

Histoire de l'imprimerie au Québec : portraits d'ateliers, 1938-1967. Par Éric Leroux. (Sherbrooke : Ex Libris, 2005. 268 p., ann., ill., ISBN 2-921061-15-5)

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[See table of contents](#)

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Histoire de l'imprimerie au Québec: portraits d'ateliers, 1938-1967.
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Trade journals have been published in Canada since the late nineteenth century to inform business owners and workers of activities and innovation in their industry. It provide today's researcher with first-hand information about personalities, working conditions, buildings, and equipment. For students of the book trades *Canadian Printer and Publisher*, launched in 1892 as part of Maclean-Hunter's expanding list, remains a standard source. In this volume Éric Leroux, adjunct professor at the School of Library and Information Science, University of Montreal, introduces *Le Maître imprimeur*, founded in 1937, as the official organ of l'Association des maîtres-imprimeurs de Montréal. With a disclaimer about comprehensiveness, and no explanation of criteria for selection, Leroux presents an anthology of seventy short company profiles, almost all drawn from issues of *Le Maître imprimeur*. Half date from the 1950s and three from the 1930s, with the remainder split between the 1940s and 1960s. Not surprisingly the majority are Montreal firms; but articles from Quebec and smaller centres such as Chicoutimi, Jonquière, and Saint-Jérôme offer a useful counterpoint. This diversity could have been identified by adding place names to the table of contents which organizes the firms into six sections as general printers, specialized trades, newspaper printers, religious communities, printer-publishers, and paper makers.

In a twenty-page introductory essay Leroux sketches the first two hundred years of printing in Quebec, starting in 1764 with the arrival from Philadelphia of William Brown and Thomas Gilmore. In June of that year they launched the *Quebec Gazette / La Gazette de Québec*. Among their early imprints were almanacs and printing jobs ordered by merchants, government, and religious communities, a pattern of diversification that sustained printers in "l'époque artisanale" from 1764 to 1860. Since literacy was low in this period, 36.8% in the 1840s,

Quebec printers were an elite among workers, organized for cultural activities and to claim their rights. With technical advances in press and papermaking, and the introduction of mechanical typesetting, the years from 1860 to 1900 were marked by a series of strikes as small shops gave way to industrial production. In the final section Leroux addresses questions of professionalization and specialization as he identifies major figures in the trades from 1900 to 1960. No references link this essay to the articles extracted from *Le Maître imprimeur*, and there is no index identifying themes and individuals discussed.

The business profiles are almost wholly optimistic, celebrating master printers, their families and successors, anniversaries, and new buildings suitably blessed by the clergy. Recognition of long-serving workers prompts details of employee benefits while visits to several plants report an inventory of presses by make and size, as well as ruling machines and binding equipment. We learn that in 1949 Stewart's could obtain replacement parts for presses by air from England in thirty-six to forty-eight hours. And we meet Euclide Pilon, an employer of eight, four of them his children, still printing on hand presses at l'Imprimerie Artistique in 1951. Answering the usual absence of women from the record are two sketches: l'Imprimerie Leduc et Vézina, a two-woman shop at Quebec, and La Reliure d'Art Française (placed by error among the printers), a bindery operated for twenty years by Ms Moisan, a veteran of forty-three years in the trade.

Although a stronger apparatus would make the contents more accessible, the volume is nicely produced with sixteen small photographs illustrating a variety of workplaces. Typographical errors are not numerous but readers should correct the date of John Lovell's twelve steam presses from 1836 to 1866 (p. 21), and note that pages 57 to 112 are misnumbered in the table of contents.

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