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# *The Evolution of Ontario's Hansard*

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*The name Hansard comes from Thomas Hansard, the man who as an unofficial observer is generally credited with first reporting the debates in the House of Commons at Westminster. In 1811, Thomas was the son of Luke Hansard, the official printer to the House of Commons. He later became the official reporter, printer and publisher of the report of debates. His name has served as the unofficial title for this document in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries ever since and has been officially recognized in recent years. It is now included on the covers of the reports of debates of several Parliaments, including those of the Ontario Legislature.*

**by Peter Brannan**

**H**ansard-style reporting did not begin in Ontario until 1944, but the Journals of the House have been printed from the very first session of the first Legislature, following Confederation in 1867. The Journals comprised orders of the day, bills, and some excerpts from speeches. Later, in the 1920s, there was a Hansard-style reporting of the Committee of Public Accounts and for some years prior to 1944 it was the practice to report the speeches of the party leaders and financial critics.

## **The Shorthand Years**

Ontario Hansard first reported a complete session with the 21st Legislature, which ran from February 23 to April 5, 1944. The report was produced by shorthand writers and typewritten. Onion-skin carbon copies were made for distribution to the Premier, each cabinet minister and for the party leaders.

The debates of that year ran to 2,613 typewritten pages. The final page bears the signatures of the four Hansard reporters, testifying before a notary public "that the foregoing is a true

and accurate record of what has been said in the session." One of those who signed was court reporter R.C. Sturgeon who, with his colleagues, worked on the Ontario Hansard part time until 1956. Mr. Sturgeon died many years ago but one of the amanuenses with whom he worked, the late Eileen McFadden, carried on as head of the tape reporting staff until April 1980. Another, Fern Welch, worked as a part-time tape reporter long after her formal retirement, to within months of her death in February, 1986.

The spring Legislative session of 1945 (February 15 to March 22) was produced in mimeographed form. This followed the request at the beginning of that session of Agnes MacPhail (CCF Member for York East) who suggested that each member should receive a copy of the transcript. Premier Drew also expressed dissatisfaction with the previous arrangement of onion-skin paper copies, only one of which had been available to each party. That session totalled 2,033 typed pages.

Following an election shortly thereafter, the first session of the 22nd Legislature opened on July 16, 1945, lasting only three days and filling only 390 typewritten Hansard pages. The 1946 session contained 2,404 pages and was again mimeographed and the pages subsequently stitched into the large formally bound copies to be found in the Legislative Library.

## **Printing of Hansard**

The first formally printed Ontario Hansard was produced in 1947. The printer was Garden City Press of Toronto, and the type used was 10 on 11 point Baskerville. The year's volume totalled 1,145 printed pages which was probably equivalent to

*Peter Brannan*

*is Chief of Hansard*

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roughly double that number of typescript pages. The 1948 Hansard was printed by Ryerson Press and contained 1,251 pages. In 1949, the format was changed to Caledonia type; the session lasted from February 10 to April 8 and totalled 2,158 pages.

The earliest form of index had appeared in the typewritten 1946 Ontario Hansard with a list of speakers and subjects, plus an index of bills. This was bound in at the front of Volume 1. The first printed Hansard index in 1947 followed the same format and contained an errata section. In 1955 the style of the Hansard index was changed so that the order became: bills, index by speaker and index by subject.

There was a return to mimeographed production of the Hansard and index through the years 1950 to 1953. This departure from formal printing followed the reported observation of then Premier Leslie Frost that for the price of printing Hansard he could pave nine miles of Ontario highway. The mimeographed pages are not numbered except by reporters "takes" and the indexes of those years again list R.C. Sturgeon as Chief Hansard Reporter.

Formal printing by Ryerson Press resumed in 1954. The 10 on 11 point Caledonia type was retained and the debates for that year filled 1,302 pages. The volumes for following years grew to 1,508 pages in 1955, 1,726 pages in 1956 and 2,011 pages in 1957.

The Hansard type size was reduced to 8 on 9 point Caledonia in 1958 and this helped reduce the total number of pages to 1,378.

### **Tape Recording Introduced**

At the commencement of each session in the fifties and sixties, the Premier would move a resolution authorizing Mr. Speaker to "employ an editor of debates and speeches, and the necessary stenographers, at such rates of compensation as may be agreed to by him."

The year 1957 saw a major change in the method of producing Hansard. Up until that time Ontario's report of debates was produced by shorthand writers who dictated their notes to typists (or amanuenses). These people were usually members of local court reporting staffs who worked part time during the Legislative sessions, on an hourly rate or contract basis.

Difficulty in finding the highly skilled shorthand writers required for this task prompted the move to tape recording.. There was already one microphone located on each pair of members' desks as part of the sound system in the Legislature. The output from these was recorded on one-quarter inch reel-to-reel tape and transcribed, using regular stenographic dictating machines, by the same typists who had served in conjunction with the shorthand writers. Mr. Sturgeon, though near death, worked on the editing of the debates from his hospital bed.

Hansard production continued as a part-time operation and Ernest Burrows took over the contract in 1958. There was something of an emergency in 1960 as a result of the resignation of Mr. Burrows and the Speaker of that day, William Murdoch, initiated enquiries at the nearby offices of Maclean-Hunter Publishing Company, on University Avenue (where his daughter Joan was employed as an advertising production assistant), for someone to take over the transcription and editing of Hansard, at short notice.

It was at this point that several members of the subsequent full-time Hansard team became involved with the production of the report of debates. Several Maclean-Hunter editors, led by Peter Brannan, Ernest Hemphill and Don Cameron, worked in the evenings with the existing team of typists led by Eileen McFadden.

At that time the Legislature sat for only three or four months each year. The editors were employed by various publishing houses during the day and arrived at Queen's Park at 6 p.m. to work in the now unused west-end fifth-floor garret until 10 or 11 p.m., and often later. As the editors made their way up University Avenue they would look apprehensively for the red lights in the window at the centre of the top of the building that would signify a night sitting. (Many years later the red light would be replaced by a white one – not through any sense of moral decorum but because the white light was deemed non-partisan!).

The Hansard crew also moved down from the fifth floor to the third, but not before they had transcribed and edited the words of Donald MacDonald, leader of the New Democratic Party, who said during a debate on the fabric of the Legislative Building that the fifth floor was a firetrap from which no one could possibly escape.

The part-time staff contract operation lasted a further ten years. By 1970, with the steady growth of the legislative year and the extension of Hansard reporting to estimates committees outside the Chamber, the part-time operation was no longer practicable.

### **Full-time Operation**

The Hansard Reporting Service became a full-time branch of the Office of the Speaker in February, 1970, with considerable autonomy, the chief being responsible only to the Speaker of the Legislature for prompt and accurate reproduction of the debates and subject only to his directives.

This degree of autonomy was maintained, in terms of the legislative and political independence of Hansard, when the operation became part of the Office of the Legislative Assembly on its formation in 1975. For administrative and budgetary purposes, however, the Editor of Debates (Chief of Hansard) now reports to the Clerk of the Legislature and comes under the jurisdiction of the Board of Internal Economy, an all-party management committee.

The full time group carried on with the use of tape recording in the production of Hansard but the increasing complexity and volume of debates soon rendered reel-to-reel transcribing obsolete. The recording process became increasingly important and the conversion was made to standard cassettes, but using custom designed equipment capable of recording on up to four tracks simultaneously.

The remarks of the various speakers are recorded on one track and the identification of the speakers is provided on a second track, by the audio operators in the Chamber speaking into microphones attached to their headsets. The remaining two tracks were originally intended to facilitate the recording of interjections but were subsequently disconnected to prevent the possibility of electronic eavesdropping. Recording then reverted to the standard two-track.

By 1975 each member of the Legislature had an individual microphone. The audio operators, who sit at a console somewhat reminiscent of a theatre organ, switch the various mikes on and off and this action also provides direction for the semi-automatic video Hansard television cameras. These were installed in the Chamber during the 1986 summer recess following the unanimous agreement of all parties, through the Board of Internal Economy. Video Hansard is now televised over Rogers Cable and other broadcast outlets across Ontario, as well as through an internal Queen's Park network.

Additional help with the identification of speakers and with the reporting of off-mike interjections is provided by shorthand reporters who sit at a table in the chamber. The reporters do not attempt to take down the entire debate but merely to note those remarks that may be pertinent but which would not otherwise be recorded. Interjections are generally considered "out of order" and are not included in Hansard unless the speaker who has the floor responds, or the interjection provokes some intervention on the part of Mr. Speaker or the Chair. This policy was initiated following lengthy discussion among members of the Canadian Hansard Association and in consultation with Speakers of provincial legislatures. It is now widely adopted.

When Ryerson Press went out of business in the mid 70s, a number of staff members and much of Ryerson's equipment was taken over by The Carswell Company, which continued to print Hansard for a number of years. Ed Oliver, composing room foreman when he supervised Hansard work on the stone at Ryerson's in 1954, rose to assistant sales manager for The Carswell Company. The University of Toronto Press took over the printing of Hansard in January, 1984, following one of the periodic contract tenders.

The connection with Ryerson Press was maintained for many years through Arthur Staubitz, who served there as a Hansard proofreader from 1948 on, and who joined the permanent Hansard staff as an Indexer in 1971. His research provided much of the early statistical information on Ontario's Hansard contained in this report. He also produced biographical information on Ontario's Legislature dating back

to the commencement of the 21st Legislature on August 4, 1943, which remains in our reference library. Mr. Staubitz retired in November, 1980, but carried on as a part-time editor for several years until shortly before his death in March, 1987.

Many problems formerly associated with the production of Hansard in Ontario were due to the extreme peaks and valleys in workload. Sessions were relatively short but extremely hectic and the small staff was expected to stay abreast of the debate and to provide its reports expeditiously. This resulted in long hours and considerable strain upon individuals. The situation has been eased in that respect by the build up of committee activity during recesses, permitting consequent increases in permanent staff.

The greatly increased demand for committee service during a period of minority government (1978-80) led to the creation of separate Ontario House and committee Hansard reporting groups. The committee section was established in the Whitney Block, across the road from the Parliament Building, with communication through the tunnel under Queen's Park Crescent. This arrangement was terminated when the volume of committee work subsided after the 1981 election, but the steady increase in committee work is currently causing substantial delays in Hansard delivery. Outside court reporting services are used as necessary in an attempt to relieve the pressure and improve delivery times.

Ontario Hansard's policy with regard to language of debate is identical to that of the province of Quebec.

***Hansard reports and publishes a member's speech in the language it is delivered (either English or French) but without translation.***

The use of any language other than English or French is not permitted under the standing orders of the Legislature; if and when this rule is overlooked, Hansard merely notes that remarks were delivered in a specific language, without reporting the details.

### **Introduction of Computers**

Word and data processing terminals have become standard equipment in the improved efficiency of Hansard operations. Computers were first used to produce the cumulative index, which is updated in periodic printouts, followed by the introduction of word processing equipment for the tape reporters and editors. The visual display terminals and their relatively silent keyboards have considerably facilitated the tape reporters' and editors' tasks, while necessitating a reduction in their formerly excessive working hours.

The editors work directly on the VDT screens rather than editing on the traditional "hard copy" manuscript or paper. This

development greatly improved the appearance and readability of those committee transcripts that were not formally printed, and speeded up and facilitated the final printing process of the remainder, providing substantial cost savings.

In effect Hansard staffers have replaced the commercial printer's manual typesetters, the output from their terminals being revised and stored in a small central computer for transmission directly, via telephone data link, to the printer's typesetting computer. The resulting cold-type/offset printing process has considerably streamlined the whole operation. The next step being implemented to reduce production costs is the use of a laser printer to produce camera-ready Hansard pages, in-house, thus eliminating the cost of commercial typesetting altogether.

Word processing also provides many advantages for the tape reporters and editors, such as rapid reference to glossaries (or dictionaries) of names, titles and other frequently used material. A built-in dictionary is used to verify spellings, while incorrect proper names or titles recurring in any batch of copy can be searched out and corrected, by a "search and replace" function.

For many years only the debates in the Chamber, and those committees considering estimates, were formally printed and subsequently produced as bound volumes, with the deliberations of other committees printed formally only by specific motion of the Legislature.

Transcripts of all other committees, standing or select, were produced at the discretion of the committees themselves and reproduced by means of computer printout and photo copier. In practice, virtually all committees availed themselves of this transcript service.

Studies of Ontario legislative procedures in the seventies (the Camp Commission and the Morrow Committee) led to recommendations that all committees should be formally printed, as they are in Ottawa and in the province of Quebec. This recommendation was endorsed by the Legislative Assembly standing committee in 1985, but was not implemented, due to the increased printing cost entailed.

***The formal printing of all Ontario standing and select committee proceedings was finally approved in the latest amendments to the Standing Orders passed by the Legislature on July 25, 1989 and became effective on October 9, 1989.***

Generally speaking, a draft transcript of the debate in the Legislature is available within one or two hours of the actual proceedings, while the formal printing is held up for one full day, to enable queries to be pursued and for corrections to be incorporated. The printed Hansard is delivered to members'

desks the second day following debate. Committee reports are usually produced in transcript form within three to ten days of the meeting, depending upon the volume of work, and printed reports are usually available within a further three to five working days.

### **Future Developments**

Ontario Hansard converted from manual shorthand coverage to tape recording just a little over 30 years ago, but it now appears that a development called Computer Assisted Transcription (CAT) could result in our reverting to shorthand reporting. A computer program has been created that can convert the output from a stenotype reporting machine into plain language – on a screen or printer – virtually instantaneously.

We are still assessing the probable impact of this development upon our tape recording operation. Although CAT is in use and has made substantial inroads in court reporting and other applications, it is still not evident whether it is acceptable in the demanding parliamentary environment.

CAT stenotype operators have been covering the Queen's Park question period on a verbatim basis since October of 1986, as part of the television service to the hearing impaired (without any interjections or off-mike remarks, it should be said) simply by sitting and watching the video Hansard display. If we were to take advantage of this technology, the much sought after first draft of the question period could be made available much more rapidly than is possible under our present system.

Certainly, this output would need careful editing. We would still record, and listen through the tapes as we do now, to verify the text and generally clean up the debate. We would also still employ shorthand interjectionists in the chamber, to help with the off-mike remarks we require occasionally in order to make an exchange between speakers complete.

CAT would seem to be of most practical use in reporting the Legislative Chamber, where speakers generally are recognized by Mr. Speaker and stand to make their contributions. Tape reporting would still be the necessary medium in committees, where speakers remain seated and where we sometime have to decide, after the fact, which discussion we should be reporting!

The outstanding advantage achieved by the adoption of CAT would appear to be increased speed of delivery of the House material. But what would be most intriguing is that, having converted from shorthand to tape operation over 30 years ago, Ontario's Hansard would be reverting to shorthand coverage once again. Full circle! ♦