



History of the Book in Canada: Volume One: Beginnings to 1840

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In 1997, a team of historians, librarians, and literary scholars from across the country joined the growing number of researchers around the world studying print culture on a national scale and took up the task of producing a history for Canada. Volume one of the *History of the Book in Canada* – the first of three volumes in this collaborative project – examines the role of print in the political, religious, intellectual, and cultural life of the colonies that eventually became Canada.

This volume begins with Aboriginal peoples who maintained their stories and history both orally and in writing. When Europeans arrived, the printing press was not yet a century old, but once printing began in Halifax in 1752, it spread rapidly. Printers set up shops through the eastern provinces, in Quebec and Ontario, and by 1840, as far west as a mission near Lake Winnipeg. Their productions were largely utilitarian: newspapers, handbills, almanacs, textbooks, and works of religion and governance. Canada's early presses printed in French and English from 1752, Native languages from 1766, German starting in 1788, and Gaelic in 1835.

The burgeoning world of the book was made up of printers and apprentices, bookbinders, engravers, lithographers, papermakers, booksellers, peddlers, evangelists, librarians, and collectors. Importers trading with the United States and Europe supplied many of the books and periodicals favoured by readers in all regions. Although literary standards may have been set elsewhere, newspapers were ready to publish a local author's letter or verse and short-lived magazines persisted in fostering homegrown efforts. It was authors, printers, and readers who created literary cultures from the songs sung, tales told, and works written and read in early Canada.

Impressive in its scope and depth of scholarship, this first volume of the *History of the Book in Canada* is a landmark in the chronicle of writing, publishing, bookselling, and reading in Canada.

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal is publishing French-language editions of each volume as *Histoire du livre et de l'imprimé au Canada*.

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