

Letters / Lettres

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Letters

Canada Centre for Geoscience Data

I am writing this letter in my capacity as Director of the Canada Centre for Geoscience Data to correct misleading statements concerning the Canadian Index to Geoscience Data made by A. D. Miall (Geosci. Can. v. 3, no. 3, p. 258) in the context of a personal exchange of views between us on the subject of "computer applications". Regretably, the two paragraphs on the Index had not been made available to me by the author or editor prior to publication of his letter.

Development of the Canadian Index to Geoscience Data was recommended in 1967 by the National Advisory Committee on Research in the Geological Sciences and in 1968 by the Conference of Provincial Ministers of Mines as a practical step to facilitate national access to the considerable volume of geoscience observations, measurements and other data widely disseminated in publications, open files, assessment reports and other public documents. With a backlog of an estimated 100,000 documents and about 20 agencies responsible as publishers and custodians, a medium-term (20 to 15 years) plan was developed by the Canada Centre for Geoscience Data under which these agencies and CCGD would cooperate to build a comprehensive computer-processable national index.

Taking into account the resources made available and the lack of precedent for "data indexing", I believe that good progress has been made - over 50,000 documents have been identified and indexed according to uniform standards by 14 participating agencies and the results consolidated in a national referral file called the

Canadian Index to Geoscience Data. Nevertheless, its incompleteness and variable coverage have militated against offering a general national service based solely on the Index; public access to the file has been limited to the provision of individual custom indexes to clients made aware in advance of its limitations in coverage. I am pleased to advise readers of recently developed plans to organize a "Data Referral Service" at CCGD that will provide a broader range of services based, not only on the Canadian Index to Geoscience Data, but on all available referral tools.

Miall's "analysis" of use of the Canadian Index is a curious mixture of incomplete information, faulty assumptions, hearsay, inconsistencies and even a psychic perception of future events. My only specific comment is to point out is that the Canadian Index does not duplicate existing services, since it, a) identifies data, not literature, and b) covers unpublished government reports (about 33,000 indexed to date) not captured by the international bibliographic services such as GEO. REF or Geoarchive.

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The editor regrets that, through a misunderstanding, a revised version of Dr. Miall's comment was printed before Dr. Burk had had the opportunity to see it and modify his own comment printed in the August, 1976, issue.

John Jeremiah Bigsby

I was pleased to see the article on the Bigsby Medal and its donor John Jeremiah Bigsby, in the February issue of Geoscience Canada. Dr. Bigsby's early contributions to the geology of the Canadas and adjacent parts of New York predated those of Logan in Canada and Hall in New York, and, not surprisingly, have been overshadowed by them. Altogether Bigsby wrote 22 articles on the geology of this area, beginning in Silliman's Journal in 1820. However, my pleasure at the appearance of Bigsby in the History of Canadian Geology is tempered by the historical inaccuracies and confusion of events which occur throughout the article. I should like to set the record straight. The source of this information is Bigsby's *The Shoe and Canoe* first published in 1850 and recently (1969) published in facsimile by Paladin Press of New York.

By his own account, Bigsby came to Canada in 1818, not 1821 (*The Shoe and Canoe*, vol. 1, p. 252, then p. 105). On his first "Excursion" he was indeed questioned closely on geology by Papineau, but was well enough aware of who was questioning him to feel cheated when Papineau gave Bigsby no opportunity to question him about "Political economy . . . and perhaps a little politics" (p. 60).

In the spring of 1819, "the Colonial Government was pleased to send . . . (Bigsby) through Upper Canada to make a general report upon its geology, of which at that time nothing was known." (p. 105). For this journey of nearly 2000 miles Bigsby was paid 26 Pounds. He was also given a free passage to Sault Ste Marie in a Northwest Company light canoe (p. 105). This was Bigsby's first major geological excursion in Canada. It took all that summer. The report of the geological tour apparently gave satisfaction.

In the following winter, Bigsby was appointed British secretary and medical officer to the Boundary Commission. In 1821 he was with the Boundary Commission schooner "Confiance" working in Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair. In 1923 he took his most extensive trip of all, starting in a clinker-built boat from Kingston to Toronto. Boat and baggage were transported by wagon up Yonge Street to Holland's Landing, launched down the Holland River to Lake Simcoe, portaged to the Nottawasaga River and then down to Lake Huron, up through the North Channel past Sault Ste Marie into Lake Superior. At Fort William two north canoes, manned by six voyageurs each were ready to take them by the Grand Portage, along the old commercial route to the Lake of the Woods. He does not mention travelling further west to the Red River. There are two islands named after Bigsby, one in the Lake of the Woods and the other in the North Channel of Lake Huron.

Dr. Bigsby returned to England in 1924 or 1925, practising as a consulting physician in Newark-on-Trent for more than twenty years before retiring to London. At the Geological Society of London he began to compile a comprehensive listing of all described Silurian fossils. With the aid of a Royal Society grant, his list was published as the "Thesaurus Siluricus" in 1868. Bigsby was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in the following year. His "Thesaurus Devonico-Carboniferus" was published in 1878. Both Thesauri were standard reference works for students of the Palaeozoic in the last part of the nineteenth century.

In addition to finding the type for the echinoderm class Edrioasteroidea, Bigsby also found the types for the cephalopod mollusc subclass Actinoceratoidea in Middle Ordovician dolomite on Thessalon Island in Lake Huron, probably in 1819 or 1820. Described by Bigsby as "Fossil Orthocerae" in 1824, the specimens were named *Actinoceras bigsbyi* in 1835 to typify the new genus, *Actinoceras*. *Actinoceras* in turn, typifies the family Actinoceratidae, which typifies the order Actinocerida, which typifies the subclass.

Dr. Bigsby regarded the six years he spent in Canada as the most exciting of his long life. His account *The Shoe and Canoe* makes entertaining reading and is well worth the effort needed to find a copy.

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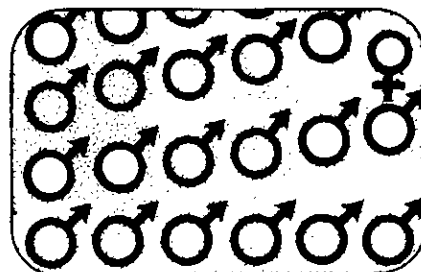
We appreciate the interest of Dr. Collins in our note on the Bigsby Medal and we are glad to know that he shares our admiration of this pioneer worker in Canadian geology.

One of us (RFL) apologises for the error in the date of Bigsby's arrival in Canada which we should have shown as 1818, as Dr. Collins points out. The additional information given by Dr. Collins usefully supplements the three brief paragraphs in which we summarized Bigsby's years in Canada.

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