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The geological library of the Natural History Society  
of New Brunswick: supporting early scientific  
research in the Maritimes region

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The Natural History Society of New Brunswick (1862–1932) was a leading scientific organization of its time. Members studied and published in all areas of natural science and developed large specimen collections. Their collections formed the basis for the present New Brunswick Museum. How did an amateur society, operating in Saint John away from the major centres of science in Canada, produce an impressive body of work that included significant scientific (especially geological) discoveries? It has been speculated that Sir J.W. Dawson's taxonomic problems arose from his isolated position on the edge of the British Empire, and his difficulties accessing relevant literature. If Dawson had trouble accessing literature in Montreal we might imagine his colleagues, like George Matthew, in Saint John suffered even more so with only the resources of a small natural history society. Saint John did not have any large academic or government institutions like a geological survey to support research. The only libraries with scientific resources belonged to the Natural History Society and the local Mechanics' Institute. It is clear from library reports in the Society's Bulletin that, from the beginning, the intent was to provide members access to a first rate science library necessary to support their research activities. The library was particularly important as the Great Fire of 1877 destroyed personal libraries while the Society library was untouched.

In 1885, the Society reported 657 bound volumes and pamphlets in the library. The final report in 1913 stated the library contained 12 500 books and pamphlets. The average increase from the time of the first Bulletin in 1882 is about 387 items per year. The library grew from donations by its members and friends, and from items acquired in exchange for the Society's Bulletin. Additional items were purchased to fill deficiencies, such as the acquisition of volumes of the *American Journal of Science and Art* bought in 1887 and in 1893 the first volumes of *Canadian Naturalist*. Back numbers of the journals were purchased specifically for the benefit of those interested in geology and other natural sciences since, in the early days of the Society, papers of interest had been published in these journals.

The research and public education output of the Society was impressive. George Matthew alone published more than 200 scientific papers. Between 1862 and 1917 the Bulletin of the Natural History Society records 709 lectures read before the Society and 105 elementary lectures for a broader audience. Lectures were often at the leading edge of scientific discovery, such as Matthew's 1890 report of the first authentic Precambrian fossil.