

ABSTRACT

Reading Fletcher's Commonplace Books: The Breadth of Cultural Influences in New Westminster, British Columbia, 1887-1897

James Gifford
University of Alberta

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~gifford/fletchers.pdf>

My presentation discusses the contents of two commonplace books belonging to Edward Taylor Fletcher of New Westminster, British Columbia, and my current electronic archiving work with the Streetprint Engine. I argue for the complex network of print distribution to Canada's West Coast in the late nineteenth century and the dense cultural associations that attend such materials. I also discuss the practice of electronic archiving of these texts and their parallel distribution via online networks in the twenty-first century. As artifacts of everyday life in the West Coast of Canada, these two folio volumes demonstrate the breadth of cultural resources available to residents of New Westminster, as well as the background of the citizenry during years of great change. Moreover, as textual materials from the years of transition to confederation and the opening of the railway, these books illustrate the strength of cultural ties between major Canadian cities, as well to Britain the United States.

Fletcher moved to Canada at age eleven, was trained as an architect and was involved in the construction of many important buildings and homes in Québec City. He eventually became a land surveyor and established Canada's regulatory system for surveyors. More importantly, he was a longstanding president of the Toronto Literary Association, he wrote under various pseudonyms for a number of periodicals, was a cellist, was known for his great facility with languages, he studied philology, and delivered several academic and religious lectures that were later published. Moreover, he was the author of three published books of poetry and wrote his own memoirs.

Newspaper articles and journal clippings are either glued in like a scrapbook or tucked between pages, evidencing the breadth of materials available to residents of New Westminster—these include literary and newsworthy items taken from the *Ottawa Free Press*, *Toronto Week*, *The Daily Colonist*, *The Montreal Star*, and several European sources such as *The London Daily News* and the American-published *Every Saturday*. I discuss these materials as evidence of a pre-confederation unity among Canadian cities and as evidence of the cultural affinities of a class of West Coasters during the nineteenth century.