Canada's First Bookseller's Catalogue

Sandra Alston

One of the most satisfying aspects of the research undertaken on the supplement to Marie Tremaine's classic *A Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1752-1800* has been the discovery of previously unknown or unlocated items. Among the most interesting discoveries has been a copy of item number 1188, described in the bibliography as follows:

1188. Neilson, John, 1776-1848.

[Catalogue of Books for Sale, 3 Mountain St., Quebec, 1800.]

Leaflet of 2 or 4 pages. *Printed at Quebec, by John Neilson, 1800.*

Neilson recorded this *Catalogue* in his advertisement: 'Imported from London in the Brickwood, and will be ready for sale tomorrow at the Printing Office, 3 Mountain Street, for Cash only - A small assortment of new and valuable French and English books, of which Catalogues may be had at the Office.'—*Quebec gazette*, Nov. 20, 1800.

This seems to be the publication of which a copy was listed by Dora Hood, Toronto, in her *Catalogue no. 4*, Autumn, 1930 (which included works from the collection of Col J. Hubert Neilson, a grandson of the printer), item no. 316. Mrs Hood recalls the item as a leaflet of 2 or 4 pages, sold for 75 cents.

Copy known but not located; J. Hubert Neilson copy supra.

This citation was the only clue to the existence of this early Neilson book catalogue, apparently the very first such bookseller's catalogue printed in

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Canada. Marie Tremaine lists thirteen earlier catalogues, all of books and other items for sale at auction. Only one of these, number 787, the Catalogue of the libraries of the late Honorable Adam Mabane, and Alexander Gray ..., printed by Samuel Neilson in 1792, has been located, at the Séminaire du Québec, in Quebec City.

A search for this item in the Eighteenth-Century Short-Title Catalogue (ESTC) database on the Research Libraries Information Network produced one record. Cited as item #w016672, the catalogue was listed as being at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, accession number 69-683. Accession records showed that the Houghton had purchased the title from Goodspeed’s Book Shop in March of 1970 for seventy-five dollars.

Beyond the joy of discovering a hitherto unlocated Tremaine imprint was the realization that this particular copy, obviously the one described as item 1188, is extensively annotated in Neilson’s own hand; additions have been made to the text, items sold have been crossed out, and often the person to whom the book was sold has been inserted.

John Neilson (1776-1848) joined his brother Samuel’s printing firm in 1791 at the age of fifteen, and inherited the business two years later. Through shrewd financial management and business acumen he built it into the most prominent and influential printing shop, newspaper office, and bookshop, not only in the city of Quebec, but throughout British North America. As well as selling his own printed books and pamphlets he began to import titles from England and the United States, advertising them in the Quebec Gazette, and acting as both a wholesaler and a retailer of books. He also tried to import books from France, but war between Great Britain and France during this period complicated those dealings. Married to a niece of the Roman Catholic bishop of Quebec, and fluently bilingual, Neilson had business and familial connections to both French and English society in the colony.

Prior to 1800 Neilson had advertised books for sale in the columns of the Quebec Gazette, but this catalogue — a small octavo of sixteen pages — is the first to appear as a separate text. Neilson has inscribed on the front cover: 'Any of the Books in Catalogue not sold out & not in Shop are upstairs W. Cowan if they should be wanted can get the Key & bring them down, J.N.'

John Hare and Jean-Pierre Wallot, in their article on the Neilson bookshop, studied the books sold by the firm based on five catalogues published in 1802, 1803, 1811, 1817, and 1818, as well as on the Neilson papers held by the National Archives of Canada. Some brief comparisons to those later catalogues can be made.

The 1800 catalogue, like Neilson’s later catalogues, has been divided into books arranged by format — folio, quarto, octavo, and duodecimo — and
by subject—classics, dictionaries, French and English grammar and school books, political pamphlets, plays, etc. There is a very small degree of duplication of the categories. A total of 265 titles are listed; 212 (80%) in English, 41 (15.5%) in French, 3 (1.1%) in Italian, and 9 (3.4%) in Latin. Neilson’s next printed catalogue, not published separately but as part of the supplement to the Quebec Gazette, no. 1931 (15 April 1802), contains 254 titles, 182 (71.7%) in English, 58 (22.8%) in French, and 14 (5.5%) others. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the increase in the number of French titles; it may reflect customer demand, but equally likely it reflects availability.

Hare and Wallot examined the titles in other Neilson catalogues using the chart developed by François Furet,7 which lists twenty-six categories of subjects under five broad headings—religion and theology, law and jurisprudence, history, arts and science, and belles-lettres. Following that scheme one finds a subject breakdown as follows: religion and theology, 10 titles (3.8%); law and jurisprudence, 10 titles (3.8%); history, 81 titles (30.6%); arts and science, 61 titles (23.0%); belles-lettres, 91 titles (34.3%); unknown, 12 titles (4.5%).

In examining the categories it is easy to ascertain from manuscript annotations the more popular works—history, biography, voyages and travels, medical and legal treatises, and literature. It is interesting that several categories seem to have elicited no interest at all, among them classics and dictionaries.

Products of the local press cannot be assigned to the categories listed above, but work to date on eighteenth-century Canadian printing shows the following breakdown of material actually printed in Canada: almanacs (15.5%); belles-lettres, (0.9%); government (i.e. laws, debates, proclamations of government officials) (45.8%); religion and theology (12.7%); school texts (3.2%); other (i.e. advertisements, announcements, etc.) (21.9%).

Neilson’s shop was patronized by the elite of both English and French society in the city of Quebec. Lawyers and notaries Olivier Perrault and Pierre-Louis Deschenaux purchased legal treatises and the collected works of Montesquieu. Jean Thomas Tascherau, a lawyer, showed a wide range of interest with his purchases of Charles Hutton’s Mathematical and Philosophical Dictionary, the Lex Parlamentaria, Newton’s Natural Philosophy, and Thomas Pownall’s great treatise on the administration of the colonies. Bishop Jacob Mountain, Anglican bishop of the diocese of Quebec, bought Wilkins’s Universal and Biographical Dictionary. John Black, Sir John Caldwell, John Young, and Thomas Grant, all closely allied in business, bought texts on subjects as diverse as cookery, the river police, poetry, philosophy, and medicine.
The breadth and depth of subjects listed in the catalogue demonstrate to some extent the calibre of the elite in the colony of Quebec. It is hoped that the reproduction of this unique catalogue, with its extensive manuscript annotations will provide more evidence to enable scholars to study the social and intellectual history of Canada.

NOTES
2 Unfortunately to be found in the index to the book only under the heading 'Book Catalogue.'
3 Numbers 316, 363, 384, 443, 509, 526, 597, 758, 787, 971, 1030, 1122, and 1143.
4 Previous visits to the Houghton Library had failed to turn up the item, as it was accessible only through the union catalogue in the Widener Library, and not through Houghton Library's own catalogue.
5 Goodspeed's has informed the author that they have no record of the source of the pamphlet.
8 The catalogue is reproduced by the permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
Printing office

Any of the books in catalogue
not sold unless written in the blank

Catalogue

Of English French and Latin books,
for sale at the PRINTING OFFICE
no. 3 Mountain street, Quebec.

1800.

Always Lecong

and[::-]

Dashes, Comma

 physics, electricity

American publications
CATALOGUE.

The greatest part of the Books in this Catalogue have been imported from London within these late years, and many of them are entirely new works imported this fall in the beginning of November.
11th Nov. 1800.

Folio.

The Common Prayer Book according to the rites of the Church of England.
Barrett's Dictionary of the Spanish and English, and English and Spanish languages.

La Minerve, or General National from September 31 to November 9.


History of England by Mr. Rapin de Thoyras, 10 volumes.
Leland's History of Ireland, 4 volumes.
Lumlelen's Antiquities of Rome, with plates.
The Duke de la Rochefoucault Liancourt's Travels in North America and Canada.

Park's Travels in the interior of Africa, plate.


Embassy to China, 4 vols. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 8 vols.
Account of a Missionary Voyage to the South Sea Islands, plates.
Oriental Collections, 2 vols., plates.
Sir William Jones’s Persian Grammar.
Ranier’s Life of Lorenzo d’Medici, 2 vols.
Military Journal to the 1st. August, 1800
The Officer’s Manual.
Boyer’s Royal 4to Dictionary English and French and French and English.
Pilkington’s Gentleman’s and Connoisseur’s Dictionary of Painting.
Saxon and English languages illustrative of each other, sewed.
Paint’s Practical Builder.
Hartley’s Precedents of the House of Commons, with the volume on Conferences and Impeachments, 4 vols.
Idem 1 vol. without plates.

Oblavo.

Blackstone’s Commentaries, 4 vols.
Gibson’s Laws of Evidence, 4 vols.
Burns’s justice, 4 vols.
Alston: Canada's First Bookseller's Catalogue

Impey's Practice of King's Bench.

Hargrave's Cookery.

Coke's Practice of the Law, 7 vols.

Hargrave's Coke on Littleton, 7 vols.

Harrington on the Human Understanding, 2 vols.

Newcomen's Natural Philosophy, 2 vols.

Simpson's Euclid.


Cassel's Chemical Journal, 1 to No. 4.

Lavoisier's Chemistry.

Van Swieten's Commentaries on the Aphorism of Bockhave, 4 vols.

Whytt on Vital Motion.

Lewis's Materia Medica.

Bohan's Domestic Medicine.

Swan's Translation of Dr. Sydenham's works.

Bell's Surgery.

Douglas on Muscles.

Le Dran's Operations.

Tissot on Fevers.

Essais d'Anatomie.

Sir Joshua Reynolds's works, 3 vols.

Bath Society's Papers and Letters on Agriculture, 1 to 12.

Hunter's Geographical Essays.

Amours's History of the French Revolution, 9 vols.

Gibbon's History of the English People.

Ch Kosten.
Baker's Translation of Livius's Roman History, 6 vols.
Nestle's History of the Reign of Charles V. Emperor of Germany, 4 vols.
Noble's History of the House of Mecklenburg.
Voltaire's History of the Russian Empire.
Campbell's Lives of the Admirals, being a complete Naval History of Great Britain, 4 vols.
History of the Reign of Catherine II. Empress of Russia.
Wood's History of the Roman Republic, 6 vols.
History of the English Civil War. 2 vols.
History of New Holland.
Weiss's Travels in North America and Canada.
Watkin's Biographical Dictionary.
Crouch's British Customs.
History of Whitby.
An account of Lord Amherst's Embassy to China.
Law and the Canadians.
Ralt's Account of Jersey.
Lamartine's St. Domingo in Green, 3 tomes.
D'Arville's Vincennes, captured by France since the Revolution.
Coup d'etat sur l'Empire d'Europe a la fin du 18e siecle.
Biscoe's Life of Burke, portrait.
M. Hermand's Memoirs of the last years of the reign of Louis XVI.
Vie de Catherine II., Empress of Russia, avec figures, 2 vols.
Regulations of Russian Infantry.
Boni's Peace 1862.
St. Pierre's Voyage to the Isle of France, 4 vols.
Clarendon's History of the Civil Wars, 6 vols.
Lettres de Barret contenant des nouveaux documents pour les Mémoires du Jacobinisme.
La Prusse et la neutralité.
Stael on the Influence of the Passions on the happiness of Nations and Individuals.
Meister's Letters during a residence in England.
Letters from a Traveller, containing an account of the present state of the Countries in Europe, Asia and America.
Wimpffen's Voyage to St. Domingo.
Letters from Italy from 1822 to 1828, by Mariana Starke, 3 vols.
Justamond's Translation of the Abbé Raynal's philosophical and Political History of the European Settlements in the East and West Indies, 4 vols.
Bonaparte's Campaigns in Italy, with portrait.
Political and Military Memoirs of Europe 1899.
Southey's Letters from Spain.
D'Istel's Curiosities of Literature, 2 vols.
Bibliothèque Portatif des meilleurs Écrivains Français, 4 parties.
Pieces diverses, relative aux opérations Militaire et Politique du Général Bonaparte en Egypte.
Parliaments of Literature, latest edition.
Les derniers Adieux à Bonaparte.
Lettres de l'Armée Française en Egypte, 2 parties.
Senti Williams Sketches of the T. Revolution.
March 10th

Donty's Poems

Washington's Letters, 2 vol.

Selections from the works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke.

Recueil des meilleures pieces de Theatre, 4 tomes.

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Idem on the River Police.
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Memoirs of Rousseau by Covancez.
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Dods's History of Ireland.
Bancks's Life of Oliver Cromwell, portrait.
Nouveau Paris, par M. Mercier, 6 tomes.
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Hughes's Rise and Progress of Jacobinism.
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Idem Apology for Christianity.
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Negroes Ungenerate.
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Goldini due Commedia.

Ladies Annual Register 1798.

Teilet.

Etat des familles de France.

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C. J. Caesaris commentarii.

Virgili Opera.

Horatii Delphini.

Ovidii Naonis Metamorphoseon.

C. C. Schollii opera.

Corinthus Nepos.

Eutropius.

Seleetia e Profanis.

Eton Latin Grammar.

Clarke's Introduction.

Dictionaries.

Ainsworth's Latin Dictionary.
Chambaud's Dictionary abridged,
Nagel's English and French Dictionary,
Patrick's English ditto,
Walker's Dictionary,
Johnson's Dictionary abridged,
Bayley's Etymological Dictionary,

French and English Grammars & School Books.

Lowth's Grammar.
Murray's do. and Exercises.
Chambaud's Grammar and Exercises.
Boyer's Grammar.
Porrey's ditto and Exercises.
Perrin's Grammar and Exercises.
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Perrin's Eléments de la langue Anglaise.
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Sheridan's reading and reciting Poetry.
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all Provincial Publications.
1807

Catalogue of Notes 1860 Meeting
Rose Uke