

Correspondence / Correspondance

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CORRESPONDENCE / CORRESPONDANCE

March 20, 1984.

Dear Editor:

I do not know if you customarily publish letters, but in the interests of scholarly research I should appreciate it if you could see your way to publishing my remarks in one form or another.

I wish to remark upon Dale Chisamore's review of the special theme issue of the *Canadian Library Journal* that dealt with Canadian library history (*Labour*, 12, pp. 268-271).

I shall ignore the fatuous statement that only one author is an historian, but wonder at the assumption that there is a "lack of acquaintance with previous work done on libraries by historians." For my period and topic (1880-1920) there is no "previous work" as I am breaking new ground. For the earlier period I have a bibliography of sources which, incidentally, includes the "handful" of accounts Chisamore mentions. The mere fact that a source is not cited does not mean that it has necessarily been overlooked!

The reasons for not straying "much beyond outlines" are in my case two-fold: these were conference papers with time limits imposed which, therefore, influenced the length of the paper; my study is a "baseline" study intended to sketch out the territory for a fuller study of readership, currently in progress, and is the reason why I do not deal with reading habits and the impact of libraries in the paper under review.

I also found it curious that, when our studies deal with *Canadian* institutes and libraries, we should be criticized for not making greater use of literature on British institutes where the points of comparison are, in fact, not that many. I studied the British institutes before tackling ours, and I can assure Mr. Chisamore that as far as modern studies are concerned, they are few and far between, the best being Mabel Tylecote's examination of the Lancashire and Yorkshire institutes.

This brings me to an even more serious point which suggests that the reviewer has only a superficial knowledge of the topic he was asked to review, epitomized by his statement that I seem "unaware that the fantastic growth of institutes in the 1880s illustrates a fast growing reading public." Any researcher worth his salt would consider that sort of simplistic correlation as a cardinal sin! The mere presence of an institute or public library tells us nothing about the use made of it. I have before me the annual reports of the Minister of Education which contain statistical tables and commentaries on mechanics' institutes and public libraries. I think I would want to analyse these and similar reference sources in detail before making such sweeping generalizations as: "thousands of people were reading hundreds of books and among those people were numerous working-class people." Unsupported statements like that are irresponsible!

I have no idea what Dale Chisamore's

credentials are, but his condescending and frivolous review has done a grave disservice both to scholarship and the review process.

Sincerely,
John A. Wiseman
University Librarian,
Trent University

Sept. 10, 1984.

Dear Editor:

I want to reply to John Wiseman's letter regarding my review of a *Canadian Library Journal* theme issue on Mechanics' Institutes and libraries.

Wiseman is off base in questioning my conclusions. I have examined the records of six Mechanics' Institutes, two workingmen's libraries, and the book catalogues of eight Mechanics' Institutes. I stand by my evidence that indicates thousands of Ontario working people read books borrowed from all sorts of libraries. My study of the Brockville Mechanics'

Institute showed that in addition to the institute library there were at least four other semi-public libraries. The Brockville Mechanics' Institute had 800 members at its peak and circulated 43 books annually among each member. I doubt few libraries could match this today. In 1895 the Brockville Mechanics' Institute held 7,253 books!

Mr. Wiseman thinks my review is unkind because I called his paper disappointing. If he looks at his paper he will see why. There are no case studies. I don't think he is in a position to throw stones. I suggest that if he really wants to break new ground, as he declares, he should go to the sources and he should also carefully read what has already been done. A good place to start is Gerald Killan's recent biography of David Boyle. Boyle was an immigrant blacksmith autodidact who used the Mechanics' Institute in his own community.

Thank you for allowing me this space.

Yours sincerely,
Dale Chisamore

Annual Meeting
Committee on Canadian Labour History
11 June 1984

CALL TO ORDER

Robert Babcock, in the chair, called the meeting to order at 12:30 pm.

ATTENDANCE (20)

Members of the executive present:

R. Babcock

President

G. Kealey

Treasurer/Editor, L/LT

A. Seager

Secretary

D. Moore

Vice-President

ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF 1983 MEETING

Adopted as presented: *Labour/le Travailleur*, 12, 1983, pp. 443-5.

AGENDA

Adopted as presented.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Robert Babcock noted with pleasure the success of his effort to have the Committee's business meeting held at a separate time from that of the Women's History group. However, the fact that the meeting this year overlapped with that of the Urban History group was still cause for concern and future action.

He reported on the excellent reception given Canadian scholars at the North American Labour History Conference at Wayne State and urged our continued involvement in this forum.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Greg Kealey reported on the continued progress of the journal, which is now receiving 40-50 manuscripts per year. He wished to thank all those who have submitted papers, expressing regret that not all could be actually published.

Kealey expressed his appreciation, on behalf of the Committee, for the fine support work he was receiving from Memorial University, and for continued financial support from SSHRC.

The Treasurer's Financial Statement showed, in brief, an income for the journal in 1983 of \$38,503.06. Expenses totalled \$42,203.80 in that year. The number of subscribers, however, increased from 881 to 971 in the same period, which was cause for satisfaction.

Finally, the Treasurer had to report that not one copy of the microfiche version of Number 10 which had been made available under the auspices of SSHRC in 1982, had been sold. The response indicated the overwhelming preference among subscribers, both individual and institutional, for the print copies.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Al Seager wished to thank Ralph Ellis, Bill Baker, and others whose efforts in planning the programme for 1984 went unrewarded. He expressed particular regret at the cancellation of a hoped-for Panel on Canadian Labour History by the CHA's Programme Committee, which had been the cause of some embarrassment to the Committee on Canadian Labour History this past year. Better results in future are expected.

The position of CHA Programme Coordinator, now held by the Secretary, will be vacant as of next year. All those interested in the position are urged to attend the Montreal Business Meeting in 1985.

VICE-PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dan Moore reported on the recent formation of the Labour Archives Committee, and urged individuals and institutions to lobby Labour Canada to continue its traditional activities of collecting and microfilming Canadian Labour newspapers.

The Vice-President announced his intention not to stand for re-election in 1984, and the Committee expressed its appreciation for his services rendered in the past.

OTHER BUSINESS

John Smart (Public Archives of Canada) reported on the Archives' microfilming of the much-used Strikes and Lockouts Files, 1907-1944. Inquiries about purchases should be directed to Mr. Smart.

Greg Kealey raised the issue of gender-biased language in writing labour's past, e.g., "man-days lost" (instead of worker or striker days lost) in industrial disputes. He emphasized that it was not the policy of the Committee to perpetuate a sexist idiom, while, at the same time, it was important to retain the original meaning of working-class language. He drew attention to the name-change of the Journal of Canadian Labour Studies: as of Number 13, *Labour/le Travail*, not "travailleur." A general discussion drew out the fact that *Labour/le Travail* was the title originally favoured by the editorial board in 1976.

RESOLUTION ADOPTED ON COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS

M/S/C Whereas it is reported that the Public Archives of Canada are contemplating the destruction of the original copies of Canadian collective bargaining agreements which have been placed in the public domain since 1907, therefore be it resolved that:

The Committee on Canadian Labour History urge the Public Archives of Canada to retain the original copies of all collective bargaining agreements for the use of future scholars.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

In accordance with the laws and customs of the organization, Robert Babcock ceded the chair and nomination for officers commenced.

for President

Greg Kealey

for Treasurer

Robert Babcock

for Secretary

Al Seager

for Vice-President

Peter de Lotinville

all were elected by acclamation

ADJOURNMENT

It was M/S/C that the meeting be adjourned at 1:40 p.m.



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