

Library and Archives Canada Foundation funds purchase of unique centuries-old Canadian legal heritage documents

The Library and Archives Canada Foundation has provided the necessary funding for the acquisition by Library and Archives Canada (LAC) of four rare and important British legislative documents dating from the reigns of Charles II and James II over 300 years ago, and William IV and the early Victorian period nearly two centuries ago.

The acquisition comprises four original British Acts of Parliament, which are the foundation stones for a significant part of Canada's legislative and constitutional history. Moreover, they appear to be the only examples of these Acts in any Canadian library.

Since LAC's primary statutory objective is to acquire and preserve Canada's documentary heritage, these documents are central to that responsibility. The Foundation's support has allowed LAC to acquire:

- *Habeas Corpus Act* (1679)—The rights within this Act are an essential part of the British legal tradition inherited by Canada. They have been enshrined in Section 10 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and form the first part of the Constitution Act, 1982.
- *Bill of Rights* (1689)—This Bill is fully entrenched in Canadian constitutional law and forms the legal foundation upon which our parliamentary democracy is exercised.
- *Slavery Abolition Act* (1833)—This Act was a catalyst for Canada's "Underground Railroad", which helped countless numbers of African-American slaves seeking freedom from bondage in the United States to escape to Canada.
- *Abbreviation Act* (1850)—Also known as the *Interpretation Act*, this Act has particular significance given its gender-equality statement, which was the first of its kind in the British – and consequently the Canadian – legislative system.

The age of the documents and the small initial print runs add to the rarity of these records, and their acquisition represents a unique opportunity for LAC in its acquisition and preservation of Canada's documentary heritage. Not surprisingly, they are the only examples held by any Canadian library.

Established in 2018, the Library and Archives Canada Foundation has been raising funds to support programming and partnerships, to grow and preserve the collection, and to promote LAC. This acquisition marks the first financial contribution from the Foundation.

Quotes

"I am delighted that the LAC Foundation has helped add these seminal pieces of pre-Confederation, indeed ancient, British legislation to Library and Archives Canada's collection. The legacies of these Acts resonate today and remain central to the preservation of our country's legal history and character."

Jacques J.M. Shore, Chair of the LAC Foundation

"I wish to thank the LAC Foundation for their hard work and dedication to our institution, and for helping LAC bring important material such as this into the national collection. We are very pleased to now hold these pivotal historical items in their original print form. They provide exciting future opportunities for research, preservation and exhibition."

Leslie Weir, Librarian and Archivist of Canada