

THE GREAT HUNT FOR GOVERNOR GENERAL'S LITERARY AWARD WINNERS

When the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean presides over the 69th annual Governor General's Literary Awards this fall, it will be only the second year that the winning titles join a complete collection of their predecessors in the Library of Rideau Hall. Until last year, the library was lacking more than a quarter of the books that had won Canada's first and most prestigious literary award. Therein lies the story of the "Great Hunt" to fill the gaps, culminating in the only complete collection of Governor General's Literary Award winners in existence. By Maurie Barrett

Throughout the history of Rideau Hall, which became the official residence of the Governor General of Canada shortly before Confederation in 1867, books have always been part of the life of the Representative of the British Crown in Canada. They formed part of the personal effects of the British peerage and occasionally noble families from which the Governor General and his spouse (they were all men until Jeanne Sauvé was appointed in 1984) were selected.

For many years, what formed the backbone of the collection were books belonging to personal libraries of Governors General and their families. You can find, for example, books inscribed "to Lady Aberdeen" or stamped "Not to be removed from the Vice Regal Train." There are poignant personal handwritten inscriptions, such as that in a small dictionary which has inside "Lt. Robin Scott—ADC to Gov Gen of Canada, July 1937—Aug 1939. Killed in action 1940 at Sea off Crete." For those wanting to know the oldest book in the collection, it is *A Natural History of Barbados*, published in 1750. Unfortunately, it suffers from the unkindest cut of all to the book lover—a large fold-out map is missing.

In 1977, a reference library was established in the lower level of the house. This somewhat small, square room has the usual trappings of a Victorian basement in a well-to-do residence that had been "modernized" in the early 20th century. A simple fireplace, surrounded by built-in wooden bookcases, is there to be admired – as long as you duck your head to avoid clunking it on a low ceiling criss-crossed with thickly insulated water and heating pipes. With the establishment of the reference library, Rideau Hall left the world of personal collections and the idiosyncracies of their owners and donors.

Today, while not a huge collection in total volumes, the library still, because of confines of space that one encounters in a building used as a

working residence and site of official functions, is divided up as to location. In the main library room can be found books dealing with Canadian history, Canadian military history and Canadian literature.

In the Pauline Vanier room, Canadian pieces of furniture and art are complemented by shelves of books on Canadian art. Downstairs, in the lower level offices, the collection of books on Canadian regional politics, geography, history and so forth is located—within handy reach of the people who create and organize the Governor General's programs of visits across the country.

Back up on the main floor, diagonally across from the library room, is Lady Aberdeen's Sitting Room, an elongated rectangle which is currently the office of the Rideau Hall librarian and houses books about former Governors General.

However, it is the Governor General's office—Lord Grey's wood-panelled addition, now a century old—which holds the stuff of what collecting is all about, and animates some of the most exciting moments in a librarian's professional life. It is here that every single one of the Governor General's Literary Awards winners' books are now located. This fall 14 more titles will be added to the collection, bringing the total to 552 winners since the awards' creation in 1937 by Lord Tweedsmuir (John Buchan, who himself had written several books while Governor General of Canada).

When former governor general Adrienne Clarkson and her husband, John Ralston Saul, arrived at Rideau Hall in 1999, they, being avid bibliophiles, were appalled to find that over 150 titles were missing from the collection. This, they said, was unacceptable: that in the Governor General's official residence and seat, nearly one-quarter of the winners of the Governor General's own Literary Awards had simply somehow disappeared over the years. So they set about, with characteristic determination, to restore the collection—

and restore it completely. It became a special project during Governor General Clarkson's mandate (1999–2005). It became the Great Hunt.

We first started searching online sources. Many of the missing copies were in French, and book dealers in Quebec were contacted and sent wish lists indicating the ones we were seeking. Early on, the going wasn't too bad, especially since we had been concentrating a lot of energy on the hunt. Sometimes we found several a week, and the missing volumes started taking their proper places on the Governor General's bookshelves among the other winners.

Then, predictably, as we narrowed down the list, the success rate slowed considerably. We were now in the tricky area of seeking Literary Award winners from decades ago and in the small print run categories of poetry and drama.

By 2003, after much dogged effort amid flagging hopes, we got down to the final 11 titles. And there we stalled. For some months, we simply couldn't get past this number. It was getting so close, but success seemed now even farther away than when we started. And the disappointment was almost crystallizing around us.

Madame Clarkson and Mr. Saul, however, are not the types to give up. They hit upon another idea: we would hand out lists of the 11 missing books at the 2003 Literary Awards dinner. Surely among the writers, publishers and book lovers who attend these events, someone would know someone else who might know something about the books we'd been hunting—and maybe even, who knows, have one! Partway through the dinner, Madame Clarkson beseeched the attendees to try their best to help close out the Great Hunt.

And it worked. A couple more came; then another and another. By early 2005, only one book was missing—*Les Jeux de Pic-mots*—the French-language children's winner in 1988. It was more a game than a book, and won for the illustrations by Phillippe Beha. Then, the moment arrived: having heard that the Governor General was in hot pursuit of this title, a relative of the original publisher found a copy in his personal collection and kindly donated it to Rideau Hall to complete the collection.

Rideau Hall now possesses the only complete set of the books to have won the award. Even Library and Archives Canada doesn't have every title! With the Great Hunt over, the library's ongoing goal is modest, but focused and dedicated.

It is to continue to develop the Canadian sections of the collection in the subjects of Canadian literature, Canadian history, Canadian military history, constitutional issues, Canadian politics and government, Canadian visual art and performing art, Aboriginal culture and history, and regional material on all of Canada.

In addition to maintaining and updating the collection of Literary Award winners, the goal is to build the collection of material written by, or about, former Governors General.

Remember, too, that the Governor General's library is a working library. It is used daily in the service of their Excellencies and the staff who support them in their work. And with each Governor General, emphases in interests and tastes can direct the library's acquisitions and focus in different areas—for example, the Canadian North with Madame Clarkson; youth and women's issues with Madame Jean.

The collection is developed with a planned budget, but one should also note the importance of gifts and special donations made to the Office of the Governor General in support of the library. We also rely heavily on material borrowed from the Library of Parliament, Library and Archives Canada and university libraries to prepare for specific events and speeches.

With the strong encouragement of Governor General Jean and Monsieur Lafond, the library has mounted its first public display of books from its collection. An exhibition of works by the former Governor General the Marquess of Lorne and his wife, Princess Louise (fourth daughter of Queen Victoria), was set up last summer in the Tent Room of Rideau Hall. We plan more such displays in the future.

Like any profession or passion, there are times when daily work or mundane matters steal our attention away from why we love what we do so much. When such moments come, I just have to remind myself of a quote from John Ralston Saul upon completion of the Great Hunt: "It's quite moving to see it all together, the great swath of Canadian creativity. You get the sense of what literary fashions were and it tells you about the evolution of how Canadians think about themselves."

Being in the midst of that great swath—and being, modestly, part of bringing it together for others to see and enjoy—is all the inspiration I need.

Maurie Barrett is the librarian at Rideau Hall.

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