

Obituary

Patrick “Paddy” Drysdale (1929–2020)

WRITTEN BY STEFAN DOLLINGER and VICTORIA NEUFELDT



Paddy and Olwen Drysdale, on a cruise in Scotland several years ago (Photo courtesy of the family)

Patrick Dockar Drysdale, Paddy to those who knew him, passed away on December 9, 2020 in hospital in Oxford, England, after a brief illness. Canadian linguistics owes a lot to Paddy. A longtime member of the *Canadian Linguistic*

Association, Paddy held central roles in the field for nearly 30 years, roles mostly out of the limelight yet essential. Paddy was the last of the founding generation of linguists who were centrally concerned with the original description and codification of Canadian English.

A degree holder from Oxford, Paddy was Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Memorial University in Newfoundland from 1956 to 1959. In 1959 he left Memorial, lured by the offer of a newly established editorial position with the publisher W. J. Gage Inc. in Toronto to oversee, in close collaboration with Canadian linguists, the research, development and production of the *Dictionary of Canadian English* series for schools. The three dictionaries in the series were based on the Scott-Foresman school dictionaries, thoroughly revised and edited for their intended Canadian audience. The new dictionaries were published successively in 1962 (*The Beginning Dictionary*), 1964 (*The Intermediate Dictionary*), and 1967 (*The Senior Dictionary*). Starting from existing dictionaries and thoroughly adapting every entry for the intended audience – and adding and purging some – is industry practice to this day. In the 1990s, at the height of the Canadian dictionary war, the method would be held against the *Gage Canadian Dictionary* (1997), which was the fifth edition of *The Senior Dictionary*, by critics who had lost their connection with lexicography.

Concurrently with this commitment to the school dictionaries, the publisher, under the leadership of the vice-president of publishing, W. R. Wees, had taken on an enormous venture, a first in Canadian publishing: a historical dictionary of Canadianisms. And so, soon after he arrived, Paddy found himself intimately involved with that lexicographical flagship project, DCHP-1 (Avis et al. 1967). He was the sole editorial staff member devoted to overseeing the four dictionaries, which, collectively, “succeeded in bringing Canadian English into print, and, more importantly, into our consciousness” (Chambers 2019). Paddy took special pride in DCHP-1 throughout his life. It was, in the words of Sidney Landau, then with Random House, “the best thing to happen in lexicography since Mathews’ *Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* [in 1951]” (Dollinger 2019: 129). Very high praise from the competition indeed.

Born in Shropshire, England, on 9 July, 1929 and named William Patrick Rolleston Dockar-Drysdale (with or without the hyphen, Paddy the editor might have remarked). Paddy had arrived in St. John’s, Newfoundland in 1955, working as stage manager with the London Theatre Company. He had long been interested in theatre and was traveling with his young wife, Olwen (Rasbridge), also employed by the LTC. When the theatre season ended and the company returned to London, Paddy and Olwen decided to stay in Canada when he was offered the position at Memorial University. Paddy’s interest in language and expressions of identity led him to become a major figure in the study of Canadian English, as he focused on dialectology and lexicography. In 1959, he left his safe tenure-track environment “almost on a whim” (Drysdale in Dollinger 2019: 100) to join W. J. Gage in Toronto and shoulder the responsibility for what was an audacious new dictionary publishing project whose conceptual underpinnings then only existed as a vague idea. The dictionaries would become the first full dictionary series of any variety

of English beyond British and American and as such, innovative in a World Englishes perspective that would gestate only much later. The project would produce decidedly descriptive and uncompromisingly Canadian reference works. As in-house coordinating editor, Paddy oversaw the conception, creation, production and multiple revisions of the titles between 1958 and 1982, in close collaboration with a team of academic linguists around Walter S. Avis (1919–1979), Charles J. Lovell (1907–1960), Matthew H. Scargill (1916–1997), Robert J. Gregg (1912–1998), Douglas Leechman (1890–1980) and Charles Crate (1915–1960).

Patrick Drysdale was there from beginning to end of the four original projects: the three dictionaries in the *Dictionary of Canadian English* series plus the created-from-scratch *Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*. He was listed on the title page as one of the authors of DCHP-1 and also made significant contributions to the content of the three school dictionaries. But, as the only in-house editor working full-time on the first editions of all four projects, Paddy was more than an author; he was the linchpin, the person who coordinated everything, who shepherded the different stages and deadlines of each book as it progressed from initial writing and editing through to the finished book coming hot off the bindery rollers and heading for the warehouse. The strong and constant support of the publisher, especially W. R. Wees, vice president of publishing, and support from government agencies, were crucial to the success of the effort, but without Patrick Drysdale in his spot, unfailingly cool and competent, none of the dictionaries would ever have seen the light of day.

Paddy helped give Canadians a linguistic voice of their own. His efforts at Gage had by the 1980s broken the dominance of American and British dictionaries and established Canadian-made dictionaries as the leading reference works in Canada (Dollinger 2019: 125). When a second edition of the historical *Canadianisms* dictionary was eventually published on 17 March 2017 (www.dchp.ca/dchp2), 50 years after DCHP-1 and 57 years to the day after the passing of founding editor Charles Lovell, Paddy wrote the foreword, linking the born-digital DCHP-2 with his own project from “a pre-digital age, [when] each quotation was transcribed onto a six by four-inch citation slip” (Drysdale 2017).

Paddy took his responsibility as the last surviving member of DCHP-1’s editorial team seriously. Then in his late 80s, he, along with his wife Olwen, actively assisted the research effort behind the history of the making of Canadian English (Dollinger 2019) and were everywhere recognised as wise, good-humored and very generous interlocutors with impressive memories. The “Big Six”, Paddy and his five co-editors of DCHP-1, with UBC’s Robert J. Gregg, turned the once-thought-ridiculous idea of “Canadian English” into an empirically proven concept that succeeding scholars have, either expressly or implicitly, built on. Beginning with the collection of the late Charles J. Lovell, Paddy and “his” team managed to do so in less than a decade, the equivalent of a flicker of an eyelash in the notoriously long timelines of historical lexicography. DCHP-1 enriched the Canadian Centennial celebrations in 1967 with a linguistic angle that Paddy and chief editor Wally Avis saw, against the odds, to fruition in November of that year. Paddy considered his role as “editor of last resort” in

his projects. This moniker captures well his unwavering commitment to Canadian English: when all else failed, Paddy was there to make it happen.

The *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* has, doubtless, been the central forum in the study of Canadian English. This can be noted not only in research papers but also in the obituaries found in its volumes. The present obituary for Paddy follows Avis' own obituary for Charles J. Lovell, DCHP-1's founding editor (Avis 1960). Paddy's obituary for Walter S. Avis, the chief editor of DCHP-1, predates the present obituary by four decades (Drysdale 1980). While the circle is now closed, the legacy lives on.

Avis, Walter S. 1960. Charles J. Lovell. + March 17, 1960. Obituary. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 6(2): 98.

Avis, Walter S., Charles Crate, Patrick Drysdale, Douglas Leechman, Matthew H. Scargill and Charles J. Lovell, eds. 1967. *A Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*. Toronto: W. J. Gage. Online at www.dchp.ca/dchp1

Chambers, J. K. 2019. Fourth cover of Dollinger (2019).

DCHP-2 = Dollinger, Stefan and Margery Fee, eds. 2017. *DCHP-2: Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles, Second Edition*. With the assistance of Baillie Ford, Alexandra Gaylie and Gabrielle Lim. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, www.dchp.ca/dchp2

Dollinger, Stefan. 2019. *Creating Canadian English: the Professor, the Mountaineer, and a National Variety of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Drysdale, Patrick D. 1980. Walter S. Avis – a tribute. *English World-Wide* 1(1): 125–28.

Drysdale, Patrick D. 2017. Foreword. In *DCHP-2*. <https://www.dchp.ca/dchp2/pages/foreword#drysdale>