

The Past and Present of Parliamentary Libraries

A Review Article: Russel L. Cope*

Patrick Gregory, *Speaking Volumes. The Victorian Parliamentary Library 1851-2001*. Melbourne, Victorian Parliamentary Library, 2001. xii, 180 pp. ISBN 076311 74054. Price: \$ 29.90 (plus \$6.50 postage. Available from Information Victoria)

Bulletin [de la] Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale [du Québec]: Special Issue [31(1-2), March 2002]. Devoted to the Second Centenary of the Library of the National Assembly. 38pp. ISSN 0701 6808.

Documentation et Bibliothèques: Special Issue [47(4), October-December 2001]. Devoted to Parliamentary Libraries, ed. by Gaston Bernier.

Quebec, Association pour l'Avancement des Sciences et des Techniques de la Documentation. 56pp. ISSN 0325 2340.

Parliamentary Library, Research and Information Services of Western Europe, edited by Jennifer Tanfield. Brussels and Strasbourg, European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation, 2000. 296 pp. Text in English and French. (copies available on application to the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation, Brussels).

The Parliamentary Libraries of the Nordic Countries and Other Information and Documentation Services in the Nordic Countries. Trelleborg, Sweden, Berlings Skog AB, 2000. 144 p. ISBN 91 85050 70 9.

Riksdagsbibliotheken 150 År 1851-2001. Edited by Margareta Brundin and Anders Norberg. Stockholm, Riksgadsbibliotheken, 2001. 285 pp.

Az Országgyűlési Könyvtár Története 1870-1995, by Jónás Károly and Veredy Katalin. Budapest, Oktav Press, 1995. ISBN 963 03 3968 4.

Is it not ironical that parliamentary libraries and their history are now receiving far more notice than ever before, exactly at a time when the Internet is seen by some observers as making them less important? The 1999 Hansard Society publication, *Parliament in the Age of the Internet*, an excellent compilation of essays on a range of aspects of parliamentary use of the Internet, is instructive in this respect.¹ One of the intriguing contributions in this compilation deals with the emerging Scottish

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¹ *Parliament in the Age of the Internet*. Edited by Stephen Coleman, John Taylor and Wim van de Donk. London, Oxford UP in association with The Hansard Society, 1999. ISBN 019 922422 6 (Paperback).

Parliament and the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to create an entirely novel form of parliamentary democracy in the British Isles.² An array of suggestions and possibilities is explored, but there is almost no mention of what role a parliamentary library might be called on to play in facilitating information and educational support for the new goals. This is curious since the House of Commons Library is already making significant contributions in this area. Moreover, parliamentary libraries can potentially make even richer contributions where there is the requisite imagination and drive to make this happen. Those qualities have been abundant in the past: is there any lack of them at present?

The Australian contribution to this same compilation by Kirsty Magarey ('The Internet and Australian Parliamentary Democracy') contains a useful overview of the position in the Commonwealth Parliament. What is, in the present context, noteworthy and even surprising, is how little reference is made to the part played for some time by the Australian Parliamentary Library as a trailbreaker in the introduction of ICT and how successfully that Library has used computers across the wide range of its information, research and library services. The marginalisation of parliamentary libraries in the discussion of such central issues as ICT for parliamentary use seems to have tangled roots, but one wonders whether the intellectual battle, as distinct from the institutional, political and public relations ones, where parliamentary libraries can rarely make any impact, has proved beyond their reach as well. This may well be too pessimistic a view to take when one considers the excellent intellectual material offered in the books reviewed below.

Setting the scene

Centenaries and anniversaries in parliamentary libraries are now coming thick and fast in Australia, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. This has prompted the Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Canada to organise what seems to be a 'first', a symposium on the history of parliamentary libraries. This is to take place in Quebec City in September 2002. The symposium will 'explore different aspects of the history of documentation and libraries in parliamentary life in Canada, the United States, and Europe, since the introduction of this type of library at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries'. Why, we might ask, is there no mention of Australasia? Perhaps when the Canadians see the work by Patrick Gregory they will realise that they have overlooked something significant

Parliaments are *par excellence* institutions in which history is of fundamental importance for defining their role in the life of the state which created them. A richer understanding of the nature of historical discourse is called for when we consider complex institutions such as parliaments. Their libraries clearly are part of

² 'The Scottish Parliament: [Re-]Shaping Parliamentary Democracy in the Information Age', by Colin F. Smith and Paul Gray, 67–79 in fn 1.

that history and have in some notable cases developed an identity which lends the library in question an interest in its own right. This is the case with the Library of Congress (LC), but it must be admitted this is also a very special case. There is, however, a certain parallel to LC in the creation of the Commonwealth (later Australian) Parliamentary Library. The legacy of history can be at times a troublesome burden for parliaments and their libraries. In the case of those of the Australian states, this is a factor that must be given due weight. The legacy of the past is in their case the ground bass that accompanies their development into modern times. Some of these points will occupy us further in the review of the publications listed above. We might add in anticipation of what follows that these publications are in most cases valuable records of institutional memory and are reminders of the larger values which parliamentary libraries can and do incorporate for the culture and self-understanding of their states and polities.

Three of the publications listed above might be said to set the scene for parliamentary libraries in contemporary times. They are the reference work compiled by Jennifer Tanfield, the guide to the parliamentary libraries of the Nordic countries, and the special issue of the French–Canadian journal *Documentation et Bibliothèques* devoted to parliamentary libraries in general.

Dealing first with the Nordic work, this publication (144 pp.) issued in 2000, deals with the parliamentary libraries and ancillary information and documentation services (for example, parliamentary archives) of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. A general introduction to the Nordic libraries is given by Margareta Brundin, the Parliamentary Librarian of the Swedish Parliament. She emphasises the strong links among these libraries whose co-operative arrangements stretch back to 1922. In the field of electronic information the Nordic legislative libraries have a common website called Parlex for information about foreign legislation in the Nordic countries (7). Each parliament is dealt with separately: basic information is given on matters such as the history of the library, details of its collections and services, its budget with a breakdown of heads of expenditure presented usually in pie-graph form and with coloured graphics. Details of the work of the parliamentary archives are also given. Each parliamentary building is represented by a sketch of its façade. Throughout there is emphasis on the use of automation and the importance of information networks embracing parliaments of the Scandinavian region. The information presented is necessarily brief but sufficient for a general orientation concerning the range of services and the nature of the organisation in each parliament. Photos (some in colour) of the library premises help the reader to gain an idea of facilities. This work, which is periodically updated, is an excellent introduction to the Nordic parliamentary libraries and would be a useful reference work for libraries catering for readers of all kind. The text is in fluent English and is easily assimilated by non-specialists.

Jennifer Tanfield has produced a substantial bi-lingual reference manual on the national parliamentary libraries of Western Europe. Eighteen countries (including the Nordic countries mentioned earlier, and Turkey) are included as well as three

international parliamentary assemblies in Western Europe. The work is divided into two sections: first the English section (1–140) and then the French section (141–295). This work updates a similar compilation issued in 1990. Entries for each section (A–J) incorporate data about history, administration, staff and organisation, electronic, research and other services, publications, parliamentary archives and other parliamentary information services. The Editor's Introduction mentions an Inter-Parliamentary Union survey of 1998 which led to production of *Guidelines for the content and structure of parliamentary Websites*. It is interesting to compare this Introduction with the monograph *Parliament in the Age of the Internet* already mentioned. The rate of change in the use of ICT means that reference publications are to a greater or lesser degree already out of date when they appear.

The long introduction to the 1990 edition by Dermot Englefield is reproduced in the 2000 edition. This text is still important and valid as an outline of the main issues concerning parliamentary libraries and their future. It still reads very well even given the numerous changes ICT has brought to the field. It is a significant text for marking the state of parliamentary librarianship as at 1990 and for its clarity in defining the range of needs parliamentary libraries seek to encompass. It is likely to be considered something of a 'classic text' by future writers on the history and role of parliamentary libraries.

The Tanfield guide is rich in detail, and is important for the spectrum of information provided in an easy assimilable form. The great diversity among parliamentary libraries emerges as one browses through the entries. This reflects the vagaries of their historical origins. But at the same time one sees a general convergence of identity among them when it comes to electronic services. This is equally true of other types of library where the computer has smoothed away the individual points of difference which often made the libraries interesting and noteworthy. Fortunately with the Western European parliamentary libraries we see a general regard for the traditions of history and a preservation of the older collections and features of these libraries.

The third publication falling into this broad category ('setting the scene') is devoted to parliamentary libraries in general, but with a North American emphasis. A collection of ten articles with an introduction by Gaston Bernier is published in French by the journal *Documentation et Bibliothèques*. Since this journal is apparently held in an incomplete form by only one library in Australia, it will be analysed in more detail than might normally be the case. Two articles were translated from English, one of them being an article from two officers of the Australian Parliamentary Library. The second translated article is by William H. Robinson, well known for his work at the Congressional Research Service in Washington, and for his numerous contributions to the literature of legislative research for parliamentarians. The Editor, Gaston Bernier, who retired as the Parliamentary Librarian of Quebec in 2000, has brought together an unusual range of topics on parliamentary libraries as well as some that are more traditional. This variety lends the whole issue a particular interest and reference value.

This reviewer found the article by Gilles Gallichan (*Les Parlements et leurs bibliothèques, ou les chemins documentaires de la démocratie*) particularly rewarding. The author traces in a panoramic fashion the rise of parliamentary libraries as a class. The influence of the French Revolution of 1789 is pivotal. In 1796 the Directory, that is, the French revolutionary government, set up a library for the use of the Chamber of Deputies, and the Senate set up a separate library in 1799 for its needs. Gallichan traces the evolution of the libraries for the French parliament, recording some valuable observations about the exchange of official publications between parliamentary libraries in France and other European countries. This is a topic that deserves a detailed study of its own, especially since parliamentary exchanges assumed a wide scope in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Official publications form a comparatively large proportion of the holdings of many research libraries and certainly the same is even truer of the collections of parliamentary libraries. Unfortunately official publications are prone to be undervalued as a category and the large amount of space they occupy is often begrudged them. New digitised formats offer here some alleviation. Exchange arrangements have a long and not altogether easily reviewed history as M. Gallichan points out and one hears reports that such long-standing arrangements are sadly in danger of lapsing for reasons which seem highly questionable.

Gallichan covers the history of parliamentary libraries in the New World in this same article, and in particular we are given an overview of the growth of the significant Library of the National Assembly of Quebec. Although relatively brief, this article by Gilles Gallichan will prove of use to historians for its text and its bibliography.

Other articles deal with management functions of parliamentary libraries (Richard Paré, head of the Canadian Federal Parliament's Library), parliamentary research services by Hugh Finsten, who uses the Canadian Federal Parliamentary Library as his principal example, a survey of the way the Canadian parliamentary libraries treat the important resource of press clippings (Daren Wierucki), and a contribution by Jocelyn Saint-Pierre on the responsibilities that parliamentary libraries have with regard to the conservation and diffusion of 'parliamentary memory'. The author writes about the role parliamentary libraries have as preservers of the 'patrimony' of their state or country. This article touches on issues which are not well enough represented in the literature on the role and future of parliamentary libraries. Australian parliamentary staffs will find much in his article to ponder and develop further, although the Australian environment is somewhat different and less easily adapted to generalisation.

Rénald Buteau's article arouses interest because the author spent some time working on a staff exchange arrangement in the Australian Parliamentary Library in Canberra. He compares the indexing operations in place in Canberra and at the Parliamentary Libraries at Quebec and Ottawa. The author has used information from a questionnaire he circulated as well as from his personal observations. He makes a strong case for the continuing importance still of the human indexer, even

though automated forms of indexing are recognised as useful adjuncts in the information-finding process. The human indexer is able to bring skills, which are better suited at present to locating precise information rather than quantities of variable value, which automated indexing produces. Buteau also points out the indexing challenges arising from a growing information world of metadata (pictures, sound etc added to text).

Jean-Antoine Milogo from the PARDOC program of the Assembly of Francophone Parliamentarians, writes about the work of parliamentary libraries in developing countries. His article deals, however, only with parliamentary libraries in Africa and Asia. His article contains information about the activities and objectives of the Francophone intergovernmental organisation and the eight parliaments comprising the Parliamentary Assembly of Francophonía. Much effort is being devoted to providing these parliaments and their libraries with Internet access and home websites. Access to information, particularly to primary documents, remains a problem. Members of parliament must be linked increasingly to information at the local, national and international level. The creation of networks among these libraries will accelerate their mutual objectives. Milogo explains these issues briefly but with references to publications in French which would be valuable for scholars seeking greater detail.

Two of the articles translated from English for this issue are worth separate comment. The first is by an author who has already contributed some fine pieces about the role and future of parliamentary libraries: William H. Robinson of the Congressional Research Service looks at library services and research in the 21st century. His article of 5 pages (with triple columns per page) is full of excellent observations made by a perceptive long-time practitioner and does not shirk the issue of the decline in the reputation of parliamentarians and of the parliamentary institution. He sees one of the keys to the continued success of parliamentary libraries in their positive services to facilitate the work of legislators and in facilitating the programs and objectives of legislatures on a broad but sophisticated level. Assistance to committees is specially singled out by him,

The second article is by two prominent officers of the Australian Parliamentary Library, Nola Adcock and Roslynn Membrey. Their topic concerns the use of technology in parliamentary libraries 'yesterday, to-day and to-morrow'. Since their Library and the Australian Parliament are now at the forefront in Australia of computer applications for a range of legislative needs, they are well placed to offer convincing arguments on this theme. They make the valid point that parliamentarians are now so dependent on the Internet and its information capacities that they need not so much the provision of information from their parliamentary library as good instruction and support from the library in their personal use of the Internet. How this will shape the work of parliamentary libraries in the coming century will be a matter keenly watched.

A final article calls for special comment. It is by the editor of this special issue and a leading identity in Canadian parliamentary librarianship: Gaston Bernier. He has chosen a subject which in the past has received far too little attention by authors on parliamentary libraries. His contribution is entitled: 'Parliamentary libraries: their collections from yesterday to to-morrow'. Nowadays, with the advent of digitisation, online publishing by parliaments themselves and the availability of reference works and serials on the Web and in newer electronic formats, librarians seem prone to discount or undervalue the printed collections they hold and give them less regard than they warrant.

The historical factors which surround the origin and growth of a number of parliamentary libraries have led to some of them acquiring over lengthy periods considerable collections of materials of great cultural, historical and social depth, but not of particularly high usage by contemporary parliamentarians. These collections, especially in countries with a colonial past such as Australia, where the parliamentary libraries were actually the best libraries in their regions for some period, represent a mirror of colonial history and culture. In this respect they have acquired heritage importance transcending their importance within a parliamentary library. However, because of other circumstances parliaments may be unaware or unheeding of this legacy under their charge. Even worse and profoundly to be regretted, is the destruction (whether by sale or other means) of the integrity of this precious asset. Indeed, publicly-owned library collections may in significant cases form part of the patrimony of a nation or state. Parliaments, at least in Australia, do not have an impeccable record as trustees of public assets in their charge. Perhaps Canada has a different history in this regard. The recent action of the House of Commons Library in London in making older publications available for display and consultation (on long-term loan) to the British Museum is an initiative which shows that other options, apart from wholesale discarding or sale, may be found in some countries.³

In his contribution Gaston Bernier points to the valuable historical work on the collections of the Parliament of Lower Canada carried out by Gilles Gallichan. The latter's study of the collection built up from 1802 to 1849 is an important pioneering analytical work which seems little known outside Canada. It is increasingly important that more factual work of this nature takes place amid the plethora of so many conflicting opinions and prejudices regarding the value of historical collections in parliamentary libraries. The printed catalogues of library holdings in the nineteenth century come into their own since they give so much data not easily obtained otherwise. Bernier neatly deals with the problem of how librarians view their collections and responsibilities as custodians by citing a statement from a report of a New Zealand Parliamentary Librarian: [while] 'the chief librarian of twenty years ago was glad to have such [that is, historically and culturally

³ Clark, Dora: *Whatever shall we do with all those old books? The King's Library Project*. 4 pp. [2002]

significant] material, the present chief librarian would be glad not to have it'.⁴ Against this appraisal of the past Gaston Bernier proceeds to offer a well-differentiated view of what the collections of the future should embrace in concert with a structured understanding of the complex roles of the parliamentary institution, the elected representatives and the professional responsibilities of the library managers. This is not a simple view and must, M. Bernier emphasises, change as political needs and personal factors dictate. There is obviously much more to this hitherto rather neglected aspect of parliamentary librarianship than can be dealt with in this review, but M. Bernier's article opens up the debate most usefully. He has obviously much more to contribute to it.

Celebrating the History of European Parliamentary Libraries

Two of the books celebrating the anniversaries of their parliamentary libraries are not in English. The first is in Swedish and the second is in Hungarian. The Swedish volume commemorates the sesquicentenary (1851–2001) of the Swedish Parliamentary Library (Riksdagsbiblioteket) in a handsome hardback with numerous photos and illustrations, many in colour. The various photos of the Library's premises give a good impression of a working library which preserves features of its historical origins whilst still being linked into the electronic age. Edited by Margareta Brundin whose name has already been mentioned, this work is divided into three sections: The Library and its collections (which include political cartoons), the Library and its premises, and the Library's services, ('The Library, yesterday, to-day and to-morrow'). Within these sections attention is given to a variety of aspects of the Library's premises and its architects, its range of services and the functions of its various departments, and finally speculations about the future development of the Library. Functions include the indexing of parliamentary publications, the organisation of the parliamentary archives and the creation of biographical files on parliamentarians.

The text combines an historical overview of the Library's evolution in response to the changing constitutional and political circumstances of Sweden (and to some extent Norway) and reference documentation on the staff of the Library (listing the names of officers since 1851 for example), and a very comprehensive bibliography of writings on the members of the Riksdag (194–285). This bibliography alone is of great research value to students of Swedish politics. In addition, there is a bibliography of writings relating to the library and its personnel (188–93). Initially, the Library evolved from the parliamentary archives, but it now embraces the parliamentary archives as one of its departments, and it also has an EU Information Centre with some 12 officers. The Library and its offshoots has a total staff of 87 and a collection of about 700,00 volumes.

⁴ The quote comes from P. Laundry's *Parliamentary Librarianship in the English-speaking World* (1980) at 13.

Like most national parliamentary libraries and an increasing number of state and sub-national parliamentary libraries, the Swedish Parliamentary Library has a full electronic service and its own Internet website. However, unlike Westminster-style parliamentary libraries, the Swedish Parliamentary Library offers its services to the public as well as the traditional parliamentary users. Its online catalogue can be freely consulted from outside the Library by the public. Because the Riksdagsbiblioteket was at one time the most comprehensive library available in Sweden and its resources were naturally sought by scholars and students, it offered services beyond its own parliamentary clientele. It is worth noting that the Greek Parliamentary Library with its collection of more than 1.2 million volumes, has similar features which are fully set out in the invaluable Tanfield guide.

Whilst this reviewer cannot read Swedish, his knowledge of German enables him to get a limited insight into the contents. He is able to appreciate that there is much more to the Swedish Parliamentary Library than he can convey. It is a pity that the Editor did not include some summary pages in an international language, such as French, English or German so that the valuable material in this volume could be accessible, at least in outline, to a larger readership. Despite these limitations most national parliamentary libraries would find this work worth acquiring if only for the numerous photos. The Tanfield reference work already mentioned would supplement the Swedish text very adequately.

The second work is in Hungarian, a language well outside the reviewer's competence. It deals with the period 1870–1995. Fortunately, however, the Editors, Drs Jónás Károly and Veredy Katalin, have provided (481–92) an English abridge of salient points in the text. This is a handsome hardback in large format with a number of reproductions in black and white of photos of parliamentary dignitaries and parliamentary librarians, copies of important documents (including relations with the European Union). There are also several coloured photos of the Library's interior. These photos show a rather crowded library that seems fairly restricted in its stock and equipment. Since the Tanfield guide does not include Hungary, it is not easy to check for details

Celebrating the History of the Parliamentary Library of Quebec

The Parliamentary Library of Quebec was founded in 1802 'during a brief period of peace between France and England' (Gilles Gallichan), and was originally known as the Library of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada. Its foundation came a year after the foundation of the Library of Congress in Washington. Quebec thus can claim one of the world's oldest parliamentary libraries with a continuous history in the Westminster system of parliamentary government. Its bicentenary is commemorated in a handsome issue of the *Bulletin [de la] Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale [du Québec]*. On the cover of the special bicentenary issue of the *Bulletin* is a large colour reproduction of the art-nouveau stained glass window that is one of the features of the Library's premises. This window depicts an

allegorical scene of a woman carry a container of water from a waterfall. This scene represents the Library's motto: *Je puise mais n'épuise* (I draw but do not exhaust). This refers to the drawing of water from the never-ending flow of the waterfall, that is, of information and books contained within the Library which do not exhaust their value or contents because of this use. A very striking and apt motto for any parliamentary library. The article by Ginette Laroche (36–38) explains the origin of this motto and how the window came to be commissioned and installed.

There are six articles and an introductory tribute to the Library by the current secretary-general of the Legislature, François Côté, in this issue of 38 pages. A brief mention of each contribution will give an idea of how this special number commemorates this signal event in the history of the Quebec Parliamentary Library. The first article to be mentioned, although not the first in the issue, is that by Clément LeBel on the cataloguing and classification systems used from 1802 until contemporary times. This article is mentioned first because so little attention is generally paid to the historical 'bibliothecal' elements in parliamentary librarianship and because knowledge of techniques and procedures from earlier eras has almost become the domain of archaeologists!

The LeBel article (in double columns, 25–31) traces the history of the printed catalogues issued since 1802 until 1933 when the collection had 170 000 volumes. Printed catalogues were given to the parliamentarians for their personal use, a system that was also followed in at least some Australian parliamentary libraries. Access to a card catalogue was at first for library staff use, but later for use by all library clients. Libraries of earlier eras generally followed a policy of restricting catalogue consultation to its own staff. In much the same way access to collections was also limited to the library staff. From 1998 the Library's catalogue has been online and available over the Internet. A brief indication of changes in printed catalogue practice in the nineteenth century (27–28) would not seem to be very different from what was the general practice at that period in other printed catalogues. Fundamental changes in cataloguing came from 1932 when 'the first catalogue to be published in almost thirty years, and the last to appear' (28) began to be issued. Only two parts appeared and it seems were not distributed to users (*ibid*). The reviewer was strongly reminded of the history of the printed catalogue of the NSW Parliamentary Library which appeared into the 1950s, but suffered similar vagaries.

The discussion about classification procedures used in the Library may be of little interest to laymen, but does reflect major concerns of librarianship up to the advent of the computer. The Library introduced the Dewey Decimal Classification in the early 1930s at the behest of the Speaker of the time, T-D Bouchard. This important parliamentary figure seems to have taken a strong personal interest in the role of the Parliamentary Library. His thinking seems by all indications to have been in advance of that of the Library staff. When the Library wished to develop co-operative cataloguing procedures with other Canadian libraries, it was found that most of these used the Library of Congress classification, but a report on the need

for change opted for the maintenance of the status quo (31). At present Dewey is used for monographs and other special classifications used for particular groups such as official Quebec publications, and the like. LeBel concludes his article by pointing to the possibilities now within reach by use of the computer. Metadata and other online tools can realise objectives which traditional cataloguing and classification did not have within their grasp, even though the old systems and the new both saw the need to unlock the contents of publications and to assemble them in a way that assisted location and retrieval.

Gilles Gallichan writes about the ‘two centuries in the service of the members of Parliament’ (5–8), Gaston Bernier (9–15) traces staff changes and services at fixed points in the Library’s history, the years 1812, 1862, 1912, 1962 and 2001–02. He reviews the Library’s budget at these points although the 1812 period does not have the necessary information because the Library was not yet fully functioning as an entity. Likewise, when he reviews the growth of the staff establishment (1900: 4 persons; 2000: 67 persons), he compares these numbers with the staff establishment of the Legislative Assembly. The first woman was employed by the Library in 1921; by 2000 women formed the majority of the Library staff, but men still generally remained the heads of the various library sections. The employment of university graduates and staff with professional library qualifications is also reviewed. He touches on the delicate question of political influence in staff placement and even on the question of ‘phantom staff’, that is, of persons paid as being on the staff but not actually working there. With regard to the future developments in staffing numbers and arrangements, M. Bernier is cautious in making forecasts, but repeats the expectation that members will themselves become more autonomous in their information searches and may look to the Library to be ‘mediators’ in their search techniques as much as (or rather than) providers of the actual information sought.

The article by Jocelyn Saint-Pierre (16–24) surveys the varying accommodation of the Library over its long history. The author notes that his account is likely to cause misgivings because the Library’s accommodation has been dogged constantly by difficulties and inadequacies throughout its history. This is, it seems, rather the common lot of this type of library if one may generalise from the experience of Australian state parliamentary libraries. The article provides photos of various Library rooms, the earliest being from 1910. Saint-Pierre is of the opinion that the present Library quarters in the Pamphile-LeMay building are adequate for staff and users and for a part of the collection. But many other Library functions and collections are still dispersed over five different buildings. In concluding his article, he states his belief that new quarters, not necessarily within the parliamentary building but within easy reach of it, could be a viable solution to accommodation problems. M. Saint-Pierre thus touches on a problem common to a number of parliamentary libraries: the long-cherished dogma that the Library should be close to the chambers. This belief is no longer as justified as it may have been in earlier times. Online access to information, email for ready communication and other

technical aids have altered perceptions and working needs. Of course political needs change over time, members vary greatly in their working habits and the dynamics of party politics cannot be easily defined in advance. All this has long been recognised and indicates why ironclad solutions to even such relatively low-key considerations (in the whole parliamentary and political context) as library services to a legislature are still elusive.

A discussion of the publications of the Library 1970–2002 is contained in the article by Yvon Thériault (32–35). The author briefly traces the history of publishing by the Library, but believes that from 1970, the time when Jacques Prémont took over, publishing on a consistent basis and especially aligned to the information and research needs of the users began to flourish. The series ‘Bibliography and Documentation’ is mentioned as one of the primary publications issued by the Quebec Parliamentary Library. Australian parliamentary librarians will be reminded of very similar publishing trends here which began at much the same time. Several important publications have been prepared by academics on behalf of the Library. One which would be useful in research libraries is *Dictionnaire des parlementaires du Québec 1792–1992* (compiled by Professor Pierre Drouilly and published by the Laval University Press, 1993). Another historically oriented work is a compilation of press reports of parliamentary debates in the nineteenth century before Hansard existed in Quebec. These works are sponsored by the Library, but are compiled by various academics. These are only some of the publishing output of the Library, which has been steadily active over a period of decades to the obvious benefit of the Parliament and of scholarship. The survey by Yvon Thériault, though brief, conveys the importance and extent of this Library activity. Its permanent value cannot be doubted.

This special issue of the *Bulletin* is a worthy commemoration of a Library with a rich history and a sound record of achievement. It also indicates that a full historical monograph on the history and place of the francophone Quebec Parliamentary Library in the social, cultural and political life of Quebec and in the world of the largely English-speaking Westminster system of parliamentary government would be a rewarding if daunting subject to undertake. It is worth remarking that this journal is regrettably not listed as held by any library contributing in Australia to the National Bibliographical Database. Since the issue being reviewed is vol. 31, nos. 1–2, the *Bulletin* has obviously a respectable history and might be supposed to be a valuable source of information and history. To judge by this one issue, the journal is impressively produced, well illustrated, and of a high, professional content. The special issue is certainly worth possessing.

Celebrating the History of the Parliamentary Library of Victoria

The review of Patrick Gregory’s *Speaking Volumes: The Victorian Parliamentary Library 1851–2001* has been placed last so as to reward the readers’ patience by offering them a treat at the end. This work is, firstly, an admirable piece of book

production, superior to what we normally encounter in parliamentary publications. Those responsible for the design, typography and illustrations have done an excellent job. A handsome volume is the result and the book is a pleasure to take in hand. But even more so, secondly, it is a pleasure to read. It is written in a style that makes the reader wonder whether the author, who is an officer of the Library, has not a promising vocation as a professional writer. And thirdly, it shows real skill in dealing with complex, sometimes controversial topics, bringing out the substance without neglecting subordinate strands. The result commands respect.

The Victorian Parliamentary Library, founded in 1851, completed its sesquicentenary in 2001, marking the occasion by launching in September 2001 the work under review. The Hon. Bruce Chamberlain, President of the Legislative Council officially did the launching at a function attended by a number of distinguished present and former parliamentarians, library staff and friends of the Library. This reviewer was privileged to be present and must 'declare an interest' in the book since he saw it in draft form, and made some minor comments. His name occurs in the text when discussion mentions a report commissioned from him by the Joint Library Committee in 1988. Having made this connexion clear, the reviewer has no reluctance in fully endorsing the publication and in describing it as a convincing piece of historical research and as the outstanding history of any Australian parliamentary library to date.

Following the traditional chronological arrangement of institutional histories, this work consists of four well-articulated chapters and 8 appendices. The latter give the usual details of Library Committee membership, lists of Parliamentary Librarians, and statistics of staff growth and budget. Appendix 4 is unusual and very valuable: it gives an analysis of the composition of the monograph collection in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It shows, for instance, the percentage of the collection in broad subject areas (Geography and Travels, Government and Politics, etc). It is worth noting in passing that 'Theology' had a heading to itself in the nineteenth century, whereas the appropriate term has become 'Philosophy and Theology' in the twentieth century. This change in terminology already tells a story. In 1980 this category comprised 1% of the holdings but in 1865 theology represented 4% of the holdings, the highest point recorded for it in this Appendix. Information such as this may not excite the common run of readers, but to those with a concern with the history of the book in Australia and the growth of colonial culture, these are important facts, which open up new and welcome perspectives.

The narrative flows easily throughout and it is obvious that the author brings a lively intelligence to his material. He draws good pen portraits of people (there is ample material on curiosities of behaviour in the nineteenth century), and comments on personal idiosyncrasies when this is called for. He certainly does not avoid some of the controversial episodes in the Library's history, but he shows admirable balance in dealing, for instance, with the career of Arthur Wadsworth, the Librarian who left the Victorian Parliamentary Library to become the first Librarian of the then Commonwealth Parliamentary Library. Wadsworth has been severely dealt

with in the history (1989) of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library by Andrew and Margaret Osborn. So extreme is their treatment that the charge of bias against the authors seems sustainable. Gregory's text is tactful and judicious on this matter. Through his tone and even-handed treatment Gregory wins the reader's confidence in his soundness of judgment.

Gregory's text is enhanced by many quotes from the Library's correspondence and internal records, official reports and, of course, the Library's own annual reports. Like other Australian parliamentary libraries, the Victorian Parliamentary Library has had its share of 'reviews' into staffing and management. The discussion of the 1928 Pitt Report into the Library's staffing falls into the pattern of similar reviews carried out by State Library authorities over the decades in more than one parliamentary library. Ernest Pitt, the then head of the Public Library of Victoria, upset the Library with his criticism of its cataloguing arrears; he thought his own Library should step in and remedy the position. This episode gives us a glimpse into the often shaky relations between State and parliamentary libraries in Australia: there is a long and rather sterile history of suspicion and even on occasions jealousy between the two institutions in more than one state. Pitt teamed up in 1934 with the prominent American librarian Ralph Munn to produce a report on Australian libraries generally. This influential report referred to parliamentary libraries as a class: they 'comprise the most favoured group in Australia'. Comparing them with the US legislative libraries, the report was critical of the parliamentary libraries. Gregory concludes:

It is not surprising that the Library fared badly in the Munn-Pitt report. It was, after all, an inquiry into the country's library services as a whole at a time when they had fallen into serious neglect . . . Thus the run-down nature of the Victorian Parliamentary Library was far from unique, and it actually fared better at the hands of Munn and Pitt than its interstate counterparts. (100)

Gregory's analysis of this malaise with parliamentary libraries in the 1930s is a good assessment of the position which lasted until the 1950s or even beyond. He does not, for obvious reasons, extend his analysis to a consideration of the administration of the parliament as a whole where a similar 'torpor' might be detected. The Victorian Parliamentary Librarian of the time, Eric Frazer, made a spirited response to the Munn-Pitt report, but it is not difficult to see that there were real questions now being posed about the rationale of parliamentary libraries and, indirectly, about the ability of parliaments to tackle the fundamental issues that arose from having large, culturally and historically important collections under the parliament's direct control. Gregory neatly sums up the reality:

But whilst the Parliamentary Library could have been considered a standard bearer for Victorian library services in the previous century, the truth is that the time had long since passed when it could make any such claim for pre-eminence. (102)

The pages he devotes to these matters document important historical strands, since so much that later occurred had their origin in the issues raised in the Munn–Pitt report. The later McColvin Report (*Public Libraries in Australia*, 1947) added further fuel to the fire by suggesting that governments should consider ‘integrating’ their state and parliamentary libraries. The polemics this report led to, involving in particular H. L. McLoskey, the NSW Parliamentary Librarian and Eric Frazer, are fully dealt with. The spirit of the times is well evoked by Gregory in this episode.

Chapter 4 (*From Collection to Information Service, 1965–2001*) moves from the troubled period when the Library suffered loss of Parliamentary Librarian Perry through premature death, continued to receive inadequate financial support and confronted awful accommodation problems, to the era when improvements became a reality and not an aspiration. The forces which made this at last possible are traced by Gregory who points to the changing climate of opinion about the role of the state parliamentary libraries. This change, advocated by the Parliamentary Librarians as well as by a core of interested parliamentarians, was mirrored also in the strong emergence of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, with a separate, independent identity after its splitting from the now National Library of Australia in 1960. All these factors promoted possibilities which were inconceivable in earlier years. The text clearly follows the huge changes in the Library’s direction, its development as a pioneer within the Victorian Parliament of significant computer online services, its increasing profile within the parliamentary organisation, its strengthening of staff expertise and its strong outreach activities to its primary users within the Parliament and in the electorate offices throughout Victoria. That there was some pain involved in these changes is made clear, but the impetus towards a new style of library services was not blocked. One of the major pains has been the culling of the collection, which was once the Library’s glory. Since the Parliament was unwilling or unable to solve the accommodation problems, which still seemingly beset the Victorian Parliament, there was little choice left to the Library in the matter. But once those painful choices had been made, the story is one of success and rewarded effort.

The growth of stronger links between the parliamentary libraries throughout Australia is another important factor in helping these libraries as a group consolidate their identity, offer mutual support and encouragement, and exchange ideas. Amongst these ideas was the suggestion of a computer-based network of the parliamentary libraries. This idea proved beyond their reach, but the discussions that accompanied it sharpened perceptions and contributed to other developments. These pages are an excellent survey of a very crowded period of initiative and progress in which the Victorian Parliamentary Library and its Parliamentary Librarians, Josephine McGovern and later Bruce Davidson, made strong personal contributions. The History ends on a strong positive note, which is fully deserved, emphasising the Library’s greatly enhanced capacity of carry out a variety of online services. The image of the Victorian Parliamentary Library as an innovator in service provision, with still a relatively modest staff establishment, shows the commitment of its staff in an unmistakable manner.

Patrick Gregory has produced a work that this reviewer found convincing, thorough and very readable. There are in addition some colourful episodes from the earlier days, which introduce 'drama' and occasional humour. Whilst there is also much in it relating to 'bibliothecal' questions that may have a limited appeal, the non-specialist reader would be rewarded by the vignettes of parliamentary life and personalities (parliamentarians and library staffers), and the intimate light cast on their working environment. This work appeals to a far larger readership than the title might suggest.

It is highly recommended.

Conclusion

The range of material now available on parliamentary libraries is considerable, especially when we recall the amount in foreign languages. The German Bundestag Library has published online and now maintains in updated form its *World Directory of Parliamentary Libraries*, and its companion, two major reference works in this area.⁵ The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), with its very active section devoted to parliamentary and administrative libraries, has been noteworthy for the range of printing and online publishing (often in the form of conference papers) in several languages. The publication in 1980 of Philip Laundry's Library Association thesis, *Parliamentary Libraries in the English-Speaking World*, has, it seems, ushered in a flourishing era of further research and publication. We can now point to a small but significant number of publications that greatly deepen our knowledge and understanding of the genesis and development of parliamentary libraries. This in turn increases our understanding of their wider social and cultural importance. No one acquainted with their work needs to be convinced about their political and parliamentary importance. In other words, the historiography of parliamentary librarianship may be said to have come of age. The Gregory work reviewed above falls into this class.

To this reviewer's knowledge at least three major contributions to this type of historiography have occurred in the last decade. The work of Gilles Gallichan, which this reviewer has not yet seen, may belong to this list as well. Firstly, there is the truly remarkable volume on the history of the Reichstag Library and its predecessors by Gerhard Hahn.⁶ This comprehensive German work is an

⁵ See Bundestag Library website www.bundestag.de/datl/library.wd.htm for details of *World Directory of National Parliamentary Libraries*, and of *World Directory of Parliamentary Libraries of Federated States*.

⁶ This work is entitled *Die Reichstagsbibliothek zu Berlin—ein Spiegel deutscher Geschichte...* [The Library of the Reichstag at Berlin—A Mirror of German History]. (Published in 1997 by Die Kommission für Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien, Bonn). For a review of this work, see 'The Saga of the German Reichstag and its Library', by R.L. Cope in *Legislative Studies*, 13(1): 105–20 (Spring 1998).

authoritative contribution both to the history of the Reichstag Library from 1872 to 1945, but also to the study of the German polity and its principal parliamentary institution.

The second is the history by David Menhennet of the House of Commons Library in London.⁷ Now in its second edition, this work adds a new dimension to the writing on parliamentary libraries. These two works certainly go beyond what has been achieved in this field by earlier writers. The history by Patrick Gregory can take its place next to these two works. In the Australian context, Gregory's work is without rival and is in its own right an elegant piece of historical research.⁸ In addition, the Gregory work can stand comparison with major histories of parliamentary libraries abroad. Whilst the Hahn volume is by both size and breadth of research pre-eminent, the histories of David Menhennet and Patrick Gregory are indispensable and estimable contributions to a difficult field. These three scholars leave us deeply in their debt. They add an important dimension to the writing of institutional history, a field which is as difficult to tackle, as it is to do well. Patrick Gregory has succeeded on both counts.

What remains for Australian students of parliamentary libraries to research? The institutional histories and studies we possess cover the field well in most respects, but the wider context seems ripe for deeper analysis. The wider context refers, for example, to the parliamentary institution itself, the relationships between the departments which it comprises, the part played by interpersonal relations between Clerks, Parliamentary Librarians and Presiding Officers, and rivalries over status and professionalisation. The impact of technological change on the internal dynamics of the organisation is also awaiting exploration and the myths already building up around this topic need sober analysis. These are some of the topics which are still unclear, yet which may play a strong 'subterranean' role in the culture of parliamentary life. Some of these matters may not be generally part of the public record, but they are nevertheless real determinants on the operations of the institution as a bureaucratic organisation. The very few memoirs of parliamentary officers sometimes offer oblique illumination on the nature of parliamentary

⁷ David Menhennet, *The House of Commons Library: A History* (House of Commons Library Document No. 21 (2nd edn)). London, The Stationery Office, 2000. A review of the first edition, 1991 is contained in 'The Future of Parliaments and Their Libraries', by R.L. Cope in *Papers on Parliament* 20 (October 1993): 1–34, Canberra, The Department of the Senate, 1993.

⁸ The history of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library by Margaret and Andrew Osborn promised to be a major contribution to the field, but it is an idiosyncratic work with some serious flaws. This is greatly to be regretted since it will not be likely that a second work of this scope will appear in the foreseeable future. See *The Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, 1901–1927 and The Origins of the National Library of Australia*, by Andrew and Margaret Osborn (Canberra, Department of the Parliamentary Library in association with the National Library of Australia, 1989). A detailed review of this work by R.L. Cope was published in *Australian Academic and Research Libraries* in 1991: see vol. 22 (1991): 55–60.

organisational culture. Even to have a bibliography of such memoirs would be of assistance.

Looking again at the parliamentary libraries specifically, there remains the sensitive subject of whether parliaments in Australia should be collectors as such. In view of their sometimes lamentable record as guardians of the collections they have amassed at public expense, some observers at least may think the answer is clear.

Hahn, Gregory and Menhennet all give tantalising glimpses of these subjects, but since they are not their main theme, the glimpses must be brief. There is still much work to be done on parliamentary sociology. These estimable writers have eased the way for future researchers. They have awakened a deeper curiosity which leads beyond the libraries as simply providers of information and research for parliamentarians, for finally, we must ask: what questions do these writers raise, either by implication or directly, about the future of parliamentary libraries? To what extent can they hold on to their nineteenth century origins and yet be modern information and research services? Is all the talk about 'information' and its importance to political decision-making something of a shadow dance? Is it enough for them to be simply providers of information and research, even if of high quality, using the Internet and other technological tools? To attempt to answer those questions here opens up new themes which go beyond the scope of this review. But the questions are there ticking away. Perhaps the most one can say at present is that parliaments, so slow to tackle reform of themselves, are not likely to encourage the questioning that might be required. Researchers, however, need not be so restrained. The future of parliamentary libraries is still an unresolved area of research. ▲