He was impressed with the idea that it was never too late to educate yourself and early in the winter he began the process. He was very catholic in his range, taking a book from each class to begin with and tackling it seriously, falling back a good deal on the dictionary. By the end of the winter he had read over twenty books, having finally settled on the subject of Modern Russia. He said he never enjoyed a winter so much. He is a man of forty-five who had read little beyond the daily paper and fox-breeding journals. I mention this because it is a rather special case of something quite common in Prince Edward Island. They know little of books but I think they must have inherited a belief in their value and they approach the library with interest. The response everywhere has been remarkably good, the proportion of non-fiction



read in one of the branches has often been thirty-five per cent and the proportion for the Island in general is thirty per cent.

We have emphasized from the beginning the value of group study and discussion in stimulating interest in the library. Here we were fortunate in having near at hand a stimulating example of what can be done in farming and fishing communities through organized group study. The University of Saint Francis Xavier in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, has for four years been conducting a University Extension course among the fishermen and farmers of the Diocese of Antigonish. The vitality of the movement can be judged by the fact that over three hundred groups were operating last winter. The movement has had the practical result of establishing various cooperative organizations and improving economic conditions as well as creating an intellectual ferment among the people. In Prince Edward Island there is no organization specially concerned with adult education or extension work but through Young Men's Debating Clubs, Young People's organizations in the churches, Women's Institutes, Catholic Women's League and directly through the library there have been established thirty-seven study groups, all working in conjunction with the library. The very great problems as everybody knows are to get a local leader enthusiastic enough to make the thing go, and to get books sufficiently simple and interesting to



work with.

So far in Prince Edward Island we have established ten branches of the library. We do not use a book truck, the roads last winter were closed from November until May, so that a book truck is impracticable. It seems to me that for display purposes and publicity before opening branches a book truck is of great service, but I have contrived an arrangement for the back of a small car which I use, by which I can carry about three hundred books. It is <sup>a</sup> series of drawers which when taken out and set on end become book shelves. It can be set up in about two minutes. For all sorts of conventions, fairs and meetings where you want to display books to back up your words, I have found it of great service. It is also a good way of carrying books to and from branches. We have then no book truck, the distribution is through branches, placed in geographic centres where people go to do their marketing. Before opening a branch we always form a local committee and we have found it profitable to hold one or two preliminary meetings so that people know what sort of service is being offered to them. These meetings were often very well attended and we always took to them a display of books. The opening of a branch we always regard as an opportunity for further publicity. The Premier, as Minister of Education, is usually present and the largest available hall is usually filled. After two or three hours of speeches, more or less on the subject of the library, we feel we have made a beginning in that district!



In all cases the locality provides the room with light, heat and equipment. There is in each branch a local custodian chosen by the Demonstration, and in branches with a registration exceeding five hundred, receiving a small remuneration. We visit the branches frequently in the summer, less frequently in the winter owing to the difficulty of getting about.

This question of winter transportation is a real problem in Prince Edward Island. This summer we shall open about ten more branches but even with twenty branches I do not think we can consider we have really made books accessible to every one. Last winter was unusually severe and I understand that owing to poor train service and bad storms winter travel is usually difficult. Branches cannot be considered as adequately covering even the country within a radius of ten miles without some supplementary service. Such supplementary service could be given through the Women's Institutes and schools, where we might look for voluntary assistance. It is necessary, I know, to proceed cautiously here in view of the fact that so many people prefer to have half a dozen books on their own doorstep rather than a thousand books a few miles away.

The people of Prince Edward Island have been very insistent in their demand for a catalogue. They realize of course that if, as we repeatedly tell them, not only the books in their branch but all the books in the library are at their disposal, they must know what books the library has, if this offer is to mean anything. I think that in some communities



subject lists of books are the best way of meeting this demand, but I do believe that in Prince Edward Island a complete catalogue of all the non-fiction would fill a very great need. Emphasis has been put on the request system by which any book other than light fiction may be asked for. This system which they value and use a great deal freshens the branch collections and the periodical complete change of books keeps the book collection fluid.

I think I have sketched briefly one aspect of the work of the Demonstration and before I leave it I should like to give you a few figures. They do not convey very much as our work is only beginning-- next week we intend to put a deposit of four thousand to five thousand books in the Charlottetown Public Library and within a few weeks to open more branches. But in the ten branches already opened there are registered 7013 members. The average circulation per month is 10,667 thirty per cent of which is non-fiction. The total number of volumes catalogued in the last year was 20,774.

I have mentioned the difficulty of getting about Prince Edward Island in the winter. The train service is not good and it takes two days to hold a meeting anywhere. This was a great handicap in organizing branches last winter. On one occasion being pressed for time, I decided to try the air! Leaving Charlottetown at twelve and returning at six the same afternoon, I was able to hold three meetings which by train could not have been accomplished in a week. Incidentally it was more economical



but - rather cold.

So far I have dealt only with the service to rural communities. In Charlottetown and in Summerside there were libraries in existence and I would like to say a word about them and the relation of the Demonstration to them.

The Charlottetown Library serves the double purpose of a Legislative and Public Library but has never received adequate financial support. It depends for its funds on the Government and on a small private endowment. Except for a very small nominal sum for upkeep, the city of Charlottetown had taken no part in its support. A month or two ago, however, Charlottetown was induced to undertake the payment of an additional assistant in the library and the Library Committee undertook to raise by private subscriptions enough money to buy a charging desk and to put up shelving to accommodate more books. With this additional furniture and staff the library will be able to accommodate a deposit of four thousand books which we intend to put there next week. As Charlottetown has a bi-weekly market and is the shopping and marketing centre for a large section of the country, this development is particularly welcome.

The Summerside Library had been taken over and fostered for many years by the I.O.D.E. It consisted of about three thousand volumes and was run on a small subscription basis. As soon as we arrived in Charlottetown, Summerside was anxious to know how it could benefit from the Demonstration. For many years it had been receiving books from the McGill Travelling Libraries. As it was difficult to run a free library together with a sub-



scription library, the I.O.D.E. decided to hand over their library to the town of Summerside. The town already supplied the room and the only added burden they undertook was the very small remuneration to the librarian. In November last year we put a deposit of one thousand volumes in the Summerside Public Library and since that date the registration has leapt from one hundred to 1335. I believe the town of Summerside, which is very progressive, may put up a special building for the library. The present quarters are very cramped and I think that they are attracted by the prospect of an efficient library which might serve the people in general and the schools.

There is another aspect of the Demonstration which remains to be considered and that is its relation with the libraries of Prince of Wales College and Saint Dunstan's University. At present both these colleges are in receipt of grants from the Carnegie Corporation. St. Dunstan's has its own librarian who has a natural aptitude for library work and took the short course given in Charlottetown last summer by the McGill Library School. Our duties there have been light but we placed a small deposit of books with them. The Prince of Wales College however had no library, its old one having been destroyed in a recent fire, and it was part of our work to start their library. The library was opened in January 1934 with 975 books classified and catalogued, and an additional temporary loan from the Demonstration collection.

Next winter we intend to start work with the schools. So



far only the schools in the centres have been touched. We did experiment last winter by putting a collection in each classroom of the Model School in Charlottetown, but it is hoped next winter to reach a great many schools throughout the island.

Another similar venture which may be of interest is a collection of books placed in the Provincial Sanitorium at Charlottetown. One section of this was devoted to handicrafts, which the doctor in charge is trying to introduce into his system.

Finally I should like to say a word about French books. Fourteen thousand of the eighty-eight thousand inhabitants of Prince Edward Island are Acadians and there has been considerable interest in French books, mostly French books written in Canada. In the branches where they have been put they seem to have been read eagerly. Our main French branch however has not yet been opened. It was one of the tragedies of the winter that we could not get to Rustico - only fifteen miles away. Several times the preliminary meeting had to be postponed owing to impassable roads and it was eventually given up until the summer. Rustico indeed should have been included among those places possessing libraries. Over sixty years ago a very enterprising parish priest secured the patronage of Napoleon III who presented to the parish of Rustico a sum of money for the purchase of books to form a parish library. The records still exist, showing remarkable feats of reading e.g. one family which read no less than seventy-two books in a year! A great many of the books are still there.



Within the next few weeks we intend to put a deposit, largely of French books, in Rustico.

There is one development I should like to suggest at this meeting and that is some system of inter-library loans in the Maritime Provinces. I hope that this may be considered. In British Columbia it made a magnificent rounding off of the system. I remember when we borrowed the complete text of the Vedas from Mr. Hosie.

I think that anyone going to Prince Edward Island from outside must be impressed with its comparative immunity from the industrial and economic problems which press so heavily elsewhere. As an agricultural province, it is unlikely to see any great social or economic changes in the near future. But the abundant leisure in the winter and the need for more intensive and scientific agriculture, for the better exploitation and conservation of its natural resources suggest fields in which the library could be made to play a very vital part in the future development of the province.

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