

# At Guelph: a long established collection

*Nancy Sadek with Sarah Funston*

Many people would be astounded to learn that the Ontario Agricultural College can lay claim to being the first institution of higher learning to include Canadian literature in the curriculum. The remarkable man responsible for such far-sighted ideas was J.B. Reynolds, lecturer in English and Physics, first head of the English Department from 1893 until 1915, and ultimately president of O.A.C. from 1920 until 1928.

Reynold's thesis topic for his his Master of Arts degree from Toronto was the literature of natural description; he included reference to several Canadian authors. Thus, it was to a 1907 summer school class in nature study that Reynolds first lectured on Canadian writers.

As early as 1904, Reynolds contributed an article on Canadian literature to the college magazine wondering "whether or not there is such a thing as a Canadian literature" and concluding "that we have every reason to feel gratified at what our writers have done, and to be full of hope respecting the future of Canadian literature."<sup>1</sup> In 1910 Canadian literature begins to appear regularly in the O.A.C. calendars as part of a second year English course for diploma and B.S.A. students.

Reynolds' pioneering efforts were strengthened by his successors such as the poet, essayist and college historian, O.J. Stevenson, who extended Canadian studies to include art and music. Although the curriculum remained heavily weighted towards the study of English classics the interest in Canadian culture led to the acquisitions of Canadian works of art and literature. This legacy has richly endowed the university art collection with several Group of Seven masterpieces, and the library with a wide collection of 19th and early 20th century Canadian works. Among the latter is an excellent selection of juvenile fiction, including first editions of authors such as Ethel M. Chapman, Ralph Connor, Bessie Marchant, L.M. Montgomery, J. Macdonald Oxley, Gilbert Parker, Marjorie Pickthall, Charles G.D. Roberts, Marshall Saunders, Ernest Thompson Seton and E. Ryerson Young.

Another teaching tradition at Guelph is also germane to the study of children's literature. Child studies is a primary focus of the College of Family and Consumer Studies, formed in 1968 from Macdonald Institute, one of the three founding colleges of the university. Spearheaded by Adelaide Hoodless, who pioneered the Women's Institute movement, the college sought to provide

courses for the young women of the province, particularly those from rural areas, which would prepare them for the intelligent running of a household. Naturally not the least of these cares was the rearing of children and from the beginning courses related to the care and management of the young were included in the calendar.

In time these studies have evolved into the more sophisticated area of child studies found in the curricula of today's Departments of Family Studies and Psychology. However, historic attitudes to child development and family relationships retain a special interest to the student of children's literature. The library has recently made substantial additions to the literature of this period with the help of a SSHRC grant specifically for the purpose of purchasing out of print materials in the whole spectrum of family life and domestic economy. Works such as Charles Haden's 1827 publication entitled *Practical Observations on the Management and Diseases of Children* or a 1756 edition of *The Relative Duties of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants* by William Fleetwood, the Bishop of Ely, offer an interesting perspective on how the child of yesteryear was expected to conduct himself. In the *Essay on the government of children* James Nelson advises parents in 1756 that children must be cautioned against bad books as well as bad company. "Witness the Swarms of lewd Plays, Poems and Romances, calculated to inflame the minds, and corrupt the Hearts of the Readers. . ."<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting a more liberal era, the Rare Book Collection at Guelph also has some interesting examples of Victorian and late nineteenth century American children's picture books and a small collection of Japanese stories with hand-coloured wood-block illustrations.

In addition to the Macdonald Institute records, other relevant archival holdings would include the Adelaide Hoodless Family Papers and psychology professor Denis Stott's surveys of children in the 1950's and 1960's in Great Britain and Ontario.

Some of the regional history files in Guelph's collections contain interesting material on the family life of new immigrant families especially in the diaries and letters of the women. The Lizars Collection, relating to a pioneer family in Colborne Township, includes a library brought over from Scotland. A well-worn collection, it contains many tomes such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* which must have been pored over by the children on many a winter evening. The uplifting *Ministering Children* by Maria Louisa Charlesworth is well-thumbed but not to be compared with *The Headlong Career and Woeful Ending of Precocious Piggy* which is in a sorry state and missing several pages.

By far the outstanding acquisition in children's literature is the widely heralded purchase of the *L.M. Montgomery Collection*. Although the diaries and scrapbooks remain sealed until 1992, other holdings are currently accessible and constitute a rich resource for studies of this enduring Canadian author.

Photographs spanning the entire life of L.M. Montgomery provide a vast pictorial archive from childhood to her final home "Journey's End" at 210 Riverside Drive in Toronto.

The author's library is also held at Guelph and reflects a wide range of reading interests from favourite classics like Scott and Dickens to a more unexpected taste for popular authors such as Agatha Christie. Inserts and marginalia in many of the well worn volumes serve as guideposts to Montgomery's thoughts on various authors. Artifacts in the collection are represented by a wide selection of needlework samples including a beloved crazy quilt mentioned in the diaries. The famous pair of China dogs, Gog and Magog, acquired on the honeymoon trip to Great Britain, are also held by Guelph as well as the shattered fragments of the Dark jug, integral to the plot of *A Tangled Web*.

Of the various other Montgomery papers at Guelph the account books, detailing sales of the author's works, are of particular interest. Other business papers include the famous letter from L.C. Page accepting *Anne of Green Gables* for publication and the records of the subsequent long and bitter lawsuit with the same company many years later. Copies of all the author's many published short stories and articles and her will are among the papers in the collection.

Guelph's Archival Collections have also developed a sizable collection of Canadian theatre archives in recent years. Beginning with the important acquisition of the Shaw Festival archives in 1983 several other collections have been added. The most significant of these, in terms of children's literature, is the *Young People's Theatre Archives*, from Canada's longest and most successful theatre devoted entirely to plays for children and young adults. YPT productions are original and frequently based on Canadian scripts. The archives are a rich source of information on the past ten years of the Theatre and include prompt scripts, production and publicity items, designs, pictures and business correspondence. The archives of the NDWT ("Ne'er-Do-Well-Thespians") Theatre Company were also recently acquired. Active throughout the 1970s, NDWT devoted a good deal of energy to theatre for young audiences, particularly in collaboration with playwright James Reaney. The company worked closely with schools, preparing educational materials to encourage children to explore social and historical issues developed in the company's productions. An interesting offshoot of NDWT was Northern Delights, a company based in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, dedicated to promoting the culture of native peoples, including the theatrical imagination of young people in the north. Because the library is building up an excellent reference collection in response to the Department of Drama's growing curriculum in Canadian and children's drama, Guelph is fast becoming a centre of excellence in this field.

Reference was made earlier to Guelph's wide ranging interest in child studies in general and it seems appropriate to conclude this brief survey of its research resources with a description of a unique collection that has potential interest for many different disciplines. In a successful application for SSHRC grant

funds to process the *All About Us/Nous Autres* this collection of children's creative writing and art, faculty from the departments of English, Drama, Languages, Family Studies and Psychology all lent their support in addition to various education centres and other institutions involved with the study of children and young adults. The *All About Us/Nous Autres*, collection has been presented by Sarah Funston, archival research assistant and exhibit coordinator, who describes this massive amount of original material as follows:

During its nine years in operation, *All About Us/Nous Autres Inc.* (a non-profit cultural and educational foundation) amassed a very substantial collection of Canadian children's creative work. This unique collection of "Canadiana" is comprised of submissions by school age children (6-18), in a variety of styles and on many subjects. Many reflect an uncanny degree of insight, truth and naivete, as to what tomorrow holds in store for them. One young person, aged 17, ponders:

"Wouldn't it be terrible if Earth died and I didn't."

Their writing, regardless of age, is not what you might expect to find. These young Canadians, both English and French, have grasped the opportunity given to them by writer and sociologist Betty Nickerson, founder and National Coordinator of *All About Us/Nous Autres*, to speak out on issues that run the gamut from death, and child abuse to local history and environmental concerns.

All submissions to the organization were made either by the individual child or his/her parent, or by teachers submitting a collective group of students' work. Material received was carefully scrutinized and letters of constructive criticism were issued. All material was retained in the archives (over 100,000 pieces of creative writing) for possible publication, either in the newspaper *Nous Journal* or in one of many other publications compiled by the organization.

It was hoped that such an archive would become a permanent record, illustrating the concerns and talents of Canadian children. Now that the task of processing this enormous collection of artwork and creative-writing has been completed, the University of Guelph Library's Archival Collections has made available to the researcher and scholar just that — a social archive of creative arts by young Canadians.

The creative-writing portion of the collection has been divided into 11 series, in most instances grouped according to the specific project, particular publication or time of writing. The largest series, *All About Us Children's Writing Collection*, is subdivided into the following categories: Adventure, Cartoons, Community and Country, Domestic Animals, Fantasy, Future, Horses, Insects, Nature, People, Recreation, Sports and Wildlife. For example, material dealing with the changing seasons, landscapes, etc., would appear in the series *Nature*. This particular series is the most specific in its subject access, and the material takes a variety of forms, from Haiku and limericks, to prose essays and short stories.

The second series, called simply *Anthology*, groups together works submitted to the organization for possible publication. This includes the efforts of outside groups (such as the Halifax Recreation Department or the Girl Guides) concerned with children's creative writing. It also includes all materials submitted to *All About Us/Nous Autres* by primary and secondary schools across Canada. A third subseries on anthologies, *All About Us Publications*, highlights works proposed, compiled or published by the organization, and *All-About Us Student Anthologies*, a fourth subseries collects works submitted by the various schools which chose to participate in the *All About Us/Nous Autres* project.

A separate and fifth series was created to highlight the earliest of efforts by AAU in 1973 to solicit creative-writing and artwork from young Canadians. This *All About Us/Nous Autres* series includes all submissions by children age 6-18 from both Ontario and Quebec. A selection of these works appeared in AAU's first publication of the same name.

Series six, *Nous Journal*, documents efforts at producing a bilingual quarterly newspaper from 1974 to 1977. Within this unit can be found issues of the publication, graphics, subscription requests, photographs, correspondence, etc.

Series seven and eight differ slightly in nature. They group together submissions which are relevant to two Canada-wide projects proposed by *All About Us/Nous Autres Inc.: Youth Dimension, 1976*, which solicited children's opinions on ways in which to improve world communities now and in the future, and *Heritage Canada, 1977*, which dealt with children's interest in history, the development of heritage sites, cultural life, etc., as discovered in their own communities.

The three remaining series are *Correspondence with kids*, a collection of letters from children submitting works, and replies of constructive criticism and encouragement by the *All About Us* editorial staff; *French Poetry*, original poems and prose by children from French-speaking Canada and a *Miscellaneous* series which gathers together the odds and ends, unsolicited manuscripts and several short stories. The literary section of the *All About Us/Nous Autres* collection consists of well over 100,000 pieces of creative writing.

There is a second and equally valuable component to the collection and that is children's artwork. There are in excess of 5000 original works of art not only by Canadian children, but also by children from the Commonwealth countries, resulting in a collection that reflects both a national and global community.

The artwork collections of greatest interest have proven to be the *All About Us Special Collection*, the *International/Canadian Commonwealth Collection* and the *All About Us Northern Collection*, all of which have been indexed in detail to provide quick and easy access to the artworks and wherever possible, their accompanying slide. Access points include name, place, age, sex, topic and medium, which appear in the form of computerized listings.

Betty Nickerson and *All About Us* were not so concerned with the medium for expression, as they were with the message. From coast to coast and abroad

children responded. The *All About Us/Nous Autres* archives is proof of their unbridled enthusiasm. Whether by pen or palette the children have something to say. and it's "All About Us!"

#### References

<sup>1</sup>*O.A.C. Review*, v. 17, no. 2, Nov. 1904, pp. 74-75.

<sup>2</sup>Nelson, James. *An Essay on the Government of Children*. 2d ed. London, Dodsley, 1756, p. 291.

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