

# Pressing the Word into the Wilderness

*Antiquarian bookseller STEPHEN LUNSFORD shares his findings from over three decades of research into nineteenth-century mission printing in British Columbia.*

THE DIFFUSION OF WESTERN RELIGIOUS values into North American First Nations cultures parallels the spread of printing across the continent. From John Eliot's sumptuous Natick Bible to James Evans's hand-moulded Cree syllabic fonts printed on bark, missionary-related printing has long been the object of intense collector interest, bibliographical scrutiny and scholarship. Little, however, has been done to sort out the introduction, spread, and extent of mission printing in British Columbia.

When I first came to British Columbia as a bookseller in 1977, my interest in pioneer printing and Indian languages led me to consult James Pilling's massive Indian language bibliography. Completed by 1900, it remains the best reference for the history of Indian-language printing enterprises and their virtually unobtainable imprints. Pilling had actually corresponded with many contemporary missionaries and linguists who printed in Indian languages, so his bibliography contained first-hand accounts by several B.C. missionaries of their printing activities. From this starting point I began what has turned into a 30-odd-year search for actual examples of these items.

Missionaries are the outreach arm of religions that believe in the duty of conversion. They attempt to teach those populations, whether domestic or foreign, viewed as lacking in, or just ignorant of, essential religious beliefs—namely those espoused by the missionaries' sponsors.

During the 18th-century exploration of the Pacific coast, in part motivated by the search for the Northwest Passage, new lands and new peoples never before exposed to Christianity were constantly being discovered. This field of opportunity for conversion drew the interest of various missionary societies throughout Europe. Although the Spanish explorers had priests aboard their vessels during this period, these priests made no

missionary establishments on the Northwest Coast.

The first known English-speaking missionary to arrive on the northwest coast of America, Jonathan Green, accompanied a fur trading expedition from Hawaii to the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1829. He didn't stay, but in his letters back home, encouraged the conversion of the many natives he encountered. By the 1830s several missionary enterprises that had already established missions in eastern



*From the collection of Glenn Woodsworth.*

North America began funding missions to the natives of the continent's west coast, principally into the Oregon Territory. At this time, the American and English missionaries to Hawaii had already begun printing works in the Hawaiian language; the Protestant missionaries in Oregon Country on the lower Columbia River were using a press (brought from Hawaii) to print primers in the Nez Perce language; and the long-established Catholic missions in the Spanish Southwest were printing grammars and scriptural translations in dozens of native languages.

## THE ADVANTAGES OF PRINTED WORKS

So why exactly was printing undertaken at the missions? The missionaries themselves realized that instructing their would-be converts in their native language was initially preferable to attempting to give English (or French or Spanish) lessons to people who were often nomadic or semi-nomadic. One day you might have students, the next day none. Also, the missionaries themselves were often itinerant, travelling over large circuits to preach to scattered groups of natives speaking many different languages. Given these conditions, a printing press provided several advantages.

First, written language was largely unknown in Aboriginal America. The concept of the word as an artifact, especially an artifact presented as a direct communication from a supernatural being, was one the native people found especially compelling, as many early explorers, merchants and missionaries discovered. Pieces of paper with words written or printed on them became vectors to attract potential converts as they changed hands from one native group to another. And the paper itself lent a permanence to the “holy word” that extended beyond the missionaries’ verbal reach. Even after the missionary was gone, either temporarily or permanently, the written word remained as a reminder or testament of the missionary’s message.

J.B. McCullagh, missionary at Aiyansh, on the northern B.C. coast, recalls, for instance:

One of our little boys meeting with some hunters from a distant tribe, taught them the rudiments of spelling in the vernacular, and gave them a few copies of our little *HaĠaĠa* [the mission newsletter]. These young men were very much taken with the idea of learning to read and write in their own language... About a year after this, not knowing what had been going on meanwhile, I was much astonished to receive letters from men of this tribe in rapid succession, stating their intention of coming to live at the mission.

Second, in the multi-denominational (and multilingual) world of the missionaries, the Bible and associated prayers, rituals and devotions weren’t just any old set of words.

The accuracy of various European-language versions of the Bible was the subject of heated debate; accepted texts or rites in fact marked the usually irreconcilable differences among Christian sects. When a missionary translated a text into a native language and printed it, he both established priority for his denomination among those native speakers and effectively trumped any competing denomination from “poaching” among his converts, given the reverence with which they held such printed artifacts.

As William Duncan, a missionary to northern B.C. in the 1860s to 1880s, remarked, “Translations into the vernacular will make it impossible for any false teachers to impose their errors on a people who can themselves read the words of the Great Teacher.” The dissemination of accepted stable native language religious texts made denominational influence remarkably permanent in many cases.

## A VALUABLE TOOL FOR TEACHING

On the Northwest Coast, particularly, the presence of the potlatch—a cultural ceremony marking, for instance, births, accomplishments and deaths—confounded the efforts of missionaries to “westernize” the natives. By translating, then printing, versions of Christian rituals to replace the potlatch, missionaries aimed both to strengthen their own denominational ties to the native populations and to provide a powerful and tangible alternative to this indigenous practice, which, by 1884, had been declared illegal at the urging of virtually all the missionaries.

It is worth mentioning that Chinook, a trade language in common use among natives and whites in the fur trade on the coast, was quickly discovered to have severe limitations when used for religious teaching. Chinook utilized a vocabulary of only a few hundred words, very few of which were “abstract,” and it had very few verb forms. For the purposes of Victorian missionaries, such as Bishop Hills of Victoria in 1860, colourful metaphorical phrases such as “Children of the Forest,” commonly used to refer to native people, when translated into Chinook came out roughly as “little people who live in the trees”—offensive to the native listeners indeed, since they were neither *little* nor did they live *among* trees or *in* them.

In a related way, as missions became established and sought to teach their charges subjects such as English, the missionaries found that standard teaching texts sent to them by their sponsor societies were often useless. As Duncan, again, noted, “We teach children to read and write in English but I am sorry to say the lessons furnished in primary reading books are generally very unsuitable for Indian children, having too much nonsense about cats owning tails and dogs being able to bark, and so forth; all such information appearing very ridiculous to the Indian aspirant when translated into his mother tongue.” Primers tailored to suit the native audience seemed to make a good deal of pedagogical sense.

#### LINGUISTIC AID AND “TOOL OF THE TRADE”

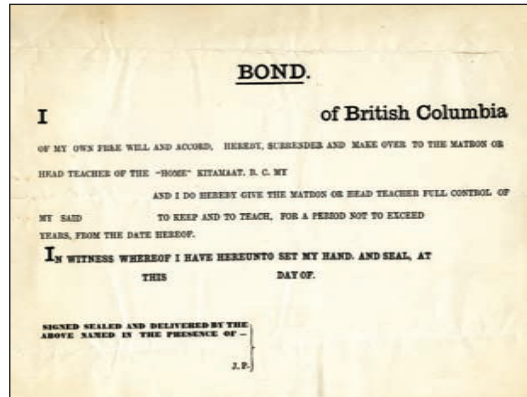
A consequence of the missionaries’ efforts to produce and print a written version of a native language was the development of two primary systems of orthography in printing. Since all Northwest Coast native languages used sounds not easily represented by the Roman alphabet, either that alphabet had to be modified, or the sounds had to be represented in some other way—phonetically by means of syllabics or stenography. Both methods employ symbols to represent single sound elements and could be combined to represent the sounds used in speaking the native tongue. As printing was introduced into the B.C. missions, all three techniques—modifying the Roman alphabet, representing sounds using syllabics, and stenography—were employed.

In addition, missionaries found that printing was a useful technical art to introduce among the native people themselves, both as a trade and as an aid to the learning of English or other European languages. Printing was a skill requiring concentration, discipline, manual dexterity, and a constant contact with written language.

These virtues were considered illustrative of white European culture and would, therefore, help the natives to become productive citizens.

Printing also provided for missionaries a means of contact with non-natives, too, in various ways. The press in Hawaii, for instance, began

producing not only texts for the missionaries and their charges, but also souvenirs for sailors and other visitors to the islands, thus increasing the financial viability of the mission. Printed newsletters became, for many missions, a means of direct fundraising by sales to the mission societies back in Europe or North America. They were



*Bond, Kitimaat Home. Courtesy of UBC Rare Books and Special Collections.*

also visible evidence of the missionaries’ work and the success of their efforts as they printed accounts of conversions or other civilizing activities—often written by the converts themselves.

The first permanent mission to the natives in British Columbia was established from missions in the Oregon Territory by the Catholic missionary (and later bishop) Modeste Demers, who accompanied Hudson’s Bay Company factor James Douglas to various forts in 1841 and by 1852 had begun preaching regularly at Fort Victoria. In 1856, an old printing press was sent from Belgium for Demers’ use, but this press is believed never to have been used by the mission. This rather large press may simply have been too cumbersome for the overworked Demers to deal with, and it was finally sold in 1858 for commercial printing after the beginning of the Fraser River gold rush.

The worldwide publicity generated by the Fraser River gold rush sparked something of a missionary rush also, as various denominations sought to stake claims both among their own adherents who arrived as gold-seekers and among the many natives who were suddenly faced with an onslaught of white cultural norms. Missionaries began to arrive in increasing numbers, generally following the miners and fur traders along the great watercourses that served as

highways, and which also flowed past traditional village sites of nearly every First Nations group. With these missionaries came lighter, smaller

and user-friendly printing presses that helped establish mission presses as significant elements in the early history of B.C. print culture.

#### 1878. ST. PAUL'S MISSION, LYTTON.

Although, as mentioned above, a press had been sent to the Catholic mission in Victoria as early as 1856, the first known extant mission imprint in British Columbia does not appear until 1878. That work, a 48-page pamphlet, *The Morning and Evening Prayer, and the Litany, with Prayers and Thanksgivings, Translated into the Nklakapamuk*

*Tongue, For the Use of the Indians of the St. Paul's Mission, Lytton, British Columbia*, was translated and printed by John Booth Good, missionary at Lytton and Yale. Good came to B.C. in the early 1860s; he began working with the Thompson First Nations at Yale and later established the mission at Lytton. He worked on and printed this translation himself on a press he kept at his home in Victoria, the mission building being too small to house the press. Not proficient with languages and hampered by using standard Roman orthography, Good was quite unhappy with his translations and printed them in small numbers, partly as working copies for revision by his students. This is the earliest known mission printing of any kind in B.C. Good printed only three other translations in this Thompson language dialect, all of them rare, between 1879 and 1880.

#### 1881. ST. MARY'S MISSION, MISSION.

Both Mulhall's biography of Morice, and Morice

in his *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*, refer to Morice printing pamphlets here for Bishop d'Herbomez in the 1870s and

again in the early 1880s. Only one copy of either of these imprints is known, *Secular Schools Versus Denominational*, printed by the pupils of the Indian school of the mission in 1881.

#### 1882. OKANAGAN MISSION, LAKE OKANAGAN.

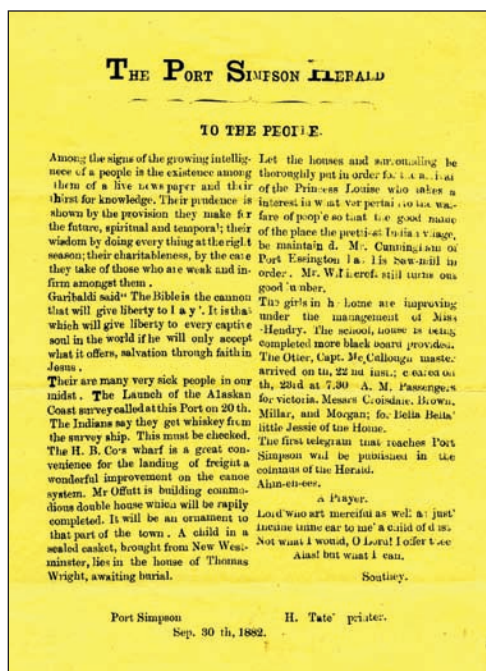
Correspondence indicates that Fathers Chiappini, Le Jeune and Morice arrived at the mission with a printing press in 1879. And Morice reports using that press in 1880–81.

The only known item that appears to have been printed at the mission is a

small decorative baptismal announcement for a native child at the mission, signed and dated in print "May, 1882" by Father Chiappini.

#### 1882. FORT SIMPSON METHODIST MISSION, FORT [LATER PORT] SIMPSON.

Thomas Crosby had been a missionary in Nanaimo and at various places on the Fraser River before establishing a permanent mission at the old HBC Fort Simpson in 1876. In his autobiographical *Among the Ankomenuks*, Crosby states, "For years we printed hymns for Christmas and New Year, translations of prayers and the commandments. We also published a little paper, the *Simpson Herald*... in 1882." The only known example of any printing from this press is a single broadside, THE PORT SIMPSON HERALD, Port Simpson, B.C., Sep. 30th, 1882. Roughly printed on yellow paper, the text begins, "To the People. Among the signs of the growing intelligence of a people is the existence among them of a live



*Port Simpson Herald. Courtesy of UBC Rare Books and Special Collections.*



newspaper and their thirst for knowledge,” and it is signed in print “H. Tate, printer.” Henry Tate was a native man, remarkably fluent in English, whose father taught William Duncan several native languages and who later became a principal informant on native customs for Franz Boas, the first modern anthropologist to work on the Northwest Coast. No other imprints are known from this mission.

1885. ST. LOUIS COLLEGE [LATER MISSION], KAMLOOPS. The earliest known item bearing this imprint is a unique 76-page *Manual*

*N'tla-ka-pa-moh Containing the Catechism, Prayers, in the Thompson Language*, presumably printed by either Father Morice or Le Jeune, both of whom were active at the mission at the time, and both of whom are known to have translated and printed other items later on. In 1886 a *Practical Chinook Vocabulary*, again known in only a single copy, appears with this imprint, but still with no printer identified. In 1891, however, Le Jeune began printing on a Gestetner-style duplicator the famous *Kamloops Wa-Wa*. The duplicator made production of this little newsletter practical, since Le Jeune

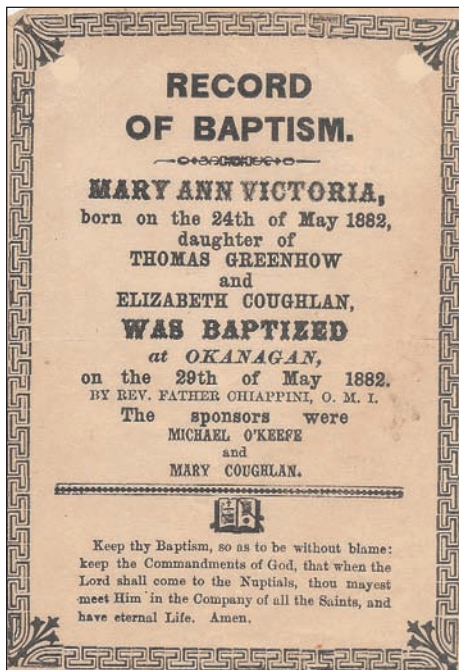
introduced a stenographic shorthand to transcribe native languages for which no cast types yet existed. Writing and printing the newsletter was thus both quick and simple, as long as the number of copies printed was no more than a few hundred. The *Wa-Wa* eventually went to over 200 issues, being printed (commercially in New Westminster) in upwards of 2,500 copies for distribution to supporters of the mission around the world. The press was by far the most prolific mission press in B.C., lasting well into the 20th century and producing a monumental 12-volume *Polyglott Manual* in nine native languages, completed in the late 1890s.

1890. STUART'S LAKE MISSION PRESS, FORT ST. JAMES. By 1890, Father Adrian Morice had moved from the Okanagan Mission to establish a new mission at Moricetown, in the headwater basin of the Nass/Skeena rivers system near the old fur trade post at Stuart's Lake. By this date several missions were located on B.C.'s upper coastal river systems, at the conflux of the great runs of eulachon and salmon where the natives had traditional villages and where commercial canneries had established themselves in the preceding 20 years. Morice devised a

syllabary, based on Evans' Cree syllabics and the much earlier Cherokee syllabics, improved, as he says, for the more delicate sounds of the language of the Babine natives. He produced several small primers and prayers using a roman type in 1890. He also printed at least one pamphlet that year set in the new syllabic type, which he had ordered cast, apparently, shortly after he arrived. He likely printed these items on the press brought from Kamloops, since nothing else appeared from that mission until the arrival of the press that Le Jeune used for the *Wa-Wa*. In 1891, Morice

began printing (in syllabic type) *Tooestloes-Nahwoelnoek*, a newsletter similar to Le Jeune's *Wa-Wa*, which continued through 1894. A handful of other works in English, French and syllabics appeared until the 1930s.

1891. AIYANSH MISSION, NASS RIVER. Rev. J.B. McCullagh began using a cyclostyle duplicator to produce a one- or two-page periodical, *HaGaGa: The Indian's Own Newspaper*, in the Nishga language in October 1891, which he continued to print at least until 1895. He later received a small printing press, which he assembled using only the illustration of a press



From the collection of Glenn Woodsworth.

from a magazine as a guide. On this press he produced a number of primers, two other periodicals—*The Caledonia Interchange* and *Aiyansh Notes*, a translation of the book of Matthew, and numerous smaller works until at least 1918. In his biography and in the publications themselves, he notes that the printing was actually done by “several Indian boys” who were learning the trade.

1894. MASSET, QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS. A single copy of *A Child's Manual* with this imprint is known. This 12-page compilation of prayers in Haida was possibly printed by J.H. Keen, missionary to Masset at the time, who is known to have produced a series of translations into Haida for publication in England. Two other short Haida translations are reported to have been printed by the mission.

1896–97. KITIMAAT MISSION, KITIMAT. REV. G.H. Raley took over this mission in 1893, remaining there until 1908. He began printing small hand-set broadsides within a few years, but the first known dated imprint is a broadside list of *Kitimat Rules 1897* for acceptable behaviour at the mission school. A broadside prayer, *Ahmakatle Hallelas*, is sometimes cited in bibliographies as printed in 1896 but is in fact undated. From 1897 on, Raley enthusiastically set to work printing weekly lessons and services, the periodical *Na-Na-Kwa* or *Dawn on the Northwest Coast* (1898–1908), an illustrated guidebook to the area, and numerous translations.

1898. COQUALEETZA MISSION SCHOOL, CHILLIWACK. A single imprint, *Indian Methodist Hymn=Book*, printed by William Barraclough in 1898, is known from this mission. The hymn book contains translations of hymns

into Coast Salish by Barraclough, Thomas Crosby and C.H. Tate—all Methodist missionaries who independently published other works. I am aware of a few later ephemeral items that appear to have been printed at the mission.

1899. ALL HALLOW'S SCHOOL, YALE. This long-established mission first started printing, as far as is known, in 1899, after a girls' school for both white and native students was founded. An English-language periodical, *All Hallow's in the West*, appeared in 1899 and continued with varying regularity for a number of years. Copies note that the printing work was done by students.

#### THE NO-SHOWS AND MAYBES

1858–[?]. ST. ANN'S, VICTORIA. Established in 1858, the mission regularly printed reports, according to various sources, but no copies are known dating before 1900.

1872. KINCOLITH MISSION, NASS RIVER. Robert Tomlinson arrived as a medical mission-ary for the hospital at the mission in 1872. A secondary source quotes a letter from Tomlinson say-

ing he began publishing his hospital reports there in 1872. No copies have been located.

1899. KITWANGA MISSION, NASS RIVER. A.E. Price was assigned to the mission at Kitwanga in 1899, arriving with a printing press. Although copies of three works printed there are known, only one is dated—1906.

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A page from AN-SHI-WIL-AIKSHIM SHIM-ALGIUK: or the Little Starter in the Nishka language. Courtesy of UBC Rare Books and Special Collections.