

The Canadian Association of Slavists

A BRIEF HISTORY

The idea of forming an association of Canadian teachers of Slavic languages, similar to one existing in the United States, was born at a meeting of teachers of Slavic languages arranged by Professor L. Ignatieff and Professor W. Skey, 21 May 1946 at the University of Toronto. The result of this conference was the founding of the Canadian branch of AATSEEL — the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages. The meeting was attended also by Professor N. A. M. McKenzie, President of AATSEEL, and by Professor Arthur P. Coleman of Columbia University, the initiator and founder of AATSEEL, which had come into being at the conference of teachers of Slavic languages, held 30 December 1941 in Indianapolis.¹

The tragic events of the Second World War, German occupation of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia, the penetration of invading German forces into the very heart of the Soviet Republic, aroused not only the desire but also the need for a better knowledge of Slavic problems, languages and histories. There was another reason for this increase of Canadian interest in Slavic studies: As Professor W. J. Rose rightly observed, “. . . the fact that a substantial fraction of Canadians are descended from or are themselves immigrants from Slav countries.”²

In response to these demands, the universities began to include in their curricula the teaching of Slavic languages, history and literature. As Professor Coleman showed, by 1945 in the United States some 150 institutions at the collegiate level were offering courses in Slavic or other East European languages; 81 presenting instruction in Russian, and twelve providing training in Polish.³

With the termination of the Second World War, the return of army personnel, and more importantly the arrival in Canada of a large number

¹ Victor O. Buyniak, “Slavic Studies in Canada: An Historical Review,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, IX, 1, p. 7.

² W. J. Rose, “Slavonic Studies or Slavic Studies,” *Encyclopedia Canadiana* (Ottawa, 1958), IX, p. 328.

³ Arthur P. Coleman, “Teaching Area Language Courses in the Field of Slavic and East European Studies,” *The American Slavic and East European Review*, IV, 8-9, August 1945, p. 185.

of European intellectuals from displaced persons camps (among them teachers with degrees from Slavic departments of various European universities) offered Canadian universities a welcome addition to the numbers of needed lecturers in the field of Slavic studies.

The first conference of the newly formed AATSEEL of Canada was held 13 June 1947 at the University of Toronto. It was also attended by guests from the American AATSEEL. The membership of the Canadian branch was by then steadily increasing and several universities introduced credited courses in Russian and other Slavic languages. McMaster University in Hamilton even introduced a course in Soviet geography in 1947.⁴

Members of the Canadian and American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages maintained close contacts, attended each other's yearly conferences and exchanged speakers. In 1951 the Canadian and American AATSEEL conferences were held at the same time, 27-29 December. The Canadian conference convened at the Assumption College in Windsor and the American conference was held at Wayne University in Detroit just across the river from Windsor. On the opening day, 27 December, AATSEEL of Canada arranged a joint luncheon in Windsor with Professor Edward Micek, President of AATSEEL as guest speaker. In the evening of the same day, Professor V. J. Kaye, President of the Canadian AATSEEL was introduced by Professor Micek and addressed the American conference at Wayne University.⁵

The seventh annual conference of AATSEEL of Canada was held 31 May 1954 at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg jointly with the Learned Societies of Canada. It was attended by 26 members. In his opening address, the President of AATSEEL of Canada brought up the question which led to discussion and the subsequent formation of the Canadian Association of Slavists. He said:

AATSEEL of Canada was originally started on very broad lines, patterned on a similar, elder organization functioning in the neighboring United States. With the growth of interest in Slavic studies in Canada and with the establishment of Slavic departments

⁴ Buyniak, p. 9.

⁵ *Circular*. Eighth Annual Meeting of AATSEEL, Wayne University, Detroit, Michigan, 27-29 December 1951.

at a number of our leading universities, we were faced with specifically Canadian problems which touched wider fields, reaching beyond pure language instruction. The membership of the Association has gradually changed its composition, embracing professors and lecturers of Slavic disciplines in general. The subjects included in Slavic studies deal now with history, philology, ethnography, sociology, social and political economy, etc. Thus the membership of our association also is composed of historians, philologists, sociologists. At the same time it has narrowed predominantly to members of academic faculties. It has become an organization where problems of common interest can be discussed and ideas exchanged. I sincerely believe that the Association would benefit and grow in strength if we broaden our membership by not restricting it to actual members of academic faculties, but expanding it by the inclusion of scholars and students of Slavistics engaged in research, and those who have already established a name in the field of Slavic studies.

To be able to achieve our aims, there arises the necessity of establishing our own periodical publication where the members and invited contributors could express their opinions and publish their research findings.⁶

After a thorough discussion, the conference approved unanimously the adoption of the name "Canadian Association of Slavists", decided to apply to the Royal Society of Canada for status as a Learned Society, and appointed a committee to draft a constitution. In 1955, the Association confirmed its constitution and was recognized by the Royal Society as one of the Learned Societies of Canada.

In 1956 the first volume of the *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, the official organ of the CAS, made its appearance. In his Foreword, Professor George Simpson said:

This first volume sponsored by the CAS is the beginning of a publishing enterprise which seeks to promote Slavic studies and offer a practical way by which these studies may be made known in Canada and elsewhere.

⁶ Address by V. J. Kaye, President of AATSEEL of Canada, delivered at the opening of the Seventh Annual Conference of AATSEEL of Canada, 31 May 1954, University of Manitoba.

The Canadian Association of Slavists is a professional organization of those directly engaged in teaching the Slavic languages or the cognate fields of cultural and historical studies. In addition it includes associate members who have a special interest in the promotion of Slavic studies. The Association seeks to maintain a close connection between the Slavists in all large centres of Canada, and also with similar Associations outside Canada.⁷

In 1974 the Canadian Association of Slavists enters its twentieth year of very productive activity. It has made a valuable contribution to the furthering of Slavic studies in Canada and has acted as a link between scholars of Slavic studies in Canada and abroad.

V. J. Kaye
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⁷ George W. Simpson, "Foreword," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, I, 1956, p. iii.