

SELLING THEMSELVES

The Emergence of Canadian Advertising

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The Emergence of Canadian Advertising

Russell Johnston



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Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Introduction 3

1. Newspapers, Advertising, and the Rise of the Agency, 1850–1900 18

2. Toronto Adworkers 52

3. A Professional Ideal 79

4. The Industry Takes Shape, 1900–1921 101

5. Copywriting, Psychology, and the Science of Advertising 142

6. Market Research and the Management of Risk 180

7. The Canadian Market, Magazines, and the New Logic of
Advertising 228

Conclusion 267

Appendix 277

Notes 283

Selected Bibliography 339

Index 349

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Introduction

Sam Slick pulled his cart up before the shop where Zeb Allen waited, leaning in the doorway. Slick was a pedlar from Connecticut, a specialist in clocks. Allen was a Bluenose, a Nova Scotian shopkeeper in the dry-goods line. In Slick's eyes, he was also a 'rael genuine skinflint.' They got to talking.

Slick ventured that after a year's travels throughout the province he would soon be done and out of the clock line. Zeb laughed: 'Most time ... for by all accounts the clocks warn't worth havin', and most infarnal dear too; folks begin to get their eyes open.' Slick responded in a 'confidential tone' that the goods he had been selling this trip out were indeed half-rate, poor stuff – he was ashamed of them. They were nothing like the goods he had carried years before. Trouble was, you couldn't get their like anymore. Had Zeb ever seen them?

'No,' said Mr Allen, 'I can't say I did.'

'Well,' continued he, 'they *were* a prime article, I tell you – no mistake there – fit for any market; it's generally allowed there ain't the beat of them to be found anywhere. If you want a clock, and can lay hands on one of them, I advise you not to let go the chance; you'll know 'em by the "Lowell" mark, for they were all made at Judge Beler's factory. Squire Shepody, down to Five Islands, axed me to get him one, and a special job I had of it, near about more sarch arter it than it was worth; but I did get him one, and a particular handsum one it is, copal'd and gilt superior. I guess it's worth ary half-dozen in these parts, let t'others be where they may ...'¹

Did the pedlar have it with him, the shopkeeper asked? Sure enough

4 Selling Themselves

he did, right bundled to save it from the hazards of the trip. Slick might unwrap it to afford the curious man a gander, but it was unavailable at any price. Zeb pressed on, and the clock was brought out. Just as the other described it, it was varnished and gilt and stamped prominently with the 'Lowell' name. Zeb was hooked.

[He] offered to take it at the price the Squire was to have it, at seven pounds ten shillings. But Mr Slick vowed he couldn't part with it at no rate, he didn't know where he could get the like again ... and the Squire would be confounded disappointed; he couldn't think of it. In proportion to the difficulties, rose the ardour of Mr Allen; his offer advanced to £8, to £8 10s., to £9.

'I vow,' said Mr Slick, 'I wish I hadn't let on that I had it at all.'²

Nonetheless, he consented to part with it, under protest, and would deal with as he could the crestfallen squire of Five Islands.

As Slick pulled away from the store, he turned to his travelling companion: 'That 'ere fellow is properly sarved; he got the most inferior article I had, and I just doubled the price on him.'³ Caveat emptor.

The travelling companion was the author himself, Thomas C. Haliburton, thinly veiled.⁴ Haliburton's stories of Slick were written as a satirical commentary on Nova Scotian life in the 1830s, but they contained insights into 'human natur' that captivated readers for generations. And who better to be the vehicle of these tales of 'human natur' than a pedlar? The pedlar, dependent on sales for his livelihood, had to know when to push and when to pull his clientele, when to agree and when to argue, when to open and when to close the deal. At these skills, Haliburton's Slick was a master.

Commercial transactions gave Haliburton a fine setting to explore the foibles of humanity. In his dealings with Zeb, Slick exploited at least two of the seven deadly sins: pride and avarice. He did so in a way that allowed Zeb to believe that he was in control of the proceedings. He flattered his intelligence, agreed with him in his assessments, and feigned to take him into his confidence on this account. Zeb's own pride gave him the opening. From there, Slick drew out his avarice by stating that a neighbour was getting a good deal, and by establishing the scarcity of the product, its unlikelihood of being found again. There was a bargain afoot, just beyond Zeb's reach. This entire show was given a degree of verisimilitude by the reference to the trade mark – 'When an article han't the maker's name and factory on it, it shows it's

a cheat, and he's ashamed to own it,' Slick asserts on the very first page of the book.⁵ The trade mark becomes the sign of the maker's credibility and the clock's merit, a sign that anyone 'in the know' would recognize immediately. Through his confidence, Slick let Zeb into a charmed circle. He offered a tip of friendly advice – offered without the taint of commercial gain because Slick had nothing to gain by doing so. In short, Slick managed Zeb's decision-making process by supplying the 'consumer' with information that he knew would prompt the right action – that is, a decision to purchase the clock. Slick created desire.

By 1890 those who worked in the advertising trade thirsted for precisely this kind of knowledge and power. They wanted the same degree of control over consumers as the old-time pedlar had supposedly enjoyed. Then as now, the trade was composed of three basic sectors: media outlets, advertisers, and advertising agencies. Traditionally, media outlets meant newspapers, periodicals, and prime spaces such as billboards, public transit cards, and the like. Since 1920 this list has grown to include radio and television broadcasters and web sites on the Internet. By advertisers, we can understand any individual, company, or organization that pays media owners for space or time to publicize their products, services, or cause. The vast majority of advertisers are commercial businesses. The third sector, advertising agencies, operate as intermediaries between media outlets and advertisers. Agencies serve advertisers by recommending and designing campaigns. Such service may include anything from copywriting to package design to market surveys. However, agencies got their start by contracting space or time from media outlets on behalf of their clients, and this remains the core function of most agencies. Beyond these three groups, advertising has also employed people in numerous other occupations, but these have never assumed a permanent, fixed position within the trade. Artists, writers, photographers, typesetters, contract printers, and others may work for any of the main three groups, but advertising is neither the only nor necessarily the primary source of their income.

For the sake of simplicity, it seems appropriate to use the word 'adworker' in reference to everyone engaged in the advertising trade. While agency executives and publishers might have resented this description, it will serve a purpose here. On an immediate level, it offers a means to refer to the employees of publishing houses, agencies, and corporate advertising departments with one short term; it also avoids the pitfalls of the gender-specific 'adman' and 'adwoman.'

6 Selling Themselves

But on another level, it should remind us that the people engaged in the advertising trade were labouring at their daily jobs. They were not star characters of novels and movies or other works of fiction, such as Frederic Wakeman's *The Hucksters* (1946), which painted them in romantic – if frequently garish – strokes. Rather, they were salesmen and clerks, statisticians and typesetters, freelance writers and secretaries, whose weekly pay cheques all came from the same source: the manipulation of white space into meaningful, persuasive, commercial intelligence.

It was the advertising agents who emerged as the trade's key intellectuals. Agents sought out retailers and manufacturers who were not advertising and attempted to bring them into the fold. Many such businessmen believed that advertising was money poorly invested. The returns were difficult to trace. Agents eager to turn reluctant prospects into satisfied clients were compelled to justify the expense, and in so doing they began to theorize the *practice* of advertising itself. One of these agents was Albert Lasker, who in 1900 was a young and newly hired employee at the Lord and Thomas Advertising Agency of Chicago, Illinois. According to legend, Lasker made it his goal to uncover the secret of advertising, the essence of the successful ad that made it memorable and effective. His first belief was that advertising was news, no different from any other kind of information found in the papers. Effective advertising had to report the news about the product for sale.⁶ Certainly, this had been the traditional role of advertising. As late as 1900 ads still appeared which merely reported that a certain retailer had new goods in stock, or that a manufacturer had created a new product which the reader might find useful.

Lasker's opinion was changed by a freelance copywriter, John E. Kennedy. Kennedy arrived in Chicago in 1904 after a very successful ten years selling men's clothing in Montreal. Hearing of Lasker's quest, Kennedy arranged to meet the younger man and share his secret. Lasker was not disappointed. Advertising, Kennedy confided, was 'salesmanship in print.' A copywriter had to do more than simply describe the goods for sale or make claims about their value. The copywriter had to re-create in cold type the sense of friendly persuasion that a salesmen might use in a personal encounter. Twenty years later, Lasker – by then president of Lord and Thomas – told his staff that this revelation had changed 'the whole complexion of advertising for all America.'⁷

Perhaps. Conceptions of advertising did change after 1900, but it

would be more accurate to suggest that Kennedy's idea was only one of many attempts to define the nature of the business. Certainly, there were newspapers, magazines, and industry trade papers that had tried to educate their readers in the advantages of advertising. In the same year that Lasker met Kennedy, two books were written on this very topic: one by an agency team and another by a psychologist keenly interested in advertising.

Ernest Elmo Calkins and Ralph Holden ran a noted agency in New York City. In 1905 they published a tract called *Modern Advertising* to publicize their approach. Like Kennedy, Calkins in particular believed that advertising had to offer more than simply news about a product. He claimed that 'advertising is that subtle, indefinable, but powerful force whereby the advertiser creates a demand for a given article in the minds of a great many people or arouses the demand that is already in latent form.'⁸ This indefinable force seemed to describe something beyond mere salesmanship, beyond mere persuasion. It implied some power latent in the written word that overcame sales resistance by appealing to the inner drives or desires of readers. This power could be tapped most effectively by artists, who were imbued with the vision and ability to harness that power.⁹

Walter Dill Scott took issue with this thesis. Scott, an academic psychologist, had given this 'indefinable force' a name – the power of suggestion. His thesis was rooted in the findings of empirical psychology, particularly those concerned with the association of ideas in the human mind and the ability to guide these associations through suggestion. It would not be a matter of art, but of science to determine the best associations that would indelibly link the product to the consumer's own needs and desires.¹⁰

Information, persuasion, suggestion, a force acting according to scientific laws: by 1905 the advertising trade had begun to accept these views of its work, and itself as a special elite with the power to shape public opinion. Henry Foster Adams, a business professor at New York University, tied these strands together in 1920 when he wrote that advertising was 'the endeavour of an individual or a group to persuade others, without personal solicitation and by means of a paid medium, to perform some specific act which will result in pecuniary advantage to the individual or group which is making the endeavour.'¹¹ This definition has remained at the core of advertising theory ever since. A recent Canadian textbook could have had Kennedy, Calkins, and Scott in mind when it described advertising as 'a persua-

8 Selling Themselves

sive form of marketing communications designed to stimulate positive response (usually purchase) by a defined target market.¹²

Although many different types of media carried advertising, only newspapers and magazines provided something more than a mere delivery system. Advertising had always been a part of the press, but it had been peripheral to the primary function of newspapers and magazines: the provision of news and opinion. The audience for hoardings and handbills did not have to pay for the privilege of reading the commercial messages they contained. Newspapers made their living by collecting news relevant to their audience, and they charged that audience for the service. Advertising, when it was carried, was a source of bonus revenue throughout the early 1800s. Only after the introduction of faster technology in the printing trades – technology that demanded access to greater capital – did publishers cultivate advertisers as a steady source of income. As cultural studies scholar Richard Ohmann has argued, the technology in itself did not cause the change in publishing, although it provided the material condition that made it possible. Over time, publishers realized that their returns from advertising were limited only by the number of pages at their disposal. By 1900 Canadian publishers of mass market periodicals began to realize that their primary market was no longer readers seeking information. Rather, it was advertisers seeking media sympathetic to their corporate goals.¹³

This shift was a rational development within the publishing industry. Publishers too were businessmen, and there was no necessary contradiction between running a paper and pleasing one's advertisers. To them, the opposite was true. The massive circulation figures achieved by the most popular papers and magazines were built upon editorial content that readers enjoyed and found useful. Presumably, readers would not have bought them if they did not find them so.

This change was not monolithic. Although it did not become *impossible* to publish periodicals that did not enjoy mass appeal or the approval of advertisers, it did become more difficult. By definition, publications without mass appeal had fewer readers to support them. With smaller circulations, they also commanded less advertising revenue. As a result, publications catering to niche markets had a difficult time competing on the same terms. Higher-grade papers and inks, top-notch editors, well-known writers, artists, and photographers – all of these were the tools of the mass magazines. Traditional magazine genres and periodicals that served particular interests suffered by com-

parison as they became less and less able to afford these tools. As new media have become available to advertisers, this pattern has been repeated.

The development of advertising in the print media, then, is crucial to the story of advertising. Many of the persuasive techniques developed for print advertising after 1900 had been used in trade cards, posters, and billboards before 1900. However, these forms of display advertising did not inspire the same theoretical musings from a competitive trade press. Nor were they enmeshed in media offering ostensibly objective news-reporting and trusted editorial opinions. For these reasons, Raymond Williams has dubbed advertising 'the magic system,' a term that invokes both sides of advertising's social role. Advertising is 'magic' in so far as it endows material objects with identifications and associations that they otherwise would not have. On this point, Williams says no more than Kennedy, Calkins, and Scott. However, advertising is also a system, in that it provides financial support to cultural producers in the public sphere. It provides a structuring influence to publishing, broadcasting, and now new media. Hence, advertising's role in society is both cultural and structural.¹⁴

Scholars have examined these roles individually and in combination. The earliest critiques of advertising tended to draw upon both. As modern copywriting and illustration techniques became widespread after the First World War, they were met by a wave of popular and academic criticism. Some of this came from economists such as Stuart Chase and F.J. Schlink, who published one of the best-known commentaries in 1927, *Your Money's Worth*.¹⁵ Very simply, they argued that advertising added unnecessarily to the cost of consumer goods: if demand for a product were genuine, consumers would seek out the product whether it was advertised or not. This meant two things. First, advertising represented an irrational business practice since it forced the public to bear an unjustified cost on top of the authentic costs of production. Second, when advertising drew attention to non-staple items, it distorted the natural (and hence 'proper') demands of the marketplace. Chase and Schlink did not challenge the industry's self-image; they too believed that advertising had the power to influence consumer behaviour. But working from this supposition, they argued that advertising was an ethically dubious practice. Similar conclusions were later drawn by A.S.J. Baster in England and John Kenneth Galbraith in the United States.¹⁶ Still, these critics did recognize that new products were well served by advertising's ability to inform quickly

10 Selling Themselves

and efficiently. Rather than eliminate advertising altogether, they sought to reform it. In Jackson Lears's terms, they wanted the industry to adhere to an ideal form of communication, which he dubs 'plain speech' – advertising that described the product, the price, and the nearest retailer without bombast. In essence, they wanted Lasker's information without Williams's magic.¹⁷

More critical were the second wave of economists and sociologists who questioned the connection between advertising and the role of media as modes of public communication. While these writers did not ignore the importance of specific advertising messages, their prime concern was for the financial structure of modern media outlets. Inspired by the propaganda efforts of various Depression-era governments and corporations, scholars such as Harold Innis in Canada, Paul Lazarsfeld in the United States, and the Frankfurt School in Germany made explicit the growing tension between corporate power and the free flow of information in the Western democracies. Jürgen Habermas's study of the public sphere draws upon all of these, and his approach is unusual only for its theoretical rather than empirical orientation. That said, Habermas and the Frankfurt School take a decidedly different tack in their conclusions. Although Innis and the Americans admitted that advertising posed a great danger to the free flow of information, they accepted this as the price of a society that guaranteed personal liberties. Habermas saw the domination of the public sphere by advertising-dependent media as a failing of the capitalist system.¹⁸

Where these scholars examined the structuring influence of advertising, other cultural commentators have dissected advertisements for their ideological content, to reveal the significance of particular advertisements and ad campaigns. The classic text in this regard is Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* (1978). In Canada, scholars have studied campaigns as diverse as the Canadian Pacific Railway's early tourist advertising and the images of women in consumer magazines. However, as communications scholars William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally have pointed out, the pitfalls of content analysis are many. Whether or not any one method provides a legitimate or politically useful reading is outside the interests of this study. The reading of any one advertisement, campaign, or group of campaigns reveals more about the specific advertisers, agencies, and media involved than it does about advertising in general, let alone about the intended audience. Treating advertising as text cannot reveal the structure and workings of the industry itself since it only examines the role of specific

signifiers to specific groups of authors and readers. Each campaign can be no more than a microstudy of the industry as a whole.¹⁹

A number of American historians have tried to get behind the ads, to explore the social and intellectual world of their creators. This approach has focused attention upon advertising agencies and related organizations, and it has been extremely illuminating. Daniel Pope, Stephen Fox, Roland Marchand, Jennifer Scanlon, and Ellen Garvey, among others, have drawn upon a wealth of primary sources to understand the people who made the ads.²⁰ More than any other group, it was the men and women who worked in the agencies who proselytized on behalf of advertising. The primary interest of the advertisers lay with their products and their factories; the primary interest of the publishers lay with their papers and their presses. It was the agents' job alone to think about advertising, day in and day out. There is a danger with this approach, however, and that is to credit agents with more power than they possessed. While they may have been 'heralds of modernity' – insofar as they introduced the world to the astonishing products created by modern science – they were not themselves responsible for these products. Nor were they the only spokesmen for modernity. The mores of the time were far more consciously probed in the sermons, fiction, and editorials of traditional cultural producers.


Furthermore, advertising is not created by *auteurs*. Advertising is created by committees. From the first idea for a campaign to the final printed page, an advertisement passes through many hands. Each brings a different perspective to the campaign and has a different goal in mind. This point was made abundantly clear by contemporary workers in the fine arts. Cultural producers who upheld romantic values and jealously guarded their independence of vision scorned their commercial counterparts and consistently argued that commercial art represented something lower in the hierarchy of creative expression. Agents were fashioning intellectual goods with a very practical purpose and at the request of specific clients. Even when armed with the latest statistics on their client's target market, agents found that their idea of an effective campaign could be rapidly shot down.²¹

Canadian historians have not examined the development of the advertising trade in great detail, whether from the standpoint of publishers, agents, or advertisers. The standard reference is H.E. Stephenson and Carlton McNaught's *The Story of Advertising in Canada*, published in 1940. This book remains a fascinating study. It was written to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Canada's largest agency, McKim

EFFECTIVE ILLUSTRATIONS AND DESIGNS
PREPARED AND REPRODUCED BY—

STEWART & BROWNE

ADVERTISING ART ADEPTS



23 JORDAN ST. PHONE M. 2522
TORONTO ONT.

The uneasy relation between commerce and art was suggested in this ad for Stewart and Browne. *Economic Advertising* 8:9 (September 1915), 10.

Limited, where both men worked. Their discussion of changing consumer trends offers some valuable insights from their own long experience in the trade, but their analysis is limited by this same perspective. References to personalities and events tend to document their own firm, and advertising agencies are given credit for the entire revolution in marketing practices after 1900. More recent works on advertising have appeared, but practitioners and academics alike have concentrated on the television era.²²

The periodical press has had similar treatment. *A History of Canadian Journalism* was published in two volumes, the first by the Canadian Press Association (1908) and the second by W.A. Craick (1959). Once again, the authors were participants, and not surprisingly the heroes here are publishers and editors. There is little sustained discussion of advertising to be found, despite its central importance to the growth of their industry. By contrast, early academic work in the field emphasized the role of technology rather than economics, as seen in W.H. Kesterton's *A History of Journalism in Canada* (1967). More recent academic treatments of the publishing industry have brought a more critical perspective to its history, and among the best of these are works by Paul Rutherford and Jean de Bonville. Nonetheless, while these studies draw direct links between advertising and the changes that overtook the newspaper business, they concentrate on the overt political consequences of these changes, rather than their deeper cultural implications. Since their focus is the newspaper industry, the development of the advertising trade itself is only of secondary concern.²³

The literature on advertisers is particularly thin. Only one major work has examined an advertiser as an advertiser before 1930, and this is E.J. Hart's consideration of CPR travel publicity, *The Selling of Canada* (1983). The only attempt to draw each of these strands together – the agents, publishers, and advertisers – during the period under review can be found in Leiss, Kline, and Jhally, who provide an excellent sociological overview of the advertising trade. The book's one drawback, however, is its assumption that advertising developed contemporaneously on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel.²⁴

This study will attempt a more synthetic approach to the development of the modern advertising trade in Canada. There are three major themes. First, at its core, lies the 'professionalization' of the advertising trade. 'Professionalization' is used here with caution. The rise of professionalism as it has been described by M.S. Larson and Harold Perkin provides a useful model to describe the changes that occurred

14 Selling Themselves

within the trade from 1890 to 1930, but advertising never became a 'profession' in the strict sense of that term.²⁵ Professionalism can be seen as a set of institutional structures created by those working in a specific field of enterprise. Those working in recognized professions such as medicine or the law have created unifying organizations, learned journals, educational programs, and barriers to entry that prevent the unqualified or undesirable (as defined by those within the profession) from engaging in 'legitimate' participation. However, there exists a set of ideological premises upon which these institutional structures are built. The 'professional ideal,' according to Perkin, rests upon the inherent value of 'human capital' in place of material wealth; professionals, through trained expertise in a limited field of human understanding, carry within them 'socio-ideological, cultural, intellectual, or spiritual power,' which – if acknowledged by their fellow citizens – confers upon them status and social power.²⁶ In the case of the advertising trade, a small group of salesmen on the fringes of the publishing industry convinced manufacturers that they were 'experts' regarding its inner workings. Theirs was not the capital of presses, plants, and paper, but of intuition, imagery, and ideas. The strength of an advertising agency was the creative capacity of the men who ran it, both its salesmen and its creative staff.

A study of this professionalization movement also brings to light the contemporary transformation of the publishing industry itself. This is the second theme. The agencies were at the forefront of several trends that found common cause in the creation of mass market periodicals. Publishers were seeking new revenue streams to cover the rising costs of production, advertisers were seeking improved means of communication with the buying public, and the public was developing a growing taste for inexpensive, leisure-time reading. Agencies capitalized on these trends by developing manufacturers into constant advertisers. This in turn increased revenues for periodicals and gave editors the resources they needed to produce newspapers and magazines that appealed to ever-widening audiences.

The third theme that unites the chapters that follow is the Canadian adworkers' relationship to their American counterparts. The American advertising trade gained substantial shape when the first advertising agent appeared there in the 1840s. When Canadian agents began to appear twenty years later, they did so with the American trade in mind. The pattern struck in these early years would never be broken. Innovations in advertising thought and practice would usually appear first in

the United States, and Canadian adworkers inevitably adopted the most successful. By 1900 the Canadians were adopting ideas in step with their introduction throughout the United States itself. They never spoke of this arrangement in terms of 'dependence,' nor of 'Americanization.' Rather, they viewed themselves as the fortunate neighbours of a pioneering nation of businessmen. American innovations were simply good business solutions to problems faced on both sides of the border.

Any researcher who studies advertising in Canada faces a difficult task: advertisers, agencies, and publishers, with some notable exceptions, have been ruthless when disposing of records connected to their marketing policies and practices. What remains in Canada are the annual reports, trade journals, directories, government materials, and other published records, which tend to document the industry as a whole rather than particular advertisers, agents, or media. This need not be a problem. The story that emerges from these records reveals several sectors of an industry consciously working towards common goals. Partisan publishers who fought one another riding by riding in the mid-1800s were cooperating on industry matters by the end of the century. There were several reasons for this change, but the major impetus was an effort to stabilize, then increase, the revenues available from advertising. Met by a newly disciplined press, advertising agents had to organize themselves to plead their case with the publishers. This in turn prompted the major advertisers to join forces, to ensure that their interests were not entirely delimited by the other two. By 1915 every major sector of the publishing industry (save the readers) was actively engaged in mutual negotiations intended to set standards of conduct among themselves. During the 1910s the general public heard tell of advertising conventions trumpeting the virtues of 'Truth in Advertising.' Behind the scenes, these same conventions were drafting memoranda that chided adworkers to be honest with one another.

Like any agreement, those of the advertising industry established an operational framework that recognized the competing demands of each sector. In the debates surrounding each agreement can be found a host of arguments presenting the views of many different members of the industry. What emerges are the goals and ideals of those engaged in the advertising trade; the agreements simply enshrined the product of their negotiations.

With these qualifications aside, it is important not to lose sight of individuals. Someone was sitting on these countless committees. Modern advertising and the institutions that shaped it were not products of

impersonal market forces, but of individuals with needs and aspirations of their own. If the institutions give us a sense of the industry as a whole and how it functioned in Canada, a knowledge of the individuals involved can give us a sense of the trends and concerns that animated their industry councils.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by describing the various sectors of the industry that are important to the story – the publishers, advertisers, and agents – as they were at the end of the nineteenth century. Advertising as a trade grew rapidly in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and agents were viewed by the publishers with great suspicion, as opportunists interfering where they did not belong and where they were not welcome. Chapter 2 discusses the men and women who worked in the trade by looking at the careers of a select group of adworkers in Toronto; chapter 3 examines the rationale they crafted for their trade. Toronto adworkers were pivotal in this regard, for Toronto was the home of the publications, companies, and trade associations that would set the temper of the Canadian trade. Chapter 4, in three parts, demonstrates how publishers and agents treated with the advertisers to reconfigure the publishing industry in the twenty years after the turn of the century. In large part, this was done through agreements signed by their representative organizations. What they created was a structural framework that systematized the functions of the various sectors in relation to one another.

Chapter 5 looks at the pivotal role played by copywriting in the revamped advertising industry. Through the incorporation of academic psychology, copywriters began to systematize the content of the industry just as the agreements had systematized its business structure. After 1900 three distinct approaches to advertising emerged, whose advocates could be termed the salesman, the artist, and the psychologist. Although all three remained prominent at different firms, a fourth advocate emerged in the 1910s who eventually took precedence over them all, the market researcher. Where the first three had focused upon individual ads and readers, the market researcher looked at campaigns and mass readership. This is the subject of chapter 6. Seen as a 'mass,' readership behaved in accordance with predictable laws, and the market analyst sought to increase the probability of response from campaigns by targeting only the most suitable prospects with pre-tested copy appeals. The impact of these theories will be traced in chapter 7, where the development of Canadian consumer magazines is examined in greater detail.

Ultimately, the portrayal of Canadian society in these newly fashioned media – primarily the consumer magazines, but also the newspapers and radio stations that learned from them – became increasingly homogenized to fit an anglophone, liberal Christian, middle class. Stewart Blumin argues that middle-class identifications formed around white-collar workers who developed common patterns of social interaction and material consumption.²⁷ Advertising participated in the construction of this identification. Consistent consumption patterns were integral to the demographic categories formulated by agencies; they were also crucial to media outlets, which used them to establish market niches around which they could construct editorial content. But advertising played upon the anxieties of readers by suggesting that specific products would help them to achieve the status or acceptance they desired. It worked its magic to articulate and reinforce the relationships between lifestyle, status, and material possessions.

Newspapers, Advertising, and the Rise of the Agency, 1850–1900

You run your newspapers to make money. You are not running newspapers to mould public opinion. That is all guff. That makes me sick. (Laughter)

Roy V. Somerville, speaking to the Canadian Press Association in 1893¹

James Poole was probably a typical mid-nineteenth-century Canadian publisher. In 1860, in the rural countryside of eastern Ontario, Poole owned and operated the Carleton Place *Herald*, a four-page weekly paper upholding the Liberal cause. It carried his reports of local people and events, stories from around the world brought in by telegraph, and – on every single page – advertisements. He had a good variety of ads. Local people with produce to sell, personal ads, out-of-town financial houses offering investments and insurance, and railways and steamship operators running their monthly schedules all found a spot in his pages. Far more frequent, however, were local retailers and artisans notifying readers of recently acquired goods. Out-of-town advertisers might have come and gone, but the bread and butter of Poole's advertising were the shops within his own community.²

Why was Poole typical? Because in the early 1860s, there were some 150 other weekly papers in villages across the province, and another 79 throughout the rest of British North America. By contrast, there were only some 23 dailies. Few of them, weeklies and dailies alike, had circulations over one thousand readers.³ Journalists such as Poole were more than simple publishers. They were editors, business managers, and pressmen all rolled into one. Newspapering was more than a career for souls such as these with ink in their blood. It was a way of life, like farming or the clergy.⁴

Forty years later, rural journalism found itself the backward cousin of the urban press. As the European demand for wheat and the American demand for pulpwood and minerals grew after 1880, Canada became a favoured destination for hundreds of thousands of immigrants. With them came a host of manufacturers providing consumer goods to a growing working-class population. With these consumer goods came an ever-increasing volume of advertising.

Two groups encouraged this growth in advertising: publishers and advertising agents. Publishers slowly adapted to the emerging industrial economy and left behind the nineteenth-century world of personal journalism. Circulation drives boosted readership and revenues and prompted ever greater investment in new technologies. Much of their new revenue was achieved by increasing the volume of advertising they carried in their pages. What was once a secondary source of income fast became a primary source, and more resources were dedicated to its cultivation among local and out-of-town businesses.

The publishers' enthusiasm for advertising was matched by a new cadre of businessmen, the advertising agents. However, while the publishers were developing a latent economic potential within their own businesses, the agents were essentially outsiders poaching on the publishers' trade. Many had formerly been salesmen in the publishers' employ. As freelance agents, they were still selling publishers' white space, but now they accrued a portion of the profits from this trade to their own accounts.

Periodical Publishing before 1890

Before 1890 Canadian publishers were a remarkably independent lot. There were a wide variety of printing houses in Canada, producing newspapers, magazines, religious tracts, books, and sundry printed items. Despite the commonalities in their trades, they were in no way united as an industry, nor were they inclined to think of themselves as a single industry. Instead, each branch hewed to its own course and was served by its own trade associations and journals.⁵

Even within these particular fields, there were few national organizations to unite members of a trade from every province. The newspapers are a perfect case in point. The Canadian Press Association, founded in 1858, gathered together the publishers of daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, and trade papers, but only those published in the English language in Ontario. Others could join the Eastern Town-

ships Press Association (1879), *La Presse Associée de la Province de Québec* (1882), or the Maritime Press Association (1888).⁶ These groups did not find common cause until the 1910s.

Within each association, there were also felt differences between the publishers of weekly and daily newspapers. Weeklies tended to be the poorer cousins of the big-city dailies, located as they were in smaller towns and rural townships. It was not uncommon for publishers to establish a weekly with the intention of building it into a daily paper. In the mid-1800s success in this line required the prescience to locate in a town on the grow. Where population remained thin and businesses scant, few publishers could turn a substantial profit on a small circulation and few local sources of advertising. Chances were that everyone within reach of the paper would be familiar with the local merchants and craftsmen without notices in the paper. Those merchants who did advertise might have done so as much from a felt duty to the local paper as a desire to place their goods before the public. Such a duty might have been prompted by an obligation to support a partisan organ, or perhaps simply to maintain a voice for their community.⁷

Despite shaky prospects, there was never a shortage of investors in the newspaper field. Reliable statistics on newspapers first appeared in 1864. At that point, the weekly was still the most common format, but most of Canada's larger centres had acquired sturdy dailies. That year, there were 298 periodicals in British North America, of which 226 were weeklies and another 43 semi-weekly or tri-weekly. By 1891, the number of weeklies had more than doubled, while the total number of periodicals had expanded to 837.⁸

Before 1850 most weekly publishers expected their costs to be met primarily from reader sales, either through annual subscriptions or individual copies on the street. A small operation, with perhaps two men, could probably make enough to pay each of them a small competence. The division of labour would not be sophisticated. Likely, the publisher, editor, and business manager would be one man, the compositor and pressman another. Both would share ownership of the business. The latter man would frequently be assisted by an apprentice or journeyman printer, and he too might hope to own a paper or job printing plant someday. After mid-century new mechanized presses began to alter this relationship. While the expertise of business managers was increasingly sought by competitive urban papers, the relative importance of a skilled pressman began to wane. Printers resisted their marginalization through powerful trade unions, but the prestige

of business managers grew over time to rival that of the editors themselves.⁹

The dailies were the first to install the new presses. Dailies benefited from faster production runs, which they needed to service expanding readerships. In smaller towns, where there were fewer readers and the paper appeared only once or twice a week, current and future revenue was insufficiently promising to justify an investment in a modern press. Moreover, the urgency of the news was not as pronounced, and more traditional technology sufficed. The daily Fort William *Times-Journal* is a case in point. It kept its hand press until 1899. At that time, its circulation was roughly 250. A hand press could print the entire paper – four pages, 250 copies – in roughly two and a half hours; a small steam-powered press could finish the same run in one half hour. Demand for the new technology was questionable; either press could easily complete the paper overnight for morning delivery. However, the increased speed of the new machine installed in 1899 was decidedly advantageous as the paper expanded to eight pages. With increased traffic between southern Ontario and the Prairies, the port of Fort William expected a prosperous future, especially as the eastern terminus for the Canadian Northern Railway. The *Times-Journal* probably made its investment with that future in mind. It was a safe gamble. Six years later, its circulation had grown to one thousand.¹⁰

Weekly publishers who did not enjoy a period of growth in the 1890s found other ways to remain solvent. One method reduced the cost of news collection and plate-making by having it done elsewhere. ‘Boiler-plates’ were pre-set plates of editorial content crafted by print shops and some of the larger dailies. These usually contained undated material such as human interest stories, fiction, or poetry that could be run at any time. ‘Ready-prints,’ also called ‘patent insides,’ were full newspaper sheets that publishers bought with both editorial and advertising content pre-printed on one side. When folded, the pre-printed side became pages two and three of a four-page weekly paper. That left only the front page and the back to be filled, usually with the paper’s masthead, local news, and advertising.¹¹

Party politics also played a significant role in the survival of papers, both weekly and daily. In the 1800s most papers were established to advance either Conservative or Liberal ideals, and men moved between journalism and politics with great regularity. Notable in this regard was Sir Mackenzie Bowell, publisher of the Belleville *Intelligencer*, who served as a member of the federal cabinet and became

22 Selling Themselves

prime minister in 1894. Late in the century, Liberal and Conservative newspapers were joined by others supporting farm and labour parties. Occasionally, when rifts formed among local partisans, a new paper emerged to champion one party faction against another. W.F. Maclean, a maverick Conservative and member of Parliament, established the populist Toronto *World* in 1880. In so doing, he placed himself in open competition with the high Tory *Mail* and the Toronto-first imperialism of John Ross Robertson's *Telegram*.¹²

The merits of the 'Independent Press' was a subject on the agenda for the Canadian Press Association in 1905. The complete minutes of this discussion are as follows:

Several members asked: 'What is an independent paper?'

Mr J.H. Thompson: The paper a Tory stops because it is Grit, and a Grit stops because it is Tory.

Mr H.A. James: Is there an independent Liberal or an independent Conservative paper in Ontario?

Several members: No.¹³

Discussion closed.

There were three sources of partisan support for newspapers. The first of these stemmed from the ownership of the papers themselves. The role of partisan backers intensified after 1850, as increased capital was required to purchase the new presses and plants. Previously, it had been possible for men such as William Lyon Mackenzie or George Brown to start a paper on their own resources or with limited financing. Proprietorship allowed them to express their opinions as they saw fit – which both men readily did. Then, their ability to win influence in party councils would have been proportionate to their influence with readers. By the 1870s this relationship was in transition. The capital required to own a paper was beyond the means of most journalists. Josiah Blackburn bought the *Canadian Free Press* in London, Canada West, on his own account for \$500 in 1850. To expand the weekly into a daily, he entered into a partnership with his brother in 1853. Twenty years later the paper was reorganized as a limited company. By then, Blackburn was only one of five shareholders, whose combined stock was valued at \$60,000.¹⁴

Under these circumstances, investors had the financial clout to ensure that an editor remained faithful to the party line. This was particularly true where the editor was not a stockholder. However, many

owners allowed their editors some degree of autonomy. This approach presumed that readers would not long respect a paper that championed its party at the expense of constructive commentary. A notable example was Sir Clifford Sifton, whose *Winnipeg Free Press* provided a soapbox for editor John W. Dafoe. Similarly, J.E. Atkinson refused to join the Toronto *Star* unless its backers promised him his editorial freedom. In both cases the owners hired men whose party affiliations and political principles were never in doubt. Ultimately, beyond their initial investment, continued support depended on the maintenance of a favourable editorial policy and the depth of the backers' pockets.¹⁵

The second form of partisan support relied on local businessmen with sympathetic convictions to place advertising on a regular basis. This form of support was more tenuous than direct backing, since advertisers had no stake in the paper's finances. Their main consideration was the paper's circulation. If the paper had competitive numbers, there was no problem. If it fell too far behind its rivals, partisan advertisers would then have to assess their priorities: economic self-interest or loyalty to the cause. Other problems arose when advertisers took issue with a paper's editorial decisions. Pleasing readers did not necessarily please advertisers, and pleasing either could be difficult if the editor supported an unpopular party policy. The Toronto *Empire* foundered after several years spent parroting the Conservative line. Even an unreformed Tory such as Hector Charlesworth thought it represented the worst in blinkered editorial writing.¹⁶

The third form of partisan support was the least reliable. If the right party was in power, patronage could be sought in the form of government advertising notices or printing contracts. This kind of assistance could not be relied upon, but it kept many a paper solvent when other revenue was scarce.¹⁷

After reader subscriptions, local advertising, and political patronage, newspapers found their last bit of financing from out-of-town commercial advertisers. Ultimately, this became the most important part of the publishers' revenue. At mid-century, however, it was by far the most neglected. As late as 1890 the publisher of the St Thomas *Journal* declared that such advertising should not have been accepted unless there was vacant space to fill in one's paper.¹⁸ Nothing could have expressed publishers' ambivalence more than the name that publishers gave to it: 'foreign advertising.' In most cases, it actually was 'foreign,' since it was placed by American or British manufacturers. As an expression, 'foreign' did not begin to wane until the volume of national adver-

tising originating in Canada increased after 1900. Even then, the head of Canada's largest agency was still describing it thus in the 1910s.¹⁹

Before 1900 foreign advertising was placed by manufacturers located outside the immediate region in which the paper was published. For example, McClary's Manufacturing, renowned for their black iron wood stoves, advertised not just in London, Ontario, but wherever their goods were sold. Railway lines and steamship companies publicized their departure schedules. Circuses, theatre companies, and musical shows advertised weeks in advance of their performances to drum up excitement. But far more common than any of these were the patent medicine makers.²⁰

More than any other trade, the patent medicine makers are given credit for pioneering the field of national distribution and foreign advertising across North America. Inexpensive to produce, package, and transport, patent medicines were initially sold by itinerant pedlars who travelled through the small towns and rural countryside of the United States and Canada. Sophisticated pedlars learned that the patience of their prospective customers could be profitably lengthened by the offer of free entertainment. What they developed was something of a cross between vaudeville and a travelling circus – a mixture of comedy, music, acrobatics, and freaks presented from their wagons or tents. The master of ceremonies would then use breaks between the acts to introduce a lively sales pitch for the company's medicine. The most skilled orators could make the sales pitch itself into a featured part of the show. These travelling shows found the same audiences that P.T. Barnum found: sometimes earnest, sometimes credulous, but almost always willing to be humbugged in the name of entertainment or the off chance that the concoction proffered actually worked.²¹

The shift from travelling shows to advertising seems inevitable in retrospect. When a show left town, sales could be maintained only if a local merchant carried stock. Without the show, however, the medicine would have to be boosted in some other way. The medicine men already used newspaper advertising to publicize themselves; now they would use it to sell their products directly.²² In the tradition of their outlandish shows, the advertising of patent medicines was garishly typed, boldly set, and came illustrated with eye-catching cuts. Until the 1890s they were the single largest group of foreign advertisers in Canada and the United States. When the Ontario legislature proposed restrictions on the sale of patent medicines in 1893, the bill was denounced in the publishers' trade paper: 'The country publisher

draws no mean revenue from the general merchant and medicine manufacturer,' opined the editor, 'and he should guard their interests.' The bill died. When tariffs on American medicines fell some four years later, it was hailed as 'A Chance for Advertisements.'²³ One medicine manufacturer in Canada, Senator George T. Fulford, reputedly spent \$1 million in fifteen years advertising 'Dr William's Pink Pills for Pale People.' His success, and that of others like him, led to the gradual adoption of these techniques by other industries. The first to do so were food and clothing manufacturers – paralleling an absolute growth in consumer expenditures in these fields – but by 1920 almost every branch of modern commerce had followed suit.²⁴

James Poole's business correspondence reveals early glimmers of these changes, particularly in one set of letters dating from 1856 to 1864. Most were handwritten, asking that a prepared statement be run in the paper. If the letter came from an individual, payment was generally enclosed; if it came from a business, the client usually asked to be billed. When reading the letters, there is little perceptible difference between personal and commercial notices, and the same was true in print. All parties likely understood the conventions of the day for newspaper advertising. Most ads would have been typeset and placed much like the classified ads of the twentieth century. Few clients asked for larger space or 'conspicuous placement.' William Virgin was perhaps more casual than most, but not untypical when he wrote the following: 'You would oblige me by advertising the following in whatever form you see proper. A black and white hound with red ears strayed to my place yesterday[.] [A]ny party claiming him can have him by paying the advertisement. I think one insertion should do ... Enclosed is 2/9 for advertisement.'²⁵

Here, Poole could write, set, and place the ad entirely at his own discretion. More commonly, clients would have a prepared statement, in which case the printer would only have to set and place it. In a minority of the letters, the client also indicated a preferred layout. These invariably came from commercial houses. The dry-goods store of J. & J. Wylie submitted a handwritten letter whose prepared copy was drafted in a very stylized fashion. Given this arrangement, the printer could still play with the size of the type and the justification of the lines. The Wylies, however, submitted this to replace a previous insertion. Likely they knew how the *Herald* would set it. Similarly, Robert Watson of the Brockville and Ottawa Railway asked that his copy be inserted in the 'shape of handbills,' a format that would have dictated

J & J Wylie
 are now receiving their summer supplies
 comprising a very extensive assortment of
 Family Dry Goods
 Staple & do
 Heavy Goods
 Hard ware, Iron & Nails
 Groceries, Glass
 China & Crystal Ware
 Sole Leather &
 Groceries of the very best description
 all of which will be offered at the lowest
 remunerating prices —
 The public are respectfully invited to call
 and see for themselves —
 The market price will be paid for
 any quantity of Good Butter during the
 season —
 Harmony May 26th 1856

Mr Poole
 Will please insert the above in
 a conspicuous manner — and withdraw
 our last advertisement — ~~also the~~
 J & J Wylie

J. & J. WYLIE,
Are now receiving their Summer supplies,
comprising a very extensive assortment
OF
FANCY DRY GOODS,
STAPLE Do. Do.
Straw Goods,
Hardware, Iron and Nails!
CROCKERY, GLASS
CHINA & CRYSTAL WARE,
SOLE LEATHER, &
GROCERIES of the very best descrip-
tion, all of which will be offered at the
lowest remunerating prices.
The public are respectfully invited to
call and examine them.
The market price will be paid for any
quantity of GOOD BUTTER during
the season.
Ramsay, May 26. 87-1f

J. & J. Wylie advertisement as it appeared each week, June–September 1856.
Carleton Place Herald, 28 June 1856.

a specific look to the finished ad.²⁶ Notably, the only ads that came pre-written and printed in proof form came from foreign advertisers, such as the Provincial Insurance Company of Toronto. Its letter asked that Poole re-create the proof as closely as possible.²⁷ Over the next four decades, the casual requests of local retailers such as the Wylies would be almost entirely replaced by the more exacting demands of 'foreign' companies from out of town. Such demands signalled the fact that certain businessmen were beginning to take their advertising more seriously than they had in the past.

1895: A Turning Point?

The Canadian economy changed dramatically between 1880 and 1914, and publishers were very much attuned to these developments. From 1871 to 1901 the aggregate value of capital invested in Canadian manufacturing rose more than five times, from \$78 million to \$481 million, and hundreds of plants opened in the Maritimes, Quebec, and Ontario. Most located in Ontario.²⁸ In their wake, thousands of Canadians migrated to the industrializing urban centres, and for good reason. The number of jobs increased with the pace of investment. Between 1891 and 1901, while the rural population of Canada grew by roughly sixty thousand, its cities and towns grew by around half a million. At the same time, the annual value of wages more than doubled from \$41 million to \$113 million. Retailers and marketers were keenly attuned to these developments. On paper, at least, the country seemed flush with disposable income.²⁹

With the increase in goods and markets came a perceived increase in the volume of advertising, particularly in the period 1895 to 1905. Although no statistics exist from this period for the advertising trade, several items offer corroborative evidence. Agents identified 1895 as a turning point because that year reputable firms began to outnumber patent medicines as foreign advertisers.³⁰ Using the balance sheets of five Toronto dailies, economist Thomas Walkom has calculated that total advertising receipts had already eclipsed other sources of newspaper revenue by 1898, when they accounted for 73 per cent of gross revenue.³¹ The establishment of American branch plants brought a raft of new consumer goods into the country, and these companies already knew the value of advertising. Since Toronto was at the centre of the country's growth in manufacturing, its papers would have benefited first from increased advertising budgets.

As distribution networks extended outward, advertising followed suit. The establishment of new papers and the improvement of existing ones could be used to gauge investor confidence in local trade conditions. The Fort William *Times-Journal* was an apt case, but so too was the experience of the entire Prairie West. There, the number of dailies and weeklies tripled between 1891 and 1904. These start-ups may have been inspired by the immigrant boom, but readers alone would not have sustained them. Rather, advertisers expanded their publicity with the population, seeking new markets among the new settlers. An officer of the Canadian Press Association estimated that advertising revenue overtook subscriptions as the primary source of income at almost every Canadian paper by the First World War.³²

Trade paper publishers were also quick to capitalize on the growing interest in advertising. Between 1898 and 1908 at least five new journals began serving the advertising trade in Canada. There was a decided novelty in the focus of their news coverage. When an earlier venture appeared in Toronto in 1893, its subtitle declared that it was 'an aid to all interested in advertising.' Nonetheless, its lead article addressed only retailers, the traditional source of local advertising. Manufacturers, the core group of foreign advertisers, were nowhere mentioned. The reverse was true of *Economic Advertising* when it began fifteen years later. Its editors purposefully set out to attract a readership composed of manufacturers and rarely ran articles on retailing. For agencies, the turning point appears to have been 1902. That year, McKim Limited opened its first branch office in Toronto, and its most aggressive rival there promptly responded with an office in Montreal. Toronto adworkers noted a surge in interest in their work, and two new journals appeared in Montreal. A third started in 1905.³³

While their industrial counterparts formed trade associations, established standards, and contemplated mergers, publishers remained decidedly individualistic. Their day-to-day operations often involved ruthless competition with cross-town rivals, and they were relatively isolated from the experience of publishers elsewhere. On the surface, it might have appeared that nothing had changed among the rural weeklies. Few publishers could imagine their trade reduced to an impersonal process reorganized like sugar, steel, or cigarettes to fit within the system of mass production. A newspaper was not a standardized product, but an expression of the editor himself and a reflection of the community he served. Newspapers were far too intimate and local to contemplate corporate consolidation.³⁴