

The Canadian Science Fiction Association

A History

by

Jack Bowie-Reed



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originally published 1953



**American Private Press Association
Stayton, Oregon
1982**

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The spring of 1953 marks the fifth birthday of the Canadian Science Fiction Association, five years of progress and at times retrogression. The fifth year of life, however, has seen a considerable amount of lost ground regained and it is safe to say that the CSFA is in a stronger position today than at any time in its eventful history. This is in large measure due to the strong hand of leadership given it by its president, Chester Cuthbert of Winnipeg.

historical sketches

Science fiction had its dim beginnings in Canada shortly before the outbreak of World War II, the beginnings of which almost all traces have been lost and which constitute the mythology and legends of fandom in Canada. Almost every fan has heard of the early organizations and fanzines of Toronto and Vancouver but try and track them down! The advent of war in 1939 and the patriotism of fans spelled the doom of early fandom.

The first glimmerings of light broke through in 1942 with the trusty work of three of Canada's "senators of fandom". It was in this year that the Canadian Amateur Fantasy Press was formed with three member fanzines. These were *Light*, published in Parry Sound by Les Croutch; *Censored*, published in Kapuskasing by Fred Hunter; and *Canadian Fandom*, published in Toronto by Beak Taylor.

The fall of 1946 saw the formation of the McGill/Montreal Science Fiction Society, which organization adopted *Censored* as its club organ, Fred Hunter having happily moved to the 'City of Sin', 'le petit Paris'.

Not to be outdone, Toronto (the Good, the City of God) produced that organization known as the Derelicts early in 1947. This was followed a few months later by the Lakehead Science Fiction Society in Hamilton. A steady stream of correspondence between the three clubs resulted in the formation of the Canadian Science Fiction Association early in 1948.

expansion and growth

Early 1948 saw the CSFA constituted with three member clubs, called constituent organi-

zations. The concept, only slightly modified since, was that each constituent club would have one vote in the elections for an executive. This club would then appoint the CSFA executive as it saw fit. Any three science fiction and/or fantasy fans could join the CSFA and obtain all membership privileges but would have no vote. The idea behind this was to avoid a scattered executive of perhaps lazy workers and to substitute for this a centralized executive.

The Hamilton club was elected as the first executive and they in turn elected Paul Revey as the first president of the CSFA. This club issued several circular letters and established correspondence with outlying fans so as to bring about the formation of additional clubs. The holding of the Sixth World Science Fiction Convention, the Torcon, in Toronto was used as a propaganda device to stir up interest.

At the Torcon, in the summer of 1948, there were represented four Canadian science fiction clubs, besides the fans from many unorganized centers. The fourth club to be represented was the Picton Science Fiction Society, formed about a month prior to the convention.

These fans held the first CSFA Canada-wide meeting—the main decision at this meeting was to form correspondence clubs so as to enable individual fans in small centres to obtain a vote at CSFA elections through joining such groups. Besides this, amendments were introduced to the constitution and Jack Bowie-Reed was elected to the post of National Organizer. Affiliation was made with the CAFP. Lloyd Eshbach was elected as Honorary President, and a number of projects were delegated to individuals and clubs. Two correspondence clubs were quickly formed. These were the Norther Fantasy Fan Federation, centered on Les Croutch, and the Fantastellar Association, centered on Alastair Cameron at Deep River.

1948 saw the formation of four new science fiction clubs. These were the Deseronto SFS, the Halifax SFS, the Ottawa SFS, and the Thames SFS at London, Ontario. Correspondence was also established with the national organizations in Australia, Great Britain, and the USA with a view towards the formation of a World Science Fiction League.

eastern decline and westward ho!

The dawning of 1949 saw a smoothly functioning CSFA with a published Newsletter, numerous projects underway, and ten con-

stituent clubs functioning. The organization flush with initial success could see nothing but a rosy future ahead.

The first thunderheads had appeared, however, although none in the organization discerned them at that time. The Hamilton organization, although it had expanded until there were close to fifty attending its meetings began to hit organizational snags. The first break occurred with the resignation of Paul Revey, CSFA President, and his replacement by Clare Richards. Several of the founding members of the club moved away from Hamilton during the year and the CSFA commenced to decline, with the decline of the Hamilton club, its Executive. To make matters worse, none of the other constituent clubs felt itself in a position to assume the burden and Hamilton by default continued as the executive body until the fall of 1950.

The only ray of hope in 1949 was the formation of the Windsor SFS during the year and the establishment of contacts in western Canada—particularly in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Brandon, and Winnipeg.

Late 1949 saw the collapse of the Deseronto SFS, bringing the number of constituent clubs back down to ten. Dead rot set in at a fast pace during 1950 and the CSFA seemed doomed to death. The Newsletter had ceased publication and correspondence from Hamilton practically ceased, with the collapse of the Hamilton club early in 1950. In quick succession Halifax gave up the ghost, the London group gasped its last sigh, Windsor coalesced with the Michigan Science Fantasy Society, and the Fantastellar Association ended with Alastair Cameron leaving Deep River. Ottawa quietly declined to nothing early in 1951. The Northern Fantasy Fan Federation almost ceased operating but did not quite give up the ghost. The fall of 1950 saw the National Organizer, Jack Bowie-Reed join Canada's Special Force and leave for service in Korea and Japan.

It was under these circumstances that the Winnipeg SFS was formed in the fall of 1950 and it, together with its organizational difficulties of forming a sound group in Winnipeg, assumed the burden of reviving the CSFA.

reorganization and revitalization

The spring of 1951 saw the CSFA strings picked up one by one and carefully put straight by the new CSFA executive headed by Chester Cuthbert as President and Cam Brown as Secretary. The Newsletter was revived in February of that year and a survey was made of what fans remained and of the state of organization in general. Of the separate clubs that had functioned at one time or another, only three were still in good operational order. These three were the McGill/Montreal club, Picton, and Winnipeg. Toronto and Les Croutch's correspondence group existed as shadows only.

Of all the numerous projects which had been undertaken, only one was still being worked upon and this was near completion. This project was a very complete Fantasy Classification System undertaken by Alastair Cameron. Some fifty-two pages long this was published by the CSFA in 1952. The affiliated CAFP, which at its peak in 1949 had seven member fanzines, had dwindled back down to its original three, and the demise of Canadian Fandom was imminent.

Although a considerable amount of reorganization was accomplished during 1951, little was evident to the fan world in general, as most of the work consisted of laying the foundations of a strong organization. The circulating library project was picked up by the Winnipeg group and several thousand books were assembled throughout 1951 and 1952. The McGill/Montreal group resumed the author pseudonym project and late in 1951 Jack Bowie-Reed was delegated to write a history of Canadian Fandom.

The Canadian Fan Directory, a listing of Canadian fans, from 500 to 1000 in number, was issued in the fall of 1952; although this list contains untold errors and is dated in many of its entries, it is the first step in the establishment of an up-to-date listing of fans in Canada.

Early 1952 saw the formation of the Vancouver SFS and the beginning of the fanzine, *Vanations*, by Norman Browne. This club subsequently affiliated with the CSFA. 1952 also saw the formation of a club in Calgary and of clubs and fanzines in Toronto and Windsor. None of these latter organizations have affiliated with the CSFA as yet. In November, 1952, the Edmonton SFS was organized and this group immediately affiliated with the CSFA.

a rosy future?

Although the number of constituent clubs today are less than half of the peak number of eleven in 1949, the clubs today are better established and are built upon firmer foundations. For the first time since the inception of the CSFA, 1952 has seen the completion of some of the projects undertaken and this should help to solidify its future. Most important of all, however, the CSFA of today has the experience of five years of trials and tribulations behind it and this, more than anything else, should guarantee a future which will dim all past achievements in comparison.

The existence of one club, the Western Science Fiction Association in Calgary, Alberta, which so far has refused to affiliate with the CSFA, should serve as a prod to the CSFA and keep it from falling back into complacency. Nothing helps better than competition and the WSFA's policy of taking members from anywhere in Western Canada should stimulate the CSFA's activities not only in the West but also in the East concurrently. Although affiliation has been sought by the CSFA it perhaps might be better in the long run if the WSFA never affiliated, or at least remained independent for some time to come.

1953

The dawning of 1953 sees the state of the CSFA as follows:

Executive

Honorary President	Lloyd Eshbach
President	Chester Cuthbert
Secretary/Treasurer	Cam Brown
National Organizer	Jack Bowie-Reed

Constituent Clubs

McGill/Montreal SFS	founded fall 1946
Picton SFS	founded summer 1948
Winnipeg SFS	founded fall 1950
Vancouver SFS	founded winter 1951-52
Edmonton SFS	founded fall 1952

Unaffiliated Clubs

Western SF Association	founded spring 1952
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Embryo Groups

Toronto	Windsor
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Total Membership

approximately 150 of which 100 are in the five constituent clubs.

This is produced in an edition of two hundred copies for friends of The American Private Press Association, 112 East Burnett Street, Stayton, Oregon 97383. Additional copies are available for a SASE while supplies last.

The APPA is dedicated to preserving the history and memorabilia of the private press, of which Science Fiction Fandom plays a vital part. We will gratefully receive fanzines, correspondence, photographs, and other memorabilia; all donations are fully tax-deductable.

This chapbook was produced and designed by Mike Horvat.