A “Honey” of a Union Deal: The Labour Activism of Carleton University Librarians 1973–1975

Martha Attridge Bufton, BBA (Hons), MA Concordia University Libraries Research Forum April 14, 2014
Radical change

1975
• Carleton University professors became the 1st in Ontario to certify their faculty association
• Carleton’s librarians were charter members of this bargaining unit.
• This was a radical change for the librarians—most of whom were women.

Why unionize?
A desire for higher occupational status & workplace equity, measured broadly as:
• the right to negotiate terms and conditions of work
• this included pay and promotional scales

No “honey deal”
Carleton librarians knew one option was to join a union of all non-managerial library employees.

But according to Susan Jackson, while University librarian Geoffrey Briggs might have wanted a “a honey union of all the library staff that he would, of course, then have some nice influence on,” the librarians were opposed.

They were interested in gaining more power for themselves, not Mr. Briggs, and thus an alliance with Carleton academic staff.
Librarians: Efforts began early 1974

Valerie Swinton writes to the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) in May, 1974:

“Neither academic nor nonacademic”
Academic status
Question of occupational status

Complex relationship involving:

- Identity as professionals and academics
- Standing, measured in part by salary and promotional opportunities
Identity ~ gendered nature of work

- Librarianship as professional
- Librarianship as academic
- Both designations traditionally masculine but changing
Standing:
Random salaries and no promotional structure
A need for association

• Formed the Association of Professional Librarians of Carleton University (APLCU) in Nov. 1974

• Continued to seek an alliance with a larger group
  o Carleton University Academic Staff Association (CUASA): throughout 1974
  o Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)
  o PIPSC (Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada)
  o Not Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
    • Organizing public libraries; each library a local including all professional and non-professional staff
The appeal of CUASA
CUASA was interested

“There were some real problems … some really nasty stuff … a lot of sexual harassment … no daycare … no maternity leave … and of course that was the beginning of making common cause with the librarians, because the librarians were mostly women, and we participated in things to do with the women’s movement and that kind of thing, a fairly firm alliance, that was very important over the years, both the unionization itself and getting a good collective agreement …”

Professor Jill Vickers, former CUASA president, oral history interview, 2011
Carleton’ academic staff begin to organize in Nov./Dec. 1974
Key issue?
Occupational status: Job security, wages and the “rule of law”
February 1975

- APLCU holds “famous” meeting to discuss options
- The majority vote in favour of joining CUASA
What the librarians didn’t do

Photo credit: Archives and Special Collections, Morisset Library, University of Ottawa, Ontario (Canada), X10-1, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives (CWMA), P-X10-1-136/Amanda Bankier (Based on)
Summer of 1975

Successful collective bargaining:

- Better salaries
- Official rankings & promotion program

Effectively achieved “equal pay for work of equal value”

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**RECOMMENDATION 1:**

Carleton University professional librarians should be classified within the ranks of

- LIBRARIAN I
- LIBRARIAN II
- LIBRARIAN III
- LIBRARIAN IV
15.4 Rights and Responsibilities of Professional Librarian Employees

(a) Professional librarians have the right and responsibility to devote their energies conscientiously to the development of their professional competence and, if engaged in research, scholarship or teaching, their scholarly competence and effectiveness as teachers.

(b) It is the responsibility of professional librarians to deal fairly and ethically with those to whom they render their professional services, to foster a free exchange of ideas, to avoid discrimination and to respect the principles of confidentiality in a manner consistent with the performance of their professional role.

(c) Professional librarians shall have the right and responsibility to adopt reasonable means to maintain a learning environment in the Library which is both orderly and productive.

(d) Professional librarians, if involved in scheduled instruction shall not cancel nor terminate such scheduled instruction except for good reason and shall where possible give their students notice of such cancellation and notice of any rescheduling of cancelled instruction.
“Honey” deal:
“Rather sweet”