

Preface

This biography is about a little-known 19th-century Canadian who was one of the early pioneers in communications.

Most of what is known about Charles Fenerty is through his poetry and letters. In 1955, Dr. Charles Bruce Fergusson of the Nova Scotia Archives wrote a short biography of Fenerty. But the research involved was not detailed, and the book never caught the interest of others (perhaps because it was more genealogy than biography). Fenerty's achievement, however, is the focus of this book: the invention of modern paper.

On Canada Day 1987, Canada Post issued four stamps commemorating four Canadian inventors in communications: Reginald Aubrey Fessenden (AM radio), Charles Fenerty (newsprint), Georges-Edouard Desbarats and William Leggo (half-tone engraving), and Frederick Newton Gisborne (undersea telegraph). Canada has often been thought of as a leader in communications. Little wonder, when you add Alexander Graham Bell to that list.

But Charles Fenerty was more than a leader in communications; his writings indicate a deeper insight. This book contains thirty-two of his poems that span over fifty years of his life. His first (known) poem, "The Prince's Lodge," was written when he was about 17, and his final poem, "Sir Provo Wallis," was written just a few weeks before his death. His three-part canto, written in Australia in the mid-1800s, was a great feat—the mark of an adventurer. However, these poems, and others, were lost and unknown for many decades. This book is the first to publish them in over a century. Two poems, "Betula Nigra" and "Essay on Progress," appeared in pamphlet form in the mid-1800s and were widely known. Others appeared in newspapers. But evidence suggests that more exist.

Debate as to who invented ground-wood pulp first has not yet been settled, and this biography does not resolve the issue. However, I do explore the history of paper and some of the people who played a key roll in its development: Ts'ai Lun, René-Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, Matthias Koops, Friedrich Gottlob Keller, and Charles Fenerty.

Growing up, I was constantly reminded by my grandmother that Charles Fenerty invented modern paper, and that he was also my great-great-great-granduncle (me being a descendant of his brother Wellington Fenerty). My great grandmother (Mary Jane Mazie Fenerty) kept his story alive in her children. On a trip back to New Brunswick in 2002, my grandmother told me the story again, and so upon returning to my home in Toronto I went to the local public library. With my grandmother's enthusiasm I was sure there would be stacks of books on him. Alas, the only thing I found was a short paragraph in the *Canadian Encyclopedia*. So I decided to make it a project. And that eventually led to this biography.

In the last chapter, I refer to a collection of writings called the Stewart Script. The manuscript contains twenty-nine poems written by Charles Fenerty and was donated to Dalhousie University not long after Charles died. It is not a complete collection of his writings, nor was it supposed to be published in its present state. The manuscript was catalogued nationally only recently, and Terrence Punch mentions it in the bibliography to his entry for Fenerty in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Because the manuscript was written freehand, I spent about ten months typing it out. It was not so much the reading of his handwriting that took so long, it was the words he used. I had to verify certain words before releasing it. For that, I received help from professors at the University of Toronto, the University of Melbourne, McMaster University, and the University of Waterloo, which I attend.

The story is roughly divided into three chapters/periods: the years preceding his discovery; 1844 to 1854; and from 1854 till Fenerty's death in 1892.

I also give a brief look at histories and events during and prior to his time. Places such as Australia (where he travelled to), Canada, logging and saw mills, paper, communications, and others, were intended to bring out the period he lived in, and to show the stages and developments which led to his discovery.

A tone which I had originally intended for the biography, but was advised to leave out, was the Communication and Information Age. This was a leading subject in the first draft, but then deleted. I felt this to be important because it's often believed that paper has been the greatest agent in human development.

When paper was development at around the time of Christ, people began passing information in great abundance (much like the Internet has done for us today). And like the Internet, it has caused growth in our understanding of things; things which we had no direct contact with. From there, literacy escalated, and thoughts provoked. It started slow, but by the time of Gutenberg's printing press, in the 15th-century, people were starting to explore the many avenues of thought and innovations; they got curious with this new found knowledge. Paper gave to the people the power to know, and to explore.

However, the book does not get into this subject in any great detail. But it should be known that had it not been for its development, the passage of information would have been extremely limited, and thus, so would have the advancements to follow.

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