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The INTRODUCTION *of* PRINTING *into* CANADA

A Brief History by
ÆGIDIUS FAUTEUX, F.R.S.C.

CHAPTER THREE
*which deals with the Introduction of
the Press into the Province
of Quebec*

SALLE GAGNON

The
INTRODUCTION
of PRINTING *into*
CANADA



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"Our art was hail'd from kingdoms far abroad,
And cherish'd in the hallow'd house of God;
From which we learn the homage it received,
And how our sires its heavenly birth believed.
Each printer hence, howe'er unblest his walls,
E'en to this day his shop a Chapel calls."

M'Creery: The Press.

WUO3HTO LVAIB
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JASSTHON

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CHAPTER THREE

The Introduction of the Press into the Province of Quebec



It is the general opinion that Printing only began in Canada, properly so-called, after the country had been conquered by the English. Some bibliographers, however, find it hard to concede that, during the whole century and a half of its existence, New France could have remained deprived of a useful tool which all other civilized nations, especially its own neighbours, vied with each other in obtaining. They claim that at least one press was in operation towards the close of the French regime, and we must admit that some of the arguments which they marshal in support of their theory cannot be lightly rejected. It would be difficult to write the history of the beginnings of Printing in Canada without first considering this preliminary question, which is, moreover, of the greatest interest.

One thing is certain, that, even in the very early days of the colony, the question of in-

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roducing a printing press into New France had been considered more than once. The original missionaries, in the interests of the Gospel, were the first to think of it, as did the Franciscans in Mexico and the Puritan ministers in New England. Proof of this may be found in the following significant entry in the *Journal des Jesuites*, under date of September, 1665: "Nous concluons d'crire pour avoir icy une imprimerie pour les langues." (We decided to write in order to establish here a Printing shop for languages). However, there is nothing to indicate that this bold project was ever carried out, although we do find, in the Census of 1667, there is an entry of a certain Achille Masson who was a printer; but this evidently refers to a printer who had no type because, having stated that he lived on the Île d'Orleans, it adds that he was "engagé domestique" (domestic servant).

The Sulpicians in Montreal appear to have cherished the same ambition in 1683, as the Jesuits in Quebec did in 1665, but with no more success. The reply which M. de Belmont received from M. Tronson, the Superior in Paris, deserves, we think, to be quoted: "On a cru qu'il serait inutile de vous envoyer les caractères pour imprimer que vous demandiez parce qu'on nous a dit que vous ne pourriez pas vous en servir et que les livres ne vous en apprendraient pas assez pour pouvoir y réussir." (It is believed to be useless to send you type for printing, as requested by you, because we

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are advised that you would be unable to use it, and that books could not give you adequate instruction to enable you to employ it successfully.)

Nevertheless, it has been claimed, *that somewhere about the same time, Mgr de St. Vallier had caused one of his "mandements" (mandamuses) to be printed at Quebec; this theory is based on the fact that it is dated the 22nd October, 1686, at which time the second Bishop of Quebec was still on this continent, and consequently he must have had a small press at his disposal. This assumption is certainly a bold one. This one piece of printing of 1686, would appear very small in the whole history of New France to be cited as the sole product of a Canadian press, and it seems to us more reasonable to assume that Mgr de St. Vallier had simply handed it at a later date to Parisian printers, during a journey which he made in France immediately afterwards. Further, there are many reasons for believing that M. Tronson's discreet remark in relation to Montreal in 1683 applied equally to Quebec in 1686.

The nearest approach to the introduction of Printing into New France is the attempt which we find was made sixty years later, in 1749, by M. de la Galissonnière. When he raised the matter with the Minister of Marine, that official contented himself with putting forward the statement that a press would be eminently

*Report of the Canadian Archives for 1910, p. 56

THE
T R I A L

O F

DANIEL DISNEY, Esq;

Captain of a Company in His Majesty's 44th Regiment of Foot, and Town-Major of the Garrison of *Montreal*, at the Session of the Supreme-Court of Judicature, holden at *Montreal*, on *Saturday* the 28th Day of *February*, and thence continued by Adjournments to *Wednesday* the 11th Day of *March*, 1767, before the Honourable WILLIAM HEY, Esq; Chief-Justice of the Province of *Quebec*, upon an Indictment containing two Charges, the one for a Burglary and Felony, in breaking and entering Mr. *Thomas Walker's* House, at *Montreal*, on the Night of the 6th Day of *December*, in the Year 1764, with an Intention to murder the said *Thomas Walker*, the other for feloniously and of Malice aforethought cutting off the Right Ear of the said *Thomas Walker*, with Intention thereby to disfigure him, against the Form of the Statute of 22 and 23 *Car. II.* Cap. i. in that Case made and provided.



Q U E B E C:

Printed by BROWN & GILMORE.

M,DCC,LXVII.

The first book printed in the English language
in Lower Canada.

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useful in the colony for the promulgation of the laws and regulations; but, being himself a literary man and a savant, he must also have thought that it was time, in view of the state of civilization existing in New France, to provide means for the dissemination of ideas. Unfortunately, once again the central authority held to the usual method of temporising. The official reply was that it was necessary to wait until such time as a printer should present himself, and that when this occurred, consideration would be given to the conditions upon which the privilege might be granted to him. The famous botanist, Kalm, who visited Quebec in 1749 and was received there by M. de la Galissonnière, writing actually at that date stated: "Il n'y a pas d'imprimerie au Canada, quoiqu'il y en ait eu autrefois." (There is no printing shop in Canada although there used to be one.) In the particular circumstances, this statement cannot be accepted as the testimony of a witness. M. de la Galissonnière had evidently spoken of his project with the foreign visitor, and it is quite possible that the latter, being himself a Swede, did not grasp exactly what was in the mind of the French speaker.

We must now deal with the Pontbriand problem, a question which in the first instance was simply puzzling, but which for some time certain people appear to have accustomed themselves to considering as definitely solved.

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About 1895, M. Philéas Gagnon, the well-known Quebec bibliophile, discovered—he has never said where nor how—a treasure trove comprising two printed mandamuses of the last French Bishop of Quebec, Mgr de Pontbriand, both dated 1759. In the enthusiasm of his discovery, he was easily convinced that these two publications had been printed in Quebec, and he even decided that they were the product of a little press which was the private property of the author of the letters. He has endeavoured at some length to explain his reasons in his *Essai de Bibliographie Canadienne*; but, although they have won the assent of Mr. D. C. McMurtrie, who has just given them fresh publicity in a recent publication, we regret to state that for our part we have not found them convincing.

M. Gagnon's solitary argument rests, in effect, upon the date of the two mandamuses. A claim had already been made that a document of Mgr. de St. Vallier had been printed in Canada because it bore a date which coincided with the time when the author was actually in Quebec; therefore M. Gagnon made up his mind that the mandamuses of Mgr de Pontbriand must have been printed either in Quebec or in Montreal because they were dated 1759, at which time not only was the bishop, their author, in this country, but, on account of the war, he was deprived of any means of communicating with France. He forgets just one thing; that is, that although a document

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of this description may be dated, say, the 18th October, 1759, that being the day on which it was promulgated, it does not necessarily follow that such document, if printed copies be found, had been printed exactly on the 18th October, 1759. Is it not quite possible that the mandamuses in question, which immediately preceded the fall of the colony and the departure of a large number of functionaries or officers, were carried to France in manuscript form and were there judged to be of sufficient documentary value to be printed? Granted that such be possible, the claim of M. Gagnon must be valued only as a statement which has no foundation in fact.

Why is it, indeed, that in all the parishes that preserved the episcopal mandamuses, which were regularly distributed to them, one finds only the manuscript copy of these same pastoral letters of Monseigneur de Pontbriand, promulgated in the form usual at the time? Why, moreover, has no one ever found any trace of that press which Mgr de Pontbriand is supposed to have possessed, and which, according to M. Gagnon, would surely have been taken by its proprietor to Montreal after the capture of Quebec? We have ourselves carefully examined the detailed inventory of all the possessions which the last bishop of the French regime left at his death in 1760, and although it includes all sorts of articles, from his state coach to his candlesticks and his kettledrums, we have not found in it any mention whatever

A K I T A M I
KAKIKEMESUDI-ARENARAG'
A U I K H I G A N,

Messiui Arenâbak

Uâbanakéuiak uitfi

Pépâmkamigék éitfik,

Kifittunéfa JAN BATIST NUDENANS,

MEKAZEUSSEUET

N E G E

U-d-Arefigâtegui PATRIHANSA.

~~~~~?~~~~~

KEBEK-DARI,

ARENARAG'AUIKHIGEBANIK

BROUN, té GIRMORE.

1770.

A unique copy of the first book ever printed in  
the Abnaki language.

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of a printing press, small or large, although the rarity of such an article would certainly have assured it being mentioned.

For these reasons, and for others which the space at our disposal does not permit us to set out, we hold to our belief that there was never a printing shop in Canada under the standard of the fleurs-de-lys. This sign of progress had to wait until the opening of the British regime, whose methods of colonial administration, inspired by an entirely different spirit, allowed more scope for individual initiative, and which was more adaptable to the progress of modern ideas. There is nothing to indicate that anyone will ever succeed in depriving William Brown of the honour of having introduced the first printing press into Canada, in the year 1764.

William Brown was a native of County Kirkcudbright, in Scotland, who came to America as a youth. After having worked for some time in Virginia, and even conducted a workshop in the Barbadoes for William Dunlap, the master-printer of Philadelphia, who, besides being his patron, was believed to be his uncle, he decided, about 1763, to go and try his fortune on the Canadian side of the border, which had just passed under English rule. He was not more than 27 years of age at that time, but his courage and his resolute spirit were equal to the enterprise. His first care was to look for

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an associate, and he soon found one in the person of a fellow-worker in Philadelphia, Thomas Gilmore. The deed of partnership between the two friends is dated the 5th August, 1763, and we read in it that each had deposited in the hands of William Dunlap a sum of £72, as initial capital. Brown, the leader, set off for Quebec in order to prepare the way, and shortly afterwards Gilmore embarked for England, to make the necessary purchases of a press, with type and paper. At length, in June, 1764, they found themselves together at Quebec, actually ready to start work. During the interval, Brown had distributed a prospectus announcing the forthcoming appearance of a weekly newspaper, and a response to his appeal had been received from 143 subscribers, of whom half were English and half French. It was little enough, but the two courageous printers were not the men to draw back, and on the 21st June, 1764, the first number of the promised newspaper appeared, which must have aroused a considerable amount of interest and curiosity amongst the people of Quebec.

This paper was the famous *Gazette de Québec*, which did not cease publication until 1874, and only suffered two short interruptions during its long existence of more than 110 years: one, in 1765, following the Stamp Act, and the other, in 1775, due to the American invasion. An extremely modest paper in its beginnings, for a long time it did little more than publish, in both English and French, the Governor's

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regulations and the merchants' advertisements; but we know that it attained considerable importance finally as a party journal, especially after it had gained its freedom from the official yoke.

Brown and Gilmore, however, could not remain satisfied with the publication of one journal for 140 or 150 subscribers, even with the addition of a civil salary of £50 per annum. They had to find other material for their press, and little by little they succeeded. First of all came the little jobs that are the small change of the printing shop: calendars, sales notices, order forms, certificates, army bills, etc.; then followed pamphlets, and, finally, books.

What, apart from the journal, was the first publication that issued from the presses of Quebec? This question has long been debated; but we think to-day that it has been practically decided, thanks to the valuable *Day Book* of Brown and Gilmore, which is now preserved in the Archives of the Dominion, and which permits us to follow, almost day by day, the progress of Canadian printing during a great many years. This *Day Book* confirms the claim of Dr. Hubert Neilson, and clearly reveals that the first publication printed in Canada, and worthy of the name, was not, as has long been thought, the *Catéchisme du Diocèse de Sens*, printed in 1765, but was an English brochure of about fifteen pages, the *Presentment to the Grand Juries*, produced some months earlier in the same year. No one except Dr. Neilson, who

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affirmed that he had it in his possession, has ever seen a copy of this *Presentment*, and for this reason it is supposed by some people to be a myth, but we do not believe that anyone who has had the advantage of examining the papers of Brown and Gilmore could doubt its existence.

Although deprived of its first place in order of publication, however, the *Catéchisme du diocèse de Sens* is none the less entitled to our veneration, because it is still the earliest printed work which may properly be honoured with the name of book. And it is perhaps worthy of remark that out of an unusually large pull of 2000 copies, indicated in the account book of Brown and Gilmore, only five or six copies appear to be in existence to-day.

Amongst the famous or otherwise important works also produced by the partners Brown and Gilmore, we must mention a rare impression of *the Stamp Act*, made in 1766, which is practically unknown to bibliographers; the *Nehiro-Iriniui*, published in 1767, in the Montagnais language by the legendary Father Labrosse; the *Ordinances* of 1767, a publication of 81 pages in folio, the excellent typography of which is a credit to the primitive Quebec workshop; and finally, in 1767, also, *The Trial of Daniel Disney*, which relates to the celebrated Walker affair and which, for that reason, possesses considerable historical interest as well as its bibliographical value. We will not speak here of the *Psautiers*, *Neuwaines*,

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and other books of piety for which Brown and Gilmore received orders, from time to time, from the different booksellers of the capital.

Thomas Gilmore died in 1772. Whilst his death must have caused the survivor, Brown a certain amount of embarrassment, it must also have been a relief for him from another standpoint, for contemporary documents show that the deceased, living in an age of hard drinking, had contracted the habit of intemperance which increased until he finally became a burden. However that may be, Brown continued to work in association with Gilmore's heirs for some time, but soon set on foot proceedings to dissolve the partnership. This was not completed until in 1774. From that time on until his own death, fifteen years later, Brown continued to manage his workshop singlehanded, with so much success that when he was removed by death, he was able to bequeath to his heirs the sum of £15,000, a considerable amount of money for that period, and especially for a printer.

Of the works produced by Brown in this latter part of his career, we will mention only on account of their particular interest, the three legal *Traité*s of the Jurist Cugnet, published in 1775; the *Ordinances* of 1777, which should have been followed by those of 1780 and 1786; *The Order for the morning prayer*, the first book published in the Iroquois

ALMANACH  
DE  
QUEBEC,  
POUR  
L'Année Biffextile  
M,DCC,LXXX.

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A Q U E B E C :  
Chez GUILLAUME BROWN, à la Haute-ville  
Dèriere l'Eglise Cathédrale.

The rare first issue of the *Quebec or  
Neilson Almanack*

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language by Daniel Claus in 1780; the *Psautier* of 1782, which is noteworthy because of the little woodcuts which are believed to be the first executed in Canada; and finally the celebrated *Direction pour la guérison du Mal de la Baie St-Paul*, prepared by the surgeon Badelard.

But amongst all the initiative work which we can place to the credit of William Brown, there is perhaps none upon which we may congratulate ourselves more highly than the treasure he bequeathed to us in the invaluable collection of the *Almanacks of Quebec*. The first of these precious little books, which appeared in 1780, gave little indication of the heights to which the following issues would rise. The series was carried on from 1780 to 1841 with the exception of three breaks, in the years 1789, 1790 and 1793, and possibly a fourth, if we count also the year 1786, concerning which there is still some mystery. The collection constitutes a veritable mine of information which no Canadian historian can afford to neglect.

When Fleury-Mesplet established the first printing shop in Montreal in 1776—an establishment which we can here only mention in passing, reserving for a later chapter the history of its extremely productive career—William Brown had no great cause to be alarmed because in spite of the energy of the newcomer, the competition which he had to meet was

nullified by the distance separating them. It was not until a few months before his death that he saw his own neighbourhood of Quebec invaded by a rival, whom he himself was not left to distinguish as either dangerous or harmless. We refer to William Moore, who set up in Quebec a more or less imposing workshop under the name of the Nouvelle Imprimerie, and began, on the 24th November, 1788, the simultaneous publication of two newspapers, one French, *Le Courrier de Québec ou Héraut français*, and the other English, *The Quebec Herald and Universal Miscellany*. The first, which was really only a translation of the second, only ran into three numbers and had to be discontinued, there not being enough subscribers to defray the cost of the paper. With a perseverance worthy of a better cause, however, Moore continued to publish his English edition, *The Quebec Herald*. Up to what date it continued to appear, we do not know. Some say it ran until 1794, but that does not appear to us to be probable, because on the 4th June, 1793, all Moore's effects were seized for non-payment of rent, and that was probably the end of his hazardous undertaking. Up to the present time, only copies of *The Quebec Herald* covering a period of two years have been traced, viz: from the 24th November, 1788, to the 18th November, 1790. From November, 1789, to November, 1790, the newspaper even appeared twice weekly, on Monday and on Thursday, under the changed name of *Quebec*

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*Herald Miscellany and Advertiser*, and because all the issues of the Mondays, on the one hand, and of the Thursdays, on the other, have been found separately bound up, and arranged in order with only one copy of each issue, many people have erroneously concluded that they were two distinct publications.

Moore left but a few other works besides his newspaper, but practically all of these are of real value. Thus in 1791, for example, he published *The Paper read at the bar of the House, by Mr. Lymburner*, the French text of which the editor Neilson issued in the same year. Moore's production is remarkable in that it might have inaugurated a series in the manner of Hansard, but it was followed by only one later number, published in the same year and reproducing the text of the Constitution of 1791.

Moore also produced, in 1790 and in 1791, the two first *Directories* of the city of Quebec, the author of which was his father - in - law, Hugh Mackay, and these are of so much documentary importance that we cannot regret too keenly their excessive rarity.

The last work issued from his presses, so far as our knowledge goes, is an *Almanack* for 1792, which is excellently printed, and which would undoubtedly have proved a serious competitor for Neilson's if its author had possessed the necessary means to follow it up. But it is evident that Moore was already at the end of his resources, and it was probably only a short

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time after that supreme effort that he was obliged to leave the neighbourhood, and set out for some destination which is still unknown. Although he lived poorly and paid for his workshop, a miserable garret, the sum of only \$6.00 a year (we have the receipt signed in his own hand) he had never been able to make ends meet, and his career at Quebec came to a melancholy conclusion in the clutches of the bailiffs.

During this period, Samuel Neilson had come from Scotland to collect the inheritance of William Brown, his maternal uncle and in spite of the difficult competition which he met with from the needy Moore, he continued to carry on successfully the workshop which he had found already solidly established. Providence, unfortunately, permitted him but a short career. About 1793, he was carried off prematurely in the prime of his life. He had only time to publish in his own name a few works, amongst which, however, we must mention *The Copy of the letter of the Bishop of Capsa*, in 1790, and *The Ancient French Archives*, in 1791. He it was, also, who launched the first periodical review known in Canada, in 1792, under the title of *Quebec Magazine*. This publication, which perhaps was in advance of its time and which had to be discontinued in July, 1794, contained what we believe to be the first steel engravings executed in Canada, the work of J. G. Hockstetter.

Samuel Neilson, when he died in 1793, left

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as his heir his brother, John; but as the latter was then only 17 years of age, he could only carry on his affairs under the supervision of his tutor, the Rev. Alexander Spark. The young printer, however, was able to turn to advantage this period of waiting, and when he formally took up the reins of management at his majority, in 1796, he was already extremely well prepared for the task that awaited him. Doubtless it is unnecessary to repeat here the already well-known history of John Neilson, in his day one of the men most highly appreciated for his talent and his integrity; one of those, moreover, who in a particularly troubled epoch of our history, played a most important and a most honourable part, both in his newspaper and in the deliberative assemblies. But although it can never be entirely forgotten that he was a printer, it is nevertheless a fact that he is becoming more and more regarded principally as a statesman. The official biographer who will some day undertake to set down the story of John Neilson, will not present a true portrait unless he devotes equal attention to exhibiting in him, by the side of the great citizen, the great printer. John Neilson was one of those who loved their art most fervently and have honoured it most highly. His workshop on the Cote de la Montagne was indeed the centre of printing in Canada for half a century, and amongst the numerous printers whom he saw establish themselves successively around him in Quebec, in Montreal,



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and even in Upper Canada, there was not one, as his voluminous correspondence leads one to believe, who was not in some way his debtor, and who had not occasion to apply to him for some kind of support, either material or moral.

As to the typographical productions of John Neilson during his long career, we cannot here enumerate even the more important. They are far too numerous, beginning with the first *Journal* of our Legislative Assembly in 1793, and continuing to the *Sketch of Business before the Provincial Parliament of 1826*, and to attempt a list would be to transform this brief historical sketch into a catalogue. It must suffice for us to say that they cover all subjects: religion, literature, politics and history; and that year after year they reveal in the master-worker who produced them a striving after perfection which was ever growing, and a professional conscience becoming always more refined.

There were other printers connected with the same pioneer period, who for various reasons have a right to our attention.

In a short history of the *Gazette de Québec*, issued by John Neilson in 1822, on the occasion of his difficulties with the new *Quebec Gazette by Authority* of Dr. Fisher, which had been prepared by Samuel Neilson in January, 1792, the latter recalls that in addition to himself there were at that time two other printers in Quebec.

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For a long time this reference of Samuel Neilson has puzzled bibliographers, for they had knowledge only of William Moore, who had been working at Quebec by the side of Samuel Neilson between 1790 and 1792. Who, then, could be this third printer, of whom all other traces outside this mention had been so completely lost? The mystery has not yet been solved. At one time we thought that it might be John Jones who, although actually he only appears upon the scene of action in August, 1794, with the publication of his bi-lingual newspaper, *The Times—Le cours du temps*, might really have opened his workshop some time previously. In the first issue of his paper, however, that of August 5, 1794, Jones announces himself as a newcomer, and mentions as recent events the arrival of his printing press and the opening of his workshop.

John Jones did not figure in the profession for very long, nor does his name appear in connection with any other publications. He does not appear to have produced anything at all outside *The Times*, and towards the middle of 1795 we find him already informing his readers that he has transferred all his rights in the newspaper and in his workshop, the Nouvelle Imprimerie, to William Vondenvelden, who was probably already associated with him.

Vondenvelden, who added to his professional work as a printer the office of Provincial Land-surveyor, continued to publish *The Times* for a while, but after struggling courageously until

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the 27th July, 1795, at which time he had completed the issue of his 52nd number, he was compelled to discontinue it. However this was not the termination of his activities as a printer. Between 1794 and 1798, the products of the Nouvelle Imprimerie were very numerous and some were ambitious, such as *The Laws of Canada*, in 1794.

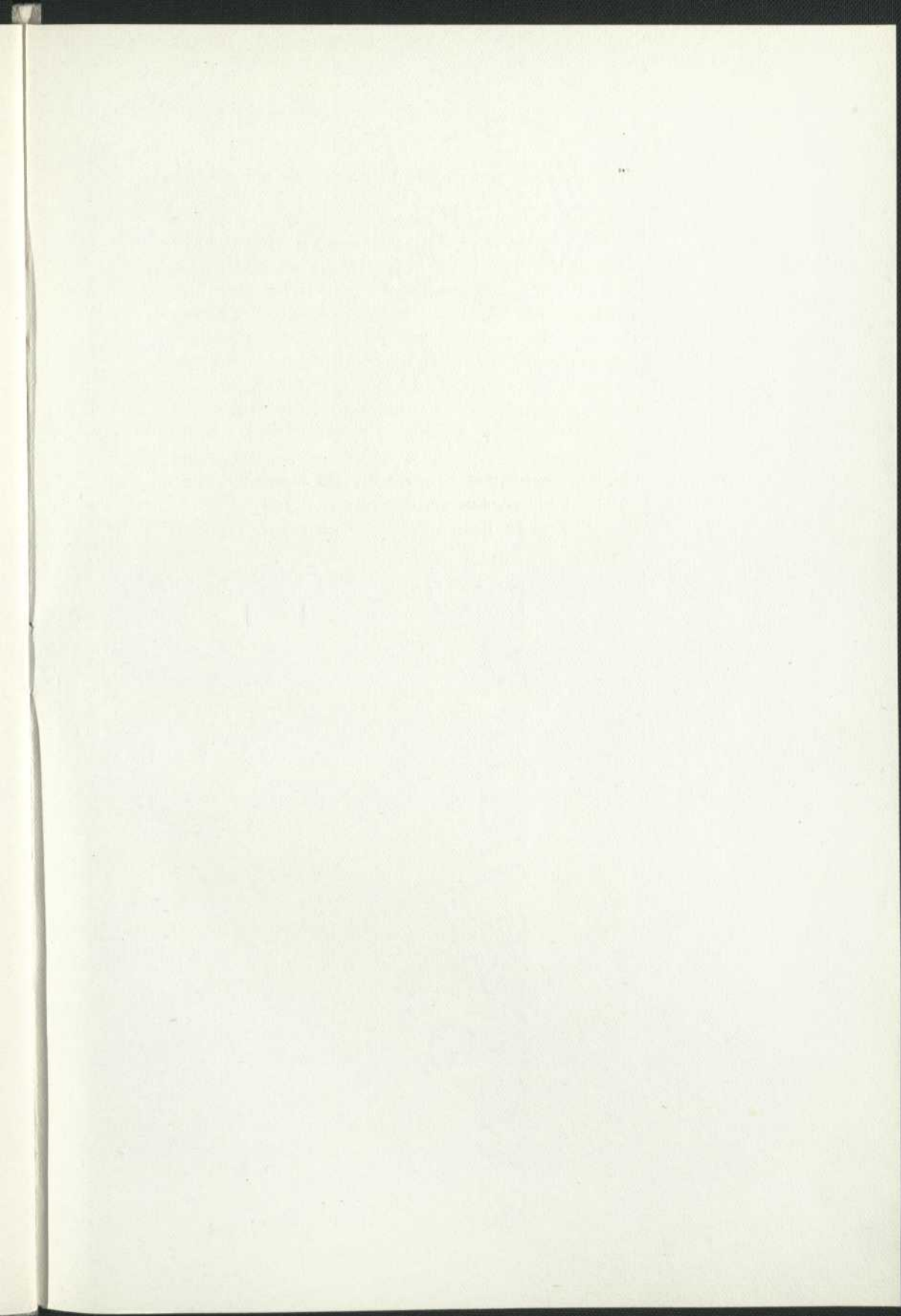
About 1798, and most probably in 1799, the Nouvelle Imprimerie again changed hands, and was transferred by William Vondenvelden to Pierre-Edouard Desbarats, originally French translator to the Legislative Assembly, who superseded John Neilson himself as King's Printer about the year 1800, and continued to hold that office until his death in 1827. In addition to publishing the laws of the Province, the Nouvelle Imprimerie, whilst operating under Desbarats, produced a large number of works the importance of which varied; of these it is sufficient here to mention the important *Collection des Edits et Ordonnances*, which appeared in 1803.

Some time in 1817, or in 1818, Desbarats appears to have transferred the Nouvelle Imprimerie to Thomas Cary, Junior, although he retained his position as the official printer of the King's laws. He had already been producing the *Quebec Mercury* for Thomas Carey, Senior, since 1805, which newspaper made violent warfare upon the *Canadien* of Bedard and Taschereau.

Much might be said of Lefrançois, of

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Laurent Bédard, of François Bélanger, and of Flavien Vallerand, who occupied a noteworthy place in the world of typography at the beginning of the 19th century; but with them we would enter upon an epoch which does not properly belong to this resumé. We are now approaching the period when the art of typography in the city of Champlain attained its most magnificent flowering with Augustin Côté, a master printer who would have done honour to any European centre, and, from this time on, we may unhesitatingly leave Quebec printing to follow its glorious destiny.



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