Scholar Librarians: Gould, Lomer and Pennington

by

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Between 1893 and 1964 the McGill University Libraries were dominated by the University Librarians Charles Gould, Gerhard Lomer, and Richard Pennington. This paper evaluates their effectiveness in transforming the libraries from a small teaching collection into a major research resource. Each man is considered as a bookman, scholar, and administrator with the conclusion that in composite the three men became the ideal scholar librarian.

Entre 1893 et 1964, les bibliothèques de l'Université McGill ont été dominées par Charles Gould, Gerhard Lomer et Richard Pennington, bibliothécaires de l'Université. Cet article évalue avec quelle efficacité ils ont transformé les bibliothèques de l'Université et comment, à partir d'une petite collection d'enseignement, ils ont constitué un fonds de recherche d'importance majeure. Chaque homme est considéré sous l'angle du bibliophile, de l'érudit et de l'administrateur; l'auteur en arrive à la conclusion qu'ensemble, les trois hommes constituent le bibliothécaire érudit idéal.

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No understanding of the McGill University libraries and their collections is possible without an appreciation of the three men who dominated them between 1893 and 1964, a total of 71 years. Through their length of tenure, their vision, and their force of personality, they imposed a point of view and left an imprint which characterize the libraries to the present day. The documentary evidence of their accomplishments can be seen in their administrative records housed in the University Archives,[1] in the buildings whose construction they oversaw, in their publications, and perhaps most importantly in the outstanding collections they developed. Yet strangely enough, there is little appreciation today of their accomplishments, partly because their surviving records are so immense as to hinder easy assimilation, and partly because only a few minor studies based upon the records have ever been published.[2] An additional problem is that, with one major exception, these records tell us more about the Librarians than the men and their personalities.

By comparison, the surviving records are most incomplete for the period before 1893 when the University acquired books which only hesitantly coalesced into collections. The main and medical libraries perambulated on and off the campus; between 1845 and 1893 there were six librarians of the main library, of whom two were honorary. By 1893, despite acquisition of some outstanding works like the elephant folio edition of Audubon's *Birds of America* and the beginnings of the Redpath British history collection, the main library was not much more than an undergraduate study collection of around 35,000 volumes.

Two factors emerged in the 1890's which set the McGill libraries along the path of becoming the major teaching and research collection we know to-

day. The first was money from major benefactors, among them Peter Redpath who in 1891 undertook to build and endow a library building capable of holding 150,000 volumes, which was opened in 1893. The second was the introduction to McGill University by Sir William Peterson, Principal from 1895 to 1919, of the German-American approach to higher education whereby graduate and professional programmes were grafted on to a strong liberal arts undergraduate programme. Adoption of this model, first seen at Johns Hopkins University in the United States, demanded excellent library resources. As well, the prevailing thinking of the day demanded that university libraries be headed by scholar librarians who could combine the qualities of bookmen, scholars and administrators. The ability to function as a bookman was ranked very highly, for the head librarian had to ensure that the library become an integral part of the University's teaching and research mission through the development of appropriate collections. Knowledge, love, and concern for books, combined with an understanding of their scholarly use, together with the administrative ability to marshall resources - these were the hallmarks of successful scholar librarians. The question is, how successfully did Gould, Lomer and Pennington fulfill this definition? Were they able to fulfill the three aspects of the role -- as bookmen, scholars, and administrators -- with equal ease or did one or the other aspect tend to predominate, perhaps to the detriment of the others? To what extent did they determine the way in which the library would develop; to what extent did circumstances help or hinder them?

Charles H. Gould (1855 - 1919)

As the first University Librarian, Gould set the pattern to be followed by his two successors. Little is known of his background and personality. He was born in Montreal of a family associated with the city's business and cultural life.[3] After graduating in classics from McGill in 1877 he followed a business career before being appointed, for reasons which remain unclear, to the newly created position of University Librarian in 1892. After spending a year studying librarianship and visiting libraries he assumed the post upon the Redpath Library being opened by the Governor General, Lord Aberdeen, in October 1893.

Contemporary accounts speak of him as being kindly -- but with a firm character -- stable, neither austere nor easy going, and extremely modest and self-effacing. He loved reading and was an accomplished musician. His portrait suggests someone who was acute, sympathetic, and dignified (Figure 12).

Gould enjoyed advantages not shared by his successors and put them to good use. He was in possession of a new, commodious structure built to the best professional standards of the day and provided with a new stack addition in 1901. He had sufficient staff and sufficient money provided by the Redpath endowments and general university funds. In addition, the library was the recipient of a steady stream of donated books which throughout his period was always greater than the number received through purchase.[4] Finally, and of equal importance, his tenure coincided almost exactly with that of the Principal, Sir William Peterson, whose commitment to the German-American pattern of higher education demanded a strong library.

Fig. 12. Charles H. Gould. (Courtesy of Department of Rare Books and Special Collections)

The goals of Principal and Librarian were completely in harmony.

What of our three criteria; how does Gould rank as a bookman, scholar, and administrator? Under Gould's aegis, between 1893 and his death while still in office in 1919, the Redpath Library collection grew four-fold from 35,000 to 146,000 volumes and the total for all the McGill collections to 180,000 volumes[5] to become Canada's largest academic library system, and a national resource for teaching and research. He took personal responsibility for collection development, doing much of the selection himself and supervising the acquisition procedures. The results of his care and judgement are evident throughout the collection in the strength of the books and serials for the twenty-six years between 1893-1919. While it is difficult to credit the acquisition of any major rare book collections to Gould except for the Ribbeck Collection of Greek and Latin philology and literature, examination shows that many important items were bought by him for the rare book collection and that many others acquired originally for the stacks have subsequently been transferred to the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Although Gould was opposed, in principle, to the development of campus libraries,[6] he did support the development of the Blackader Library of Architecture, 1917, and acquiesced in the continuation of the Medical Library and of some smaller departmental collections.

Gould was not a scholar, although he possessed an obvious appreciation of scholarship and scholarly resources. Aside from a few descriptive articles on the McGill libraries, he did not publish. On the other hand, he did found the McGill School for Librarians in 1904 as a summer school which is the progenitor of today's Graduate School of Library and Information Studies.[7] He also began the McGill University Publications, a series of original publications and reprints by faculty members issued ultimately in twenty-one subject areas and used in exchange programmes with other institutions. They fulfilled the dual role of aiding the growth of the collection and spreading McGill's reputation for scholarship.

That Gould's primary strength lay as an administrator seems hardly surprising given his business experience before entering librarianship. His running of the McGill library was considered a model of contemporary library practice. In his friendship with Melville Dewey and Charles Cutter, his sponsoring of the 1900 convention of the American Library Association in Montreal, and being elected its President in 1908-9 can be seen tangible proof of the high regard in which his personal qualities and his stewardship of the McGill libraries were held by his professional colleagues.

In summary, Gould was remarkably adept in meeting the demands of a scholar librarian. A combination of good fortune, ability and intelligence made him into one of Canada's leading librarians of the day. If he was more notable as an administrator and bookman than as a scholar, he was still able to show a real understanding for scholarship.

Gerhard R. Lomer (1882 - 1970)

Like Gould, Lomer (Figure 13) was born and raised in Montreal and educated at McGill where he received his B.A. (1903) and M.A. (1904) in

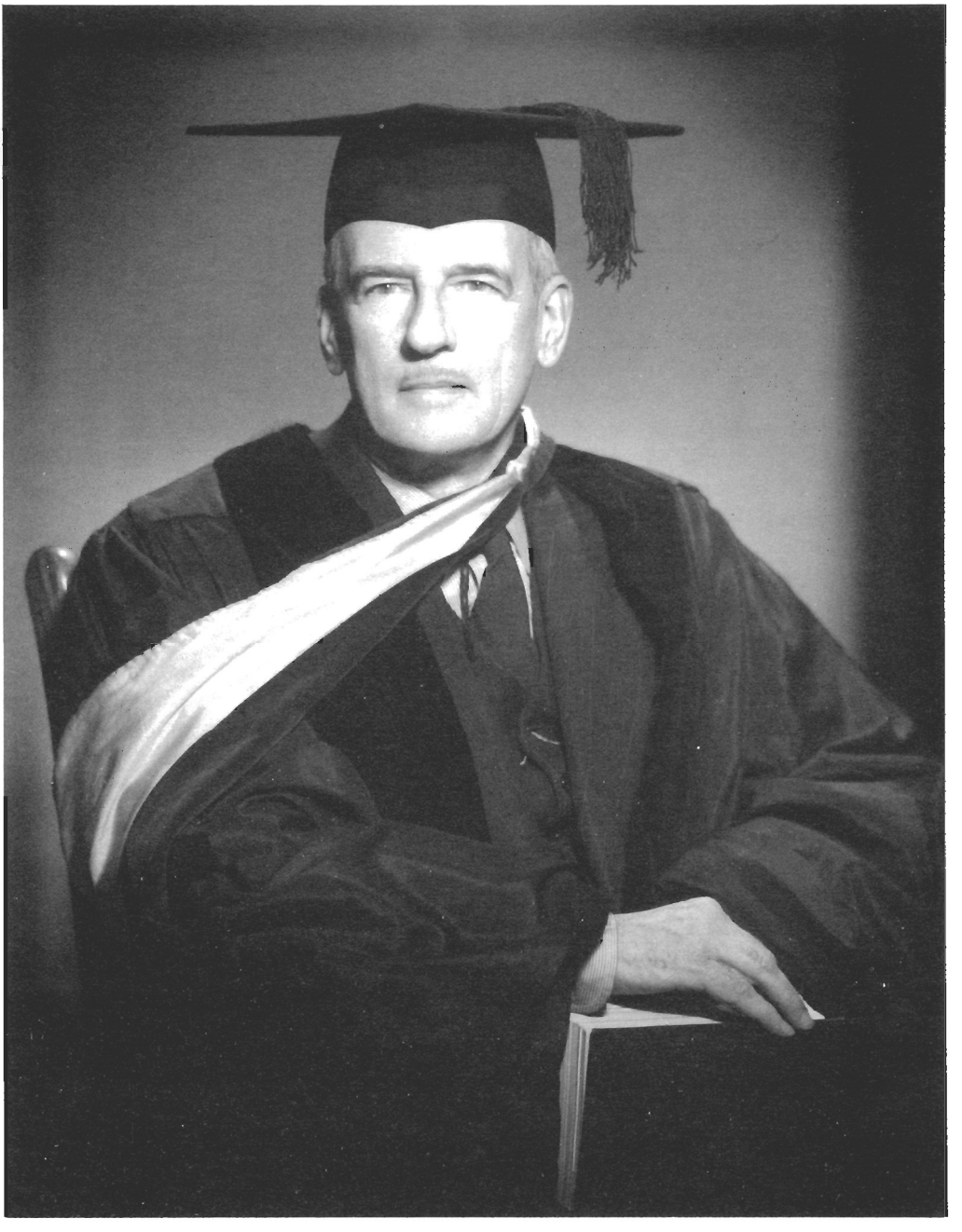

Fig. 13. Gerhard R. Lomer. (Courtesy of Department of Rare Books and Special Collections)

Philosophy. In 1910 he received his Ph. D. in Education from Columbia University, New York. Between 1906 and 1920 he taught at McGill, Columbia and the University of Wisconsin, wrote books, and served as an editor of two major American publishing series "Warner Library of the World's Best Literature" and "Chronicles Of America." In 1920 he returned to McGill to succeed Charles Gould as University Librarian, a position he held until his retirement in 1947.[8]

Lomer's tenure as Librarian was much more difficult than his predecessor's for many reasons, most of which appear to have been beyond his control. One area of difficulty, however, related directly to himself-his personality. Despite the obvious loyalty and friendship he shared with many people, his public personality would not appear to have charmed people. Many contemporaries have referred to his prickly personality and his inability to persuade. On the other hand, his intelligence and ability as a librarian and scholar were universally recognized.

The gravest problems faced by Dr. Lomer relate to the very difficult times faced by the world in general and McGill in particular. To begin with, McGill lacked the consistent direction it had known during the twenty-five years of Peterson. Lomer was required to adapt to the radically different administrative styles of three eras in the office of Principal of the University: Sir Arthur Currie (1920-1933) and his benignly sensible ways; the era of the Chancellor (1930-1939) when Sir Edward Beatty dominated a quick succession of weak principals; and the autocratic centralizing of F. Cyril James (1940-1962). Contemporary opinion held that Lomer's relationship with James was poor and that the Principal's estimation of the Librarian was low. In addition, the depression of the 30's and the shortages of World War II saw McGill passing through an extended period of financial constraint in which endowments and gifts failed to compensate for the lack of consistent government financial support. One indication of the seriousness of the situation, both local and global, is that between 1914 and 1945, a period of some thirty years, there was significantly less new construction at McGill compared with either the previous or succeeding thirty years.

Given these circumstances, how then does one evaluate Lomer as a bookman, scholar and administrator? That Lomer was a bookman is beyond question. He taught a course on the history of the book, and argued that "knowledge of how to use books and the habit of using them effectively are two fundamental aims of higher education,"[9] and during his tenure McGill received two great research collections, the Osler Library (1929) and the great benefactions in zoology, ornithology, and medicine of Dr. Casey Wood. He was also involved in the development of other collections; in the rare book and general stacks the results of his interest are easily seen. Great difficulty exists in documenting the growth of the collections during Lomer's years due to incomplete information and discrepancies between various sources. By the time of his retirement in 1947, however, the total size of the catalogued collection was approximately 500,000 volumes including 360,000 volumes in Redpath Library which compares favourably with 460,000 catalogued volumes at the University of Toronto.[10] This tripling of the collections is explained in part by the fact that during the 1920's the number of books acquired through purchase was double that acquired by donation although these remained reasonably constant between 1910 and 1950.[11] Yet

anyone who consults various university reports and uses the collections will see that there was a sharp divide after 1930 due to a radical decrease in the book budget as a result of which serials were cancelled and important monographs not purchased. In 1936 the Gest Chinese Research Library which during its ten years at McGill had grown to approximately 150,000 volumes was given up by the University. In short, because of circumstances largely beyond his control, Lomer was unable to maintain the quality of the collections despite his undoubted qualifications as a bookman.

It is as a scholar and educator that Lomer will be best appreciated. He had around 100 publications to his name including the first Canadian union catalogue, *Catalogue of Scientific Periodicals in Canadian Libraries*, 1924. He also continued the McGill University Publications series, begun by Gould, until the forces of depression and war brought about its cessation. But it was as an educator that Lomer was truly to distinguish himself; for along with Gould, Lomer deserves the title of co-founder of the McGill library school of which he was both Professor and Director. After continuing Gould's summer programme for a number of years, he began the process of transforming it into a one-year Bachelor of Library Science programme which in 1931 became the first Canadian graduate programme in librarianship to be accredited by the American Library Association. He also organized and taught summer courses in librarianship in Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, and Banff. His 1932 summer course at McGill was probably the first French-language educational programme in librarianship offered in Canada. After his retirement, he taught at and was Assistant Director of the University of Ottawa Library School until his death in 1970. By any standard, Gerhard Lomer must be considered one of the leading Canadian library educators of this century.

As an administrator, Lomer is very difficult to judge. Despite the apparent limitations of his personality, it is hard to believe that anyone else would have been able to do a better job at that time. Adapting to the radical shifts in the McGill administration during the 1920's, 30's, and 40's would have challenged anyone's ability to persuade; depression and war affected most Canadian educational institutions adversely. Despite a small addition to the Redpath Library stacks in 1922 there was insufficient space just as there were insufficient funds and staff. At the same time, between 1920 and 1947, reading room attendance and circulation increased ten-fold; departmental libraries proliferated throughout the university. Another individual would undoubtedly have handled differently the problems and opportunities Lomer faced, yet it is difficult to imagine anyone handling them better overall.

Richard Pennington (1904 -)

The third and last of the University Librarians (1947-1964), Richard Pennington (Figure 14) is undeniably the most controversial. An Englishman, he received his B.A. from the University of Birmingham in 1924 and his Library Diploma from the University of London in 1932.[12] After spending the 1930's in London, England as a librarian and participant in a wide range of social and political activities he went to Australia in early 1939 to become head librarian of the University of Queensland. In 1946 he was appointed by

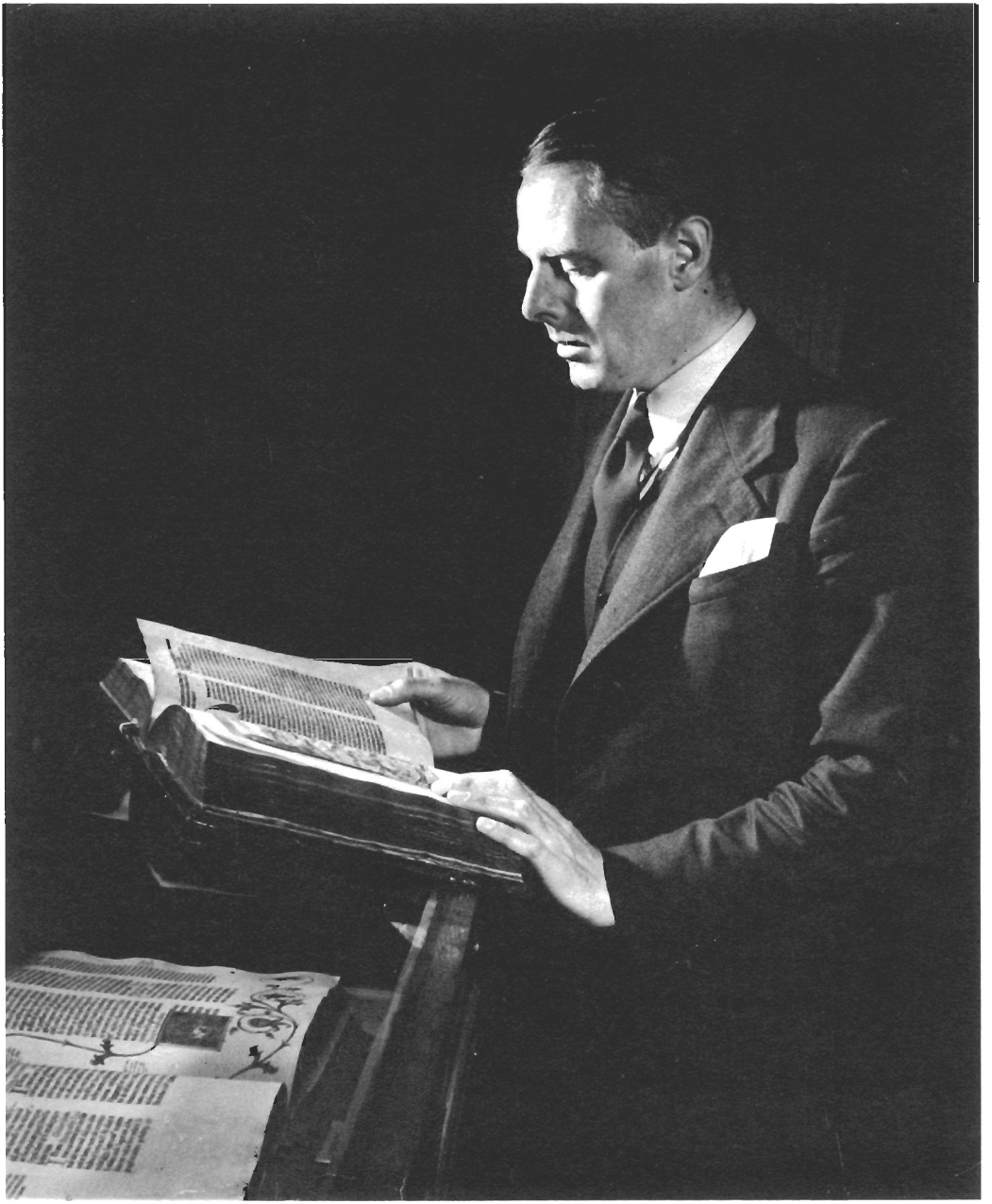

Fig. 14. Richard Pennington. (Courtesy of Department of Rare Books and Special Collections)

the Principal, Dr. F. Cyril James, as Assistant University Librarian and succeeded Dr. Lomer the next year as University Librarian. Two years after the retirement of Dr. James, Pennington stepped down as University Librarian and retired the following year, 1965.

Of all three men, Pennington's personality is the most public, largely because of a slim book which he published and quickly removed from sale in 1960 and which has subsequently been reissued in four other editions: *Peterley Harvest, Being the Private Diary of David Peterley.* The book is a thinly disguised autobiography of Pennington's life in London during the 1930's presented as extracts from the diary of an individual who does not exist and whose papers are not deposited in the McGill University Library, despite the claims of the book's Forward.[13] The controversy surrounding the book cannot have helped but contribute to undermining Pennington's credibility and effectiveness as University Librarian.

When he arrived at McGill in 1946, Pennington was part of an expatriate British elite which ran the University in a very autocratic manner. While McGill's finances were still shaky, they were much better than they had been in the 1930's and a large-scale post-war construction programme was initiated. With the passing of Dr. James from the scene the British hegemony over the administration was ended as was the autocratic administrative style to be replaced by a Canadian administration and collegial, democratic procedures.

Of Richard Pennington's personality both *Peterley Harvest* and his contemporaries testify to a man of dazzling complexity and great charisma who could be charming or disdainful with equal ease. Highly cultivated and urbane he had definite opinions on people and things which he articulated with irony and a sardonic wit. It is frequently said of him that he was difficult to deal with and not straightforward. His inability to suffer fools gladly was legendary. Yet he could also be surprisingly generous with his time and energy in imparting knowledge. Many of his views on library practice were not in line with contemporary Canadian and American thinking.

In the light of these various factors, therefore, it is not surprising that controversy and questions surround Richard Pennington's performance in all three areas of activity for a scholar librarian: bookman, scholar, and administrator. Pennington enjoyed a highly personalized approach to collection development which resulted in his becoming the most important bookman of our three protagonists and also the most controversial. Contemporaries speak of his lack of interest in textbooks and other materials designed to support the teaching programme, particularly in the social sciences. He would regularly and informally, it seems, deaccession material he considered inappropriate to an academic library, particularly contemporary novels. His major interest was in the development of research collections particularly in the humanities and in rare book collections of which the Napoleon, Hume, Colgate Printing, and Stern Puppet collections are four he began. He was also responsible for cultivating benefactors, notably Lawrence M. Lande.

Determining the size and growth rate of the collections during Pennington's era is no easier than it was during Lomer's, due once again to

inadequate information and discrepancies between various sources. Unfortunately for Pennington, the 1962 Williams Report, the first separately published study of Canadian academic libraries, presented statistics which made the growth of the McGill collection over the previous thirty years appear rather worse than it was in fact. Williams argued that between 1931 and 1961 McGill was the only Canadian university, aside from Dalhousie, in Halifax, not to double the size of its collection.[14] The report then went on in a statistical table to indicate that whereas in 1931 both McGill and the University of Toronto had 450,000 volumes, by 1956 Toronto's 1,211,772 volumes were nearly double McGill's 671,253 and by 1961 Toronto's 1,670,337 volumes were more than double McGill's 775,900.[15] These statistics taken in conjunction with Pennington's well known attitudes towards collection development made him the inevitable, if not entirely deserved, target of much criticism.

While there is no doubt that the growth rate of the McGill collections did fall behind that of the University of Toronto and some other Canadian universities during the 1950's and early 60's, some contradictory facts must also be taken into consideration. First, the figure of 450,000 volumes for the McGill and Toronto collections in 1931 does not accord with other sources which indicate that they possessed, respectively, 285,000 and 241,429 volumes in 1930.[16] Second, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in both 1953[17] and 1957-58[18] gave the size of the McGill collections at 800,000 volumes which is rather more than Williams reported for 1961. This question of collection size and growth rate among Canadian university libraries is clearly in need of further investigation. What is known is that by 1961 the University of Toronto was devoting 7.41%[19] of its operating budget to the library as opposed to about 3% at McGill which ranked last among Canadian universities in this category. While failure to support the library adequately reflects badly upon the entire university, particularly its senior administration, it must also reflect badly upon the Librarian, Richard Pennington, whose tenure began shortly after the conclusion of the War when financial support of universities began to improve, and whose primary function as head librarian was to ensure adequate funding.

Pennington's scholarly reputation rests primarily upon his bibliographical work. Although he lectured annually in the library school on the history of books and printing he did not follow in the footsteps of his two predecessors by becoming either a professor or the school's Director. *Peterley Harvest*, regardless of its intent and qualities is not a work of scholarship. The bibliographies, however, do have lasting scholarly value and that on Wenceslaus Hollar stands as a monument to Pennington's undoubted ability as a bibliographical researcher.[20] Concerning his appreciation of scholarship, one can argue that even if the rare book collections he developed reveal an appreciation for research in the humanities, there were still serious reservations within the University concerning his general understanding of the requirements of academic scholarship.

Pennington's administrative ability has elicited many harsh criticisms both during his tenure and since -- not all of which are deserved. His personal, one-man style was entirely in keeping with the prevailing McGill style of the James era. The difficulty was that Pennington, unlike James, was a very unstructured administrator who lacked an interest and adeptness

in day-to-day administrative detail. Also, he worked without an effective assistant in whom he was prepared to place his trust to handle such details. His relationship with his very able and intelligent Assistant University Librarian, Miss Beatrice Simon, was very awkward, partly because she had been appointed by the Principal rather than by himself. That said, however, Pennington's early years as University Librarian showed him to be both competent and effective. He was able to marshall the necessary support and resources needed to build the 1953 addition to Redpath Library which more than doubled its size; he was also sufficiently *au courant* of contemporary developments to introduce one of the first undergraduate libraries on the continent, patterned after Harvard University's Lamont Library; he was a consultant on the building of the new Fraser-Hickson Library in Montreal; and in 1953 he was elected President of the Faculty Club which reflects his positive standing within the University. In retrospect, 1962 must be considered his year of administrative crisis: F. Cyril James retired and was replaced by the collegially-minded H. Rocke Robertson as Principal; David Thompson was succeeded as Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies by Stanley Frost who revived the University Library Committee which had long been moribund and whose members now began earnest questioning; the Williams report was published with its critical statistics and comments on McGill:

> At McGill it is becoming evident to more and more members of the faculty that improved library services and competent administration are not unrealizable dreams but ought to be demanded.[21]

The next year, 1963, saw the publication of the McCarthy-Logsdon report on the McGill libraries which recommended among other things the development of an integrated library system and the construction of a new main library.[22]

That Pennington's contract should not have been renewed in 1964 can only seem inevitable from the perspective of the 1980's. Regardless of his ability, intelligence, and diligence, and regardless also of whether the library's problems were within or beyond his ability to change them, the tenor of the sixties demanded Pennington's removal and a radical change of direction.

Conclusion

In 1964 there occurred not only the end of Richard Pennington's term as University Librarian but the end of the position itself. The justification for replacing the title with that of Director of Libraries was to reflect better the expanded responsibilities of the head librarian over all campus libraries. A suspicion may also be that after 71 years the title of University Librarian had become discredited and needed to be replaced.

What has happened since? Whereas the three University Librarians--Gould, Lomer, Pennington -- had average tenures of twenty-four years, the Directors of Libraries of whom there have been six since 1964 have averaged less than four years in office. The University Librarians were expected to be scholar librarians, the Directors have been chosen primarily as library

administrators, even those with scholarly inclinations and a knowledge of books. Ironically, although their authority has been wider, none of the Directors has remained in office long enough to leave as strong an impact as that of any of the University Librarians. The Directors must be concerned with the system as a whole and not just with development of the main library and its collections. As yet, no consensus has emerged on what the change from scholar librarians to library administrators has meant in terms of effective administration and appreciation for the scholarly mission of the University and to what extent the change has affected our present and future collections.

It is, therefore, all the more intriguing to consider that while the three men who dominated the McGill University Libraries between 1893 and 1964 were undoubtedly at the mercy of circumstances -- both good and bad -- we are today conscious of how they were the authors of so much of the libraries' fortunes and misfortunes as they developed them into a major teaching and research resource. Gould the administrator, Lomer the scholar, and Pennington the bookman may not have succeeded individually in fulfilling all the requirements of a scholar librarian but collectively they more than did so.

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