
REPORT ON THE LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY, BRITISH COLUMBIA.

LIBRARY, LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,

VICTORIA, B. C., February 27th, 1897.

*To the Honourable the Speaker
of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia:*

SIR,—I have the honour to submit the annual report on the condition of the Library.

Owing to several causes—the holdings of the meetings of the Behring Sea Commission in the Legislative Assembly building, all the available rooms of which were occupied, the illness of the Assistant Librarian, and the anticipated removal into the new buildings, unavoidably delayed—the work of the Library during the latter part of the past year and the beginning of the present was greatly interfered with, and much confusion resulted. I am, therefore, unable to present as complete and satisfactory report as I should have otherwise desired.

During the year, however, very satisfactory progress has been made, and there have been numerous and some important accessions to the shelves. In the six months ending December 31st the contributions by way of donation and exchange consisted of 898 bound books and pamphlets, principally the former, which is a fair indication of the rate of progress throughout the whole year. Until the work of entering is completed I cannot say definitely the exact number of additions there were within that period, but approximately the accessions from various sources have been 2,000 in all during 1896.

An exchange list has been established, whereby for such publications as the reports of the Mining Bureau, Crown lands surveys, and such other reports and pamphlets as are from time to time available, the reports and publications of over one hundred institutions, including Governments, Universities, Learned Societies, Boards of Trade, &c., are being received, and the list is steadily increasing. A number of States of the Union is on the list, and arrangements are being made to include them all, with particular respect to agricultural, mining and forestry reports and their Statutes where possible.

A strong effort has been made to obtain the publications of the Imperial Government, and, through the representations of the Canadian High Commissioner at London, Eng., a promise has been received that the matter will have the special consideration of the Treasury authorities.

In accordance with the most approved library methods, an accession book is kept in which is recorded the particulars of every book and pamphlet received, and in addition to which will be kept a complete statement to date of the condition of the Library. Monthly reports are submitted to the Library Commissioners.

Heretofore, it has been impossible, owing to the inadequate and unsuitable library quarters, to catalogue the books according to any expansive system, but in the new Library, to which the books are being removed, provision has been made for cataloguing according to the most improved card index system, by which subjects, authors and titles in alphabetical arrangement refer to the numbers and position of volumes on the shelves. The subject for cataloguing has engaged the attention of expert Librarians for many years, and the system adopted here is the result of mature experience and combines the best features of Dewey, Cutter and others.

In the matter of periodical and newspaper racks, files, binders, &c., and the various other accessories of a well equipped Library, the latest improved and at the same time most useful and economical have been secured.

The shelves and book stacks in the book-room adjoining the reading-room were obtained from the Boston Library Bureau, an institution that supplies the principal libraries of this Continent, and represent the latest improvements. Although the room is limited in capacity by the arrangement adopted, the shelves at present erected will accommodate 11,000 volumes, and when that limit is reached the plan contemplates a corrugated glass floor and the continuation of the stacks to the ceiling, affording accommodation for about 22,000 volumes, at a total cost of about \$2,400 for fixtures, so that the interests of economy as well as utility have been carefully conserved.

By the plan referred to it is not contemplated that the public should be admitted to the book-room, but books required, as ascertained from the catalogues, may be obtained from the attendant and consulted in the reading-room.

Pamphlets and reports instead of being bound, as was formerly done, are now arranged in cases or boxes, duly numbered and indexed, which is very much cheaper and much more convenient for reference. In this connection the Commissioners of the Library are indebted to Mr. Alex. Begg, editor of the Mining Record, for a large number of valuable pamphlets relating to the West and to Canada, and for some reports which are not contained in any other Library in Canada.

As referred to in a former report, a system of indexing subjects of current, local and especial general interest, appearing in the press, is carried on, whereby a comprehensive and easy reference is obtained in any question of public concern. Press clippings, too, relating to the same are preserved and will be filed by a system of automatic indexing. When in the new quarters, with the facilities provided, this will be found an invaluable adjunct, and one which is becoming more and more a feature of all public libraries. It is in fact indispensable in order to render the knowledge treasured in the Library easily available. As the prime object of a State Library is essentially that of reference, where any special line of investigation may be pursued with some hope of acquiring a good deal of, if not all, the information that may be desired, and not necessarily restricted to pure law and politics, the range of subjects which is included is very wide.

Upon this aspect of Library work there is a strong divergence, as the opinions of nearly every person who takes an interest in or advantage of the Library, materially differ, and his view of its necessities as a place of reference are materially affected by the character of the subject in which he may be specially interested; and this is as true of the members of the Legislature as of any other class. It is difficult, therefore, to accurately draw the line between what are and what are not necessary works of reference, and only daily experience of the wants of inquirers can with any degree of accuracy determine what will meet the greatest wants of the greatest number. The success of library work, is to a large extent, the result of the measure with which the requirements of the public, and especially legislators, may be anticipated. It should be borne in mind that works of reference, strictly defined, are usually very expensive and the appropriation available is very limited. I wish to point out incidentally that the City of Vancouver last year expended over \$3,500 on its Library and the City of New Westminster about \$2,500. In a new country where private libraries of any value are few, and consequently the facilities for pursuing inquiries in regard to any subject limited, the necessity of affording in a public way the means for such is very obvious, and since the establishment of the Provincial Library, in its small way, experience has daily demonstrated public requirements in that respect.

As primarily a legislative library, statutes, sessional papers and public documents and books on constitutional law and political economy must have first consideration. Next to that come encyclopaedical and statistical works, and then historical, biographical and descriptive. In the latter class are essentially included those works which contain and refer to the history of, first, the discovery and exploration and general development of our own Province, and, next, of the whole western country of which the sources of history are common. After those in order are the Dominion of Canada and the wider affairs of the Empire. Among works of reference are properly classed the complete editions of great standard authors within whose stores are garnered the best expression of the English language, and whose works possess the most distinguishing characteristics, and portray the genius, of the race; and each year should see added one or more of these.

It is upon the foregoing lines that an effort has been made to build up a Library, which may eventually be representative of the intellectual status of the Province, and become a source of pride as reflecting the intelligence as well as the wealth of its people. Library methods have been the subject of the most careful study and experiment, and have all but

taken a place among the sciences. Within the past few years they have become highly developed, and involve patient, industrious and systematic attention to detail, as well as an intelligent appreciation of public demands. In making arrangements for establishing the Library in the new buildings, where alone it is possible to classify and carry out the work systematically, these approved methods, the result of the very best experience, have been adopted so that it may grow and expand according to a fundamental plan from which no departure may be necessary no matter to what proportions it may attain in the future.

In presenting my report as Librarian, I beg to state, Mr. Speaker, that with the duties pertaining to the latter are associated those of secretarial work in the office of the Premier, and those as Secretary of the Bureau of Statistics as defined in the "Legislative Library and Bureau of Statistics Act, 1894." Respecting the latter, a report is being compiled for submission to the Legislative Assembly during the present Session, containing some statistics of a Provincial character never before compiled. As representative of the Province on the Dominion History Committee, it has been my duty to assist in preparing the material for and revising the proofs of the new Canadian School History, a book of 350 pages now in print. In my private capacity I have also had under preparation a year book of British Columbia, to contain 400 pages. This is a private undertaking, the result of the continuous and widespread demand for reliable and authentic information covering a wide field respecting the Province, and the encouragement with which the announcement has met has decided the publication of an edition of 5,000 copies. The profit, after the payment of legitimate expenses, is to be devoted to the Library. A British edition has been asked for, which will be undertaken if justified by the success of the Canadian edition. The variety and extent of the contents will, I trust, recommend the Year Book to public approval and enure to the benefit of the Province.

At various times the Library has been in receipt of MSS, old volumes and other souvenirs of a local historical character, for which I am directed by the Commissioners to express their acknowledgment and due appreciation. In the new buildings, where provision exists for their preservation, special attention will be given to making a collection of matters of a reminiscent character, and it is hoped that the public will appreciate the importance of bringing together, in a safe and permanent abiding place, those remembrances of the early days which will be treasured by their posterity as fitting mementoes of the pioneers who laid the foundations of a great commonwealth.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

R. E. GOSNELL.

VICTORIA, B. C.:

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