



# Ex Libris News

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## The President's Report

Your Ex Libris Board has had quite a busy year. Preparations for the publication of *The Morton Years* has consumed a great deal of time and deliberation. Al Bowron heads this project, and he reports that the University of Toronto will be printing 1500 copies of the early history of the CLA written by Elizabeth Hulse. The book design is by Ian Maclean of the University's Design Department. The preface is by Stan Beacock, and the foreword is by W. Kaye Lamb, former Director of the Public Archives and National Library of Canada. Bowron has selected several early photographs from CLA files for inclusion as illustrations. Sales of the book to members are being handled by Ex Libris Association, while CLA has offered to handle other marketing and distribution. Eric Schultz and his committee have been very helpful in securing seed money to cover publication costs. We are eagerly awaiting publication and hope to see the book out in time for our meeting on November 6th. I do hope you will order your copy so that we can meet printing costs without touching our general funds.

Speaking of our Annual Meeting, you will notice that we now call it the "Annual Get-Together." We chose this title because "Annual Meeting" sounds so dry and boring. We know that many of you come every year to renew acquaintances, meet new friends and colleagues, and listen to the speakers. This year, we have an exceptionally fine programme: Marian Fowler and Kildare Dobbs are fascinating individuals who combine their tales of travel and

adventure with humour and wit. Please join us on the 6th of November; fill out the registration form included with this issue and send it in soon (by Oct. 27 at the latest) so that we can adequately plan for lunch. (Everyone seemed pleased with last year's spread so this year we have secured the same caterer.)

One of our concerns has been that Ex Libris is largely Ontario-based, with many of our members coming from Toronto and surrounding areas. We would like to broaden our appeal, and for this reason we are very happy that Basil Stuart-Stubbs and Bill Watson agreed to write about Vancouver's exciting new Public Library. (I was lucky enough to visit it on opening day, and I found the Library's atrium one of the most exciting interior spaces I have ever experienced.) The articles on Quebec's libraries and the Montreal Children's Library also bolster this desire to expand our membership. We hope to establish correspondents and contributors in other provinces so that we can keep up-to-date with people and events across the country.

As you may have noticed, *Ex Libris News* has been transformed in looks. Faced with rising postal rates, changing postal regulations and soaring printer's fees, we embarked on a radical change in the way the newsletter is produced: editor Wendy Scott inputs the contributions she receives into her computer, edits them, and ships off a copy to me. My computer then translates her DOS files into Macintosh files, and then the layout is designed using Claris-Works. This saves us a considerable amount of money, as only the actual printing is done by a print shop. I think the result is very attractive; I hope you think so too.

Please let us know about your concerns or any ideas you have about Ex Libris. Now that *The Morton Years* is well under way, we should be considering other projects which would record the history of libraries, library organizations, and the people who have contributed so much to the fine library systems we enjoy today.

*Les Fowlie, President*

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# The Final Years of Canada House Library

by Elizabeth Ketchum

(with notes from Ann House, Head Librarian, 1980-1993)

*In issue number 16, Ex Libris News printed Ruth Spencer Church's account of her postwar years as librarian at Canada House. In this issue, Elizabeth Ketchum brings us to the period before the library was dismantled and most of its collection turned over to the University of London (1993).*

When I was appointed acting Head Librarian in August, 1979, the reference library occupied a large, high-ceilinged, tall-windowed room on the ground floor. Canada House had been doubled in size by the acquisition and renovation of the adjacent Royal College of Physicians' building, completed in 1967. The reception area and the newspaper reading room were now separate, at the north (back) of the building, while the Visitors' Book remained at the Cockspur Street entrance. This location attracted considerable drop-in traffic.

The library office and workroom, dingy and airless, were on the other side of the hall. Two large basement storage rooms housed back periodicals, Hansard, statutes, non-current documents, gift books and duplicates.

The grandeur and elegance of the main library room were spoiled somewhat by the full-length net "bomb" curtains over the windows, weighted against shattering glass and grey with soot — as was almost everything. These obstructed the view of the fountains and other landmarks of Trafalgar Square, but were considered a necessary security precaution, as this was the assembly point for protest marches of all kinds. Although we were never a target for terrorists, earlier in the year the anti-seal hunt protesters had splashed red paint on the front steps of Canada House, and occupied some upstairs offices. For the next few years there were marches and petitioners (one led by Spike Milligan) in the front hall. In December, of course, the huge Christmas tree was a symbol of peace, although the perpetual carols often tested our musical tolerance.

The library was part of the Public Affairs division of the Canadian High Commission, which also included the Information

section, Press Office, Visitors' Services (later the Enquiry Centre), Academic Relations section, and Cultural Affairs (comprising film, visual and performing arts officers). The Public Archives of Canada, Veterans Affairs, Tourism and Immigration, and consular offices were also in Canada House. All other divisions were located at Macdonald House in Grosvenor Square, opened in 1961.

The High Commissioner, normally at Macdonald House, spent each Thursday in the large, very elegant office right above the library, with the view over Trafalgar Square once referred to as "the best in London." This room was used for press conferences, receptions and any occasion when a good impression was desired. The handsome antique glass-fronted bookcases held the detritus of many generations of High Commissioners' office collections and gifts. Occasionally it had to be refurbished on short notice before the arrival of a V.I.P. — for example a visit from the Queen in July of 1980, commemorating one hundred years of Canadian representation in London.

The Head Librarian attended the weekly meetings of the Public Affairs Committee, at which managers reported on their respective programmes, learned about and discussed policy changes or initiatives, and let off steam about "Ottawa." It was helpful to have the support of the other officers in many matters, but they sometimes misunderstood the library's best interests. When the National Library wanted to change our depository status from Full to Selective, we had to explain that it was not an insult but a relief, as we could now order just what we wanted, and had no more obligation to retain the mass of irrelevant documents taking up space in the crowded basement stacks. The British Library remained a Full depository, and three other central London libraries had Selective status.

Although the bulk of the collection consisted of official documents, there were also well over a hundred magazine subscriptions, bulging clipping files, and several thousand books. Rapid growth and chronic staff shortages had resulted in inconsistent

cataloguing (there were three separate card files), and a complete revision would be required to take advantage of the newly instituted centralized cataloguing provided by the External Affairs Library in Ottawa. For the latest information on Canada, we received a day-old copy of the Canadian Press wire service. The tasks of clipping, sorting and filing this never-ending barrage of newsprint often threatened to overwhelm us, but the CP wire service was invaluable for its wide-ranging feature stories and biographical profiles as well as for new appointments, policy statements, election results, obituaries and hockey scores. (Visitors to the Reception area and the Press Office could also see the teletype on the day it arrived.) For retrospective information, we had the *Canada Gazette* from 1881 on fiche, and the *Financial Post* from 1907 on microfilm among many other titles.

Enquiries came from all over Britain by telephone and letter, and from visitors, Canadian and British, who dropped in either casually or with a specific purpose. Most questions related to Canada and could be answered on the spot, but some, from the High Commission, for example, required visits to other libraries. (The membership in the prestigious London Library was now in the name of the Head Librarian, making us responsible for books borrowed from St. James' Square by the High Commissioner and others. Paul Martin used it extensively, but his successors did not.)

As Acting Head Librarian, I was involved with the book programmes of the other departments. The Canada Council, through Cultural Affairs, distributed Canadian books to British libraries and institutions, and I helped with their allocation and presentation. At the London Book Fair, I visited the Canadian publishers' displays and helped dispose of the books afterwards. Before the appointment of a literary officer in Cultural Affairs, the librarians were also involved in discussions regarding the availability of Canadian publications in Britain. An experimental subsidised bookshop had recently failed, and the barriers — shipping costs and customs duties — seemed insurmountable. Only the most celebrated authors were published in the U.K., and we had to tell the many enquirers to order direct from Canada. (An agent was appoin-

ted by Supply Ad Services to handle *their* publications, but it took weeks, and cost over twice the cover price, to obtain them from the agent in Cornwall!)

The Academic Relations department promoted and supported the growing number of Canadian Studies' programmes in British Universities. Library development was a vital component of this initiative, and we were glad to help with bibliographic queries, interlibrary loan, and reference service to staff and students. Someone from the library attended the annual conference of the British Association of Canadian Studies each spring. I have fond memories of a chilly but enjoyable few days at Bristol University, while at Birmingham it was a privilege to meet a modest academic, Cedric May, Britain's acknowledged expert on Canadian literature in French.

In late 1980 a new Head Librarian, Ann House, was appointed, and I replaced Janice Pereira, who had returned to Canada, as reference librarian. Almost immediately Ann was faced with the task of preparing for the move of the library to the floor above, as the first step in the conversion of Canada House into the Canada Cultural Centre. A Kafkaesque scenario ensued, wherein one plan was being developed and budgeted-for in London, and another in Ottawa, quite independently and undiscovered for some weeks. Moreover, it was soon clear to the London staff that the Ottawa plan (which, of course, won out) was designed for the space one floor higher up, as part of a much earlier and abandoned proposal. The discrepancy might have been due to the different ways of numbering floors in Britain, but seemed extraordinary considering that the design team from Canada paid us several visits. (No one ever admitted the error.)

Ann had discovered and costed modern, Canadian-built metal shelving and library furniture, available from a London distributor. Instead, there arrived in the spring of 1981 a shipload of heavy, blond hardwood 1950s-style shelving and specially designed furniture that included: wet carrels (non-automated, we had no use for them); bridge-table-sized readers' tables with four chairs each; and periodical shel-

## In This Issue

This fall we look at two very different situations: From Vancouver, **Basil Stuart-Stubbs** and **Bill Watson** take us through an upbeat tour of the city's spanking new public library building. Meanwhile, **Rosemary Lydon**, former Head Librarian of Westmount Public Library, gives us a brief history of public library service in the province of Quebec (or at least, it is still a province as I type this sentence), and **Molly Walsh** traces the history of the Montreal Children's Library, a private library serving an urgent public need. **Elizabeth Ketchum's** memoir of the last days of the Canada House Library in London describes a situation that is becoming woefully familiar to Canadian librarians today. (Part I of this history appeared in Issue #16, Autumn 1994).

*J. Wendy Scott, Editor*

ving that had to be held up with one's head to reach back issues. There were no work-room counters or storage cupboards, the vertical files were horizontal, the desks too small, and a cabinetmaker had to be employed to put the shelving (with fixed shelves) together. Considerable rearrangement was necessary to make room for everything and create an attractive library. After the gloom and grime of the ground floor, the new space *was* light and airy — but it could have been so much better!

The Cultural Centre was opened in 1982 by the Queen Mother, and soon there was an incentive to stay late working, as almost every evening something of interest was taking place in the art gallery, cinema, or all-purpose performance room, featuring notable Canadian artists, authors, actors or musicians. The library now housed the play collection, and a listening room was set up for recordings. We had lost much of our drop-in traffic, with both the passport and immigration offices now at Macdonald House, and tighter security arrangements discouraged casual wandering upstairs, but the volume of work did not diminish, and finally we were granted a second clerical position. This, plus student help (usually dependents of Canada-based staff) and Ann's expertise, enabled us to complete the recataloguing project. Ann also took on the ordering of all British publications for the High Commission and for the External Affairs Library in Ottawa.

We worked closely with the staff of other divisions of the High Commission, the five provincial Agents-General, the Royal Commonwealth Society and other High Commissions, most notably the Australian

and New Zealand librarians, with whom we discovered a lot in common. We received invitations to literary events, receptions and National Days. I had an annual stand-up lunch at Old Palace Yard, when Mrs. Alman, librarian of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, hosted Canadian parliamentary interns on tour. When the government librarians' association received permission to hold their annual social meeting at Canada House, ninety librarians gave the new library quite a house-warming. Margaret Trudeau took refuge in our sunny periodicals room on one occasion when the Prime Minister was holding a press conference in the High Commissioner's office.

The optimism of this period is reflected in the illustrated brochure prepared by Ann House, which effectively outlined the scope of the library's collection, the services provided, and hours, inviting all and sundry to visit and enjoy! It was widely distributed and probably increased awareness of the library, but I do not recall that it increased the volume of work — as in most libraries, I only remember always being too busy! The importance of the brochure, in our eyes, was to impress not only the public, but the High Commission staff and the powers-that-be in Ottawa with the size, scope and services of the Library at Canada House.

Despite the brochure, the library did not escape the severe budget cuts of 1984-85. There were rumours of closure, as the new government pursued its trade and economic priorities; instead, the two clerical staff were transferred, hours of service were curtailed, access was by appointment only and

the budget for newspapers and periodicals was greatly reduced. As well as opening the mail, circulating the journals, typing the letters and shelving the books and documents, the librarians were encouraged to emphasize service to Business. Our glory days were over, and only hard work lay ahead.

Meanwhile, most library queries continued to be from tourists and potential immigrants, Canadian and British students doing comparative studies, journalists, authors, researchers and librarians, and individuals from the broad spectrum of British life. As before, potential exporters continued to monitor statistics, and British banks, drug companies, broadcasters, film makers, and others followed the progress (or otherwise) of legislation and tax regulations in their fields. (Canadian business people used other services of the High Commission and British information sources.)

When I left Canada House in September 1986, Marilyn MacLennan was appointed reference librarian. The next few years were increasingly difficult, as budget cuts continued. The librarians were frequently required to fill in at the Enquiry Centre, in addition to running the library. Gradually, service was reduced to a minimum, with a tiny budget, no new books, cancelled subscriptions, and almost total dependence on the official publications received on deposit. In some ways, the library had become a referral service, with many of the restrictions that we had deplored in cash-starved British libraries in earlier years.

When a building survey found Canada House to be structurally unsound, requiring very expensive renovations, the decision was made to move all remaining departments to Macdonald House. Ann was told that the library would be put into storage temporarily, and that she would be given three months to prepare when the time

came. Instead, the library was closed at the end of March, 1993, and the contents dispersed (see Issue 16). It was assumed that Ann House would stay onto help find a home for the collection, but she was able to secure a contract position in Ottawa and left, after culling the most valuable items to be sent to the National Library. How ironic that contents of the clipping files, so arduously worked on for almost fifty years, should nearly all end up in the trash can!

Some future researcher may find the archival records (correspondence, reports, memoranda, financial records) worth investigating. Even if Canada House is repaired and re-opened (for a greatly reduced diplomatic staff, or for ceremonial use only, according to rumour), there will not be a library. I wonder if, in the future, someone may consider putting all the office collections together and starting again? In this electronic age, this seems unlikely.



## The New Vancouver Public Library

Two Envious Superannuated University Librarians Pay a Visit

by Basil Stuart-Stubbs and Bill Watson

We decided not to take the bus, even at the reduced fares we now enjoy. Why not experience the library's three levels of underground parking, a convenience not available in the old building at Burrard and Robson? At the bargain rate of fifty cents per half hour, it also made economic sense; return bus fares would have cost us the minimum of \$3.00.

We also decided to cast aside any preconceptions we might have acquired by reading in the local papers the ongoing discourse about the building, before and after it opened. And we decided to approach the building not as librarians but as users.

We liked it, and not just a little bit.

The new library, like the old, has a corner on Robson Street. But it is not the hyperactive Robson Street of boutiques, bookstores and restaurants beloved of tourists and citizens alike. VPL is now situated on most of an entire city block, christened Library

Square, in an area predominantly occupied by large buildings, and it seems unlikely that a lively street scene will evolve. For users, VPL is now more a destination than a place where one might enter casually as a passerby. But the area is far from moribund. In fact, it is central to a major shift in downtown density, as the land adjacent to False Creek, much of it formerly part of the Expo site, is being developed rapidly for high-rise offices and apartments. In the other direction, it is not far from Simon Fraser University's Harbourfront Campus, which will probably expand to serve the growing central urban population. In short, VPL is in the right place for the Vancouver of the next century.

In September 1991, the city, having acquired the necessary city block from the federal government, called upon the architectural community to submit "Expressions of Interest." Twenty-seven firms responded, from which three finalists were selected. The city then went to the public, and for six

weeks three anonymous models representing the visions of these architects were toured around the city to accessible locations. Citizens were invited to cast a vote, and to comment. Which, independently, the two of us did. Leaning toward the practical, we both voted for a model which was conventional in shape. We were not attracted to the oval structure reminiscent of a Roman coliseum, because experience had taught us that when architects deliver library buildings that depart from the rectangular, librarians spend the rest of their lives trying to make them work.

Almost everyone else voted for the oval building. In April 1992 the City Council gave them their wish. The contract went to the consortium of Moshe Safdie and Associates of Boston, and Downs/Archambault and Partners, a Vancouver firm. Now we really feared the worst: an unconventionally shaped library, executed by a renowned architect probably more interested in making a statement than building a functioning library. What did he think a library was? Had he ever used one?

The agitation began immediately, as local architects, critics, journalists and cartoonists weighed in against the pop-

ular choice. It was said that a building that clearly derived its inspiration from a classical Mediterranean civilization was out of place in a city that began in a rain forest just a century ago. Some wondered if librarians would be thrown to the lions. It was said that the building did not acknowledge its surrounding architectural environment, though one wondered what it was supposed to acknowledge: the Post Office, the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, or the C.B.C. building, all of which are in completely different styles, as are the buildings that line the rest of George Street as far as Stanley Park. As for its shape, it strikes us as a good addition to the streetscape, breaking the straight lines defined by buildings on the nearby streets. And if it is inspired by an ancient building, is that so bad? Isn't that what post-modern architecture is about?

The building opened in May 1995, and the dust has settled both literally and figuratively. The library is full of busy and apparently happy users. Comparing statistics for the months of June in

1994 and 1995, circulation from the main branch increased by 44.5% to 157,923; user traffic increased by 77.8% to 202,640; and new borrower registrations increased by 279.5% to 6,588. To all appearances, the citizens are pleased with what they bought, whether the critics like it or not.

What they bought turned out not to be an oval library, but a rectangular glass box of a library constructed inside an oval made of a warm precast concrete. At the shorter ends of the rectangle, the floor has been extended to the wall of the oval. But on the long sides, the elliptical area has been left open from floor to ceiling, six stories above, where a glass roof opens on a view of the ever-variable Vancouver sky. This produces the *WOW!* effect, sought by most architects who take on a library, and usually achieved by driving a hole through the middle of the structure, creating an Atrium, another inheritance from classical times. Mr. Safdie has certainly achieved his *WOW!* without compromising the functionality of the library. The effect is stunning, though no doubt it came at a price.

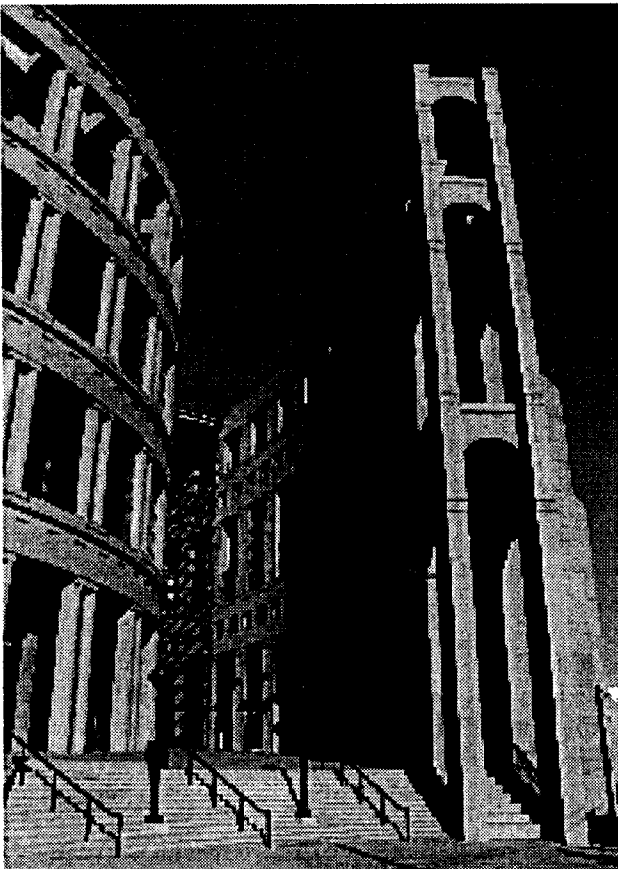
One of these elliptical areas is a pedestrian mall, which can be entered from two plazas at opposite ends of the block. The main and only public entrance to the library is at the centre of this mall. Opposite the entrance outside the library is a range of small shops vending souvenirs, pizza, juice, coffee, and books (the latter at the newest and smallest branch of Duthie Books, opened this September). Because this area is covered, chairs and tables are arranged, or disarranged, in front of the food outlets, creating a congenial street scene.

The other elliptical area, on the opposite side, is within the library itself. The perimeter of the oval wall is used for public seating. On each floor (except for the

top and bottom), these seating areas are reached by two bridges. The seating areas themselves are very pleasant: the study desks are generous and well-lighted, the chairs comfortable and attractive, and the well of the ellipse creates a comfortable sense of separation from the activity in the public reference and stack areas. That is the good news. The bad news is that those people who suffer from even mild vertigo may have trouble negotiating those bridges or staying in the study areas, the glass walls of which seem a little more than waist high. This produces what we might call the *WHOA!* effect. The child in you thinks of paper gliders, maybe even spit balls. The morbid adult thinks of accidents. So far, no problems. (Maybe one could think of it as part of a twelve-step recovery program to make vertigo sufferers confront their problems.)

Back to the entrance. One test of a good library is whether it makes sense the moment one walks in. VPL passes this test. There is the Information Desk, there is the place to get a library card, and there is the place to check out books. Beyond the Information Desk, terminals for accessing the catalogue and some elevators. Also off to the left, stairs leading down to the Children's Library. Although there can't be many children living in the immediate neighbourhood, the place was full of children, including one six year old honing her mouse skills on a CD-ROM.

On every level, the escalator and elevators discharge into open areas where there are public service desks for the various library divisions. The service desks are close to reference collections, where more seating, catalogue and database terminals are available. The relevant collections are housed in both regular and motorized compact shelving. For the most part, the compact shelving seems to hold materials formerly in storage and out of sight to users. Signs near the controls of much of the compact shelving direct the public to ask for assistance. In other areas it is available for operation by the patron;



**The Vancouver Public Library**

“Mr. Safdie has certainly achieved his *WOW!* effect...”

based on our test, it operates smoothly and quietly. But we wondered: is this a good idea? To open an aisle obviously means closing an aisle somewhere else in the range. How inconvenient could this be when users compete for aisles? (Will staff have to take courses in conflict resolution?) We also wondered about maintenance and continuing operations over the lifetime of the building. Will the manufacturer live as long? At the same time, the standard shelving in some areas seems already to be almost full to capacity.

Also close to the book stacks and the circulation area around the escalators are copy stations. As for other technological devices, the library offers access to listening equipment, audio-tape viewing equipment, and microfilm reader-printers, in what appears to be abundance by U.B.C. Library's sad standards. Platform floors, perhaps a foot or so above the concrete floors, allow for great flexibility when it comes to electrical communications, mechanical conduits, and outlets. A language laboratory was filled with people learning English with video playback units and headphones. Terminals are everywhere, many still waiting to be made operational. A Computer Lab containing fifteen machines will open soon, where user-pay policies will be applied.

Though some find the library noisy, it seemed quiet to us, thanks to carpeting throughout. Replaceable dark blue-gray carpet tiles have been used, to simplify and lower the costs of replacement. It is well and warmly lighted; in most public areas, fluorescent fixtures project indirect light into coved white ceilings. The stack colour echoes the earthtone of the main structure itself, so the overall effect is warm, despite the intense blue of the seating fabric (almost the only strong colour in the interior).

Now for some statistics. The library building is 390,000 square feet, of which the library occupies 347,000 on seven floors. The two top floors are leased to the B.C. government for twenty years, after which time they

become available for expansion. A collection of 1.2 million volumes is distributed over 15 miles of shelves, and there are 1,400 seats for users. Cost? Not all the bills are in, but the budget for the entire Library Square, which includes a substantial Federal office tower on one corner, was a hundred million dollars, and the city has been happily proclaiming that the project has been "on budget, on time."

An obvious deficiency, but one that can be and no doubt will be alleviated, is in signage. In fact, alleviation is taking place simultaneously, as staff create hand or laser-printed signs and post them as needed, as in the case of washrooms. A trip a few blocks up the street to The Bay or Eaton's would be sufficient to remind planners that people need directional signs as they both ascend and descend escalators, and that people with bifocals (probably a high percent of library users) need some large print in elevators to tell them on which floors services are located. Until and unless signage is greatly improved, we suspect directional questions will bedevil anyone sitting behind a desk.

Finally, we decided to put the library to

the test: we would look for a book. We chose *The Best Gift: A Record of Carnegie Libraries in Ontario*, by some of our superannuated colleagues. Using a genuine vintage spring-driven stopwatch, we clocked a mere two minutes and forty-five seconds between the time we conducted the call number search in the catalogue terminal area, main floor, and retrieved the book in the Social Sciences Division stacks, one floor up. Very good, considering we didn't know our way around at all. Then we had our first experience with one of the four self-service check-outs. Anyone who can deal with Canada's wide selection of banking machines can master this device in one try.

Reflecting on our visit over a latté, Vancouver's traditional beverage, we agreed that overall, from the user's point of view, this is a library that works, and works comfortably. As taxpayers, we are more than satisfied. As former librarians at an institution predisposed to deferring library construction, we cannot help but wonder if U.B.C. will ever see the like of the Vancouver Public Library.



## An Invitation to Our Readers

Over the years, ELA members and others have helped make this **Newsletter** a reality by sending us their reminiscences, historical articles, and other items of interest.

We are always looking for new, lively material. If you have a short item you would like us to include, an idea you would like us to pursue, or an article you have written or plan to write, we would like to hear from you.

**Articles** on almost any aspect of our profession — memories of your own career; first-hand histories of a library or library service (municipal, regional or provincial; in or outside Canada); reports of interesting collections, projects, or organizations; biographies of outstanding librarians — all will receive our careful consideration.

**Milestones** items are also very welcome, as omissions and late reports do occur despite the heroic service long provided by Janette White, who scans the journals and newsletters in the University of Toronto FIS collection for each issue. **Information** from outside Central Canada is particularly useful, as we may not have access to it locally.

Also, any **photographs** you can send in to accompany your contribution would be greatly appreciated.

# Public Libraries in Quebec: The Evolving Story

by Rosemary Lydon

The first paragraph of the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto says:

*Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and of individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.*

The struggle to give the people of Quebec the benefits that an access to "knowledge, thought, culture and information" brings is an interesting story, and it is still being told.

## PRIVATE LIBRARIES AS PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The first "public" libraries in Quebec were actually private libraries.

The Montreal Children's Library, whose history appears after this article, is one of several institutions still in operation that were established by interested citizens to provide public library service, that are funded, entirely or in part, by private donations or membership fees. Most, but not all, accept provincial government funds, but operate as their boards see fit.

The Literary and Historical Society of Quebec Library, founded in 1824; Montreal's Atwater Library, founded as a Mechanics' Institute in 1840; the Fraser-Hickson Institute, founded in Montreal in 1885; the Pettes Memorial Library of Knowlton, founded in 1894; and the Haskell Free Library, Inc., of Rock Island founded in 1901, were all set up in areas where English was the predominant language, although most now offer bilingual or multilingual service. All are important fixtures in their towns or neighbourhoods.

Attempts were also made in the nineteenth century to introduce library service to the French-speaking population of the

province. The present Bibliothèque de Québec was formerly the Institut canadien in Quebec City. However, the Montreal Institut canadien, founded in 1844 as "a centre of patriotism and culture" and the spur to about 60 similar organizations in the province, was ultimately destroyed by the ultraconservative political, social and religious climate of the day. Its library, a collection of major scientific, legal and literary works (many of them on the Vatican Index of prohibited books), is now housed in the Fraser-Hickson Institute. (The Institut's printer and librarian Joseph Guibord was excommunicated when he refused to renounce his membership; his burial in consecrated ground was refused by Bishop Bourget, giving rise to the famous "Guibord Affair.")<sup>1</sup>

## MUNICIPAL LIBRARIES

The first municipally established library in the province was the Westmount Public Library which opened its doors in 1899. It was followed in 1902 by the Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal, which, in its earliest years, offered its readers a carefully censored collection (books in the Index were listed in a separate catalogue).

A few municipalities built public libraries in the 1950s, but the great surge in library construction occurred in the 1960s with the so-called Quiet Revolution. This marked the end of the influence of the very conservative bishops of the Roman Catholic Church on the political life of the province and ushered in a new spirit of democracy.

But the struggle to establish high quality public library service was not over. No legislation governed, or yet governs, how a public library should be operated. The founders of the Westmount Public Library modelled its governance on the library boards found in the other provinces, but, because the "Library Committee," as it was called, had no legal status under provincial law, four of the seven members of the committee were members of the city council: the mayor and three aldermen. The other three members were elected citizen trustees.

Although norms drawn up by the Ministry of Culture in recent years provide recommendations for the operation of municipal libraries, these are not backed up by law, so individual municipalities simply set their own rules. A majority of municipal libraries in Quebec are operated as a section of the municipal recreation department. Until recently, this was the case with the Bibliothèque municipale. It was with this example in mind that, in 1993, the Council of the City of Westmount decided to amalgamate the Westmount Public Library with the City's recreation function by abolishing the position of Chief Librarian and creating that of a Library, Culture and Recreation Manager. Citizen outrage in the well-educated community subsequently resulted in the separation of the sports function from the Manager's responsibilities — a compromise of sorts.

Other libraries enjoy the status of separate departments within their municipal governments. Of recent years, however, some of these formerly separate departments have been incorporated in Culture or Culture and Library Departments, with the management responsible for art galleries and cultural performances in the municipality. In some cases, regrettably, when the incumbent librarian has left the position, the replacement manager has not had a library background. In Quebec, the idea of the public library as an intellectual rather than a cultural entity has not yet gained general acceptance.<sup>2</sup>

## SUPPORT FOR LIBRARIES

Public librarians experienced a short period of euphoria in the early 1980s, when the provincial government handed out generous funds for new library buildings and annual operations. An office in the Ministry of Culture was devoted to assisting public libraries. Unfortunately, both the funding and the moral support have waned.

The provincial government tries to encourage the municipalities to contribute towards the maintenance and improvement of their public libraries by making the level of provincial support dependent upon the contribution of the local authority. This system can run into serious problems when

a municipal council does not recognize the value of the library to the community. Local government expenditure on public libraries in Quebec in 1991 was \$13.34 per capita compared to the national average of \$19.32, and a high in Ontario of \$28.27.

At the grassroots level, the newness of the concept of library service in most communities translates into a lack of public awareness and support. For example, the Central Branch of the Bibliothèque municipale has now been closed for renovations for thirty months and no opening date has been announced. Several years ago, staff of the library system were told in February that, due to budget cuts, no more books could be purchased that year. Neither event occasioned a public outcry or political reaction.

### REGIONAL SUPPORT CENTRES

What about the small towns and the rural population? Statistics show that approximately 90 percent of the Quebec population has access to public library service.

Since 1970, small, often volunteer-run libraries in municipalities with a population of under 5,000 have been operating with collections of books received on a rotating basis from 11 central regional libraries called Bibliothèques centrales du prêt. In 1993, the BCPs were converted by law into a new form of organization called Centre régional de services aux bibliothèques publiques. Each CRSBP is a non-profit, legally incorporated, private corporation with a board of trustees elected annually. Each of the municipalities served by the CRSBP sends two representatives to board meetings. These are the library head and a member of the municipal council.

The link between a CRSBP and each municipality it serves is a contract which states what services the CRSBP will provide. The municipal council is billed twice a year for these services which include rotation of materials from the CRSBP collection, union catalogue of the affiliated libraries, interlibrary loans, and professional and technical support.

### THE FUTURE

It is hard to be pioneers and to sell a new concept. The dedicated and hard-working public librarians of Quebec are hoping that the children now being introduced to the delights and benefits of reading and library visits will be public library supporters in the future. At present, circulation in Quebec public libraries is about two-thirds of the national average, but it is climbing. Though library systems as they are known in other provinces are rare, regional associations of library directors provide mutual support and operate some shared programmes. A provincial association, l'Association des directeurs des bibliothèques du Québec, acts as an umbrella organization.

Again from the UNESCO Manifesto: *The public library...has to be an essential component of any long-term strategy for culture, information provision, literacy and education.* Maybe in the twenty-first century...

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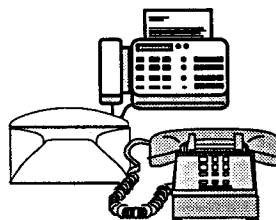
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## Let Us Hear from You!

We would like to have a *Letters to the Editor* section in the next issue. If you have comments (pro or con) or information to add to anything we have published, please contact us by mail, phone or fax:



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# Bringing Children and Books Together: The Montreal Children's Library, 1929 - Present

by Molly Walsh, Head Librarian\*

## THE BEGINNINGS: 1929-1940

Until 1929 there was no free public library for English or French-speaking children in Montreal, although the City of Westmount, governed by a separate municipal council, had a children's section in its public library.

The initiator of the Montreal movement for a children's library was Elizabeth Murray. Inspired by the example of Anne Carroll Moore in the United States, Miss Murray came from a family with a long tradition of public service and the belief that every child should have the same opportunity to grow up with books that she herself had enjoyed.

When she discovered that the librarian of the Fraser Institute, M. de Crèvecoeur, had set apart a section for children's reading but lacked the funds to purchase books for it, Miss Murray got in touch with the Local Council (later the Montreal Council of Women), which had formed a committee to inquire into the possibility of establishing a children's library, under the chairmanship of Maysie McSparran, a recent graduate of McGill. The committee obtained \$3,000 in a fund-raising campaign, and in October 1929 the room in the Fraser Institute was opened for all girls and boys between the ages of three and sixteen. Registration cost five cents, and three books could be borrowed for two weeks. During its first month of operation, under librarian Violet McEwan, membership grew to 208 children.

The experiment was so successful that other parts of the city began negotiations for branches, beginning with Montreal West, where in 1931 a branch opened in a small room of a church on Brock Avenue. By this time the Library was organized with a constitution and by-laws; a volunteer Board of Directors met monthly to direct the library's development. In 1931,

a second branch opened in downtown Montreal on Mackay Street, where the first annual meeting was held the following year (November 1932).

Nevertheless, the financial situation, in the midst of the Great Depression, was precarious. The campaign of 1933 brought in only \$1,600; appeals to the I.O.D.E. and the Carnegie Institute were ineffectual. In November, the first requests for aid from service clubs were made, and representatives from ten interested women's clubs were invited to attend Board meetings. These practices continue to this day.

In 1938 the Library was designated a charitable institution under the Quebec Insurance Act, and received its first grant, \$500, from the City of Montreal — a small but significant sign of recognition. In 1965 the city provided \$17,000, and in 1993, \$96,000 — about half of the operating budget. The rest is raised by the annual campaign run by the Board of Directors.

A small branch in the Town of Hampstead opened in 1937 was closed in June, 1939, because of lack of local support. The same month, a bilingual library was opened in Rosemount, backed by a Carnegie Institute grant of \$5,000. This venture was created by the Montreal Children's Library working in partnership with the Bibliothèque des Enfants, a French-language library in Montreal's East End with the same mission as the MCL. A bilingual librarian was hired, and the library was directed by a board of both English and French-speaking members. Opened in June 1941, it flourished for ten years, but was closed when the Bibliothèque municipale de Montréal (the public library of the City of Montreal) opened its own children's branch in Rosemount. In October, 1948, the Park Extension Boys' and Girls' Library opened, assisted by a gift of \$2,000 from the Royal Army Medical Corps and the Canadian Dental Corps Women's Auxiliary.

The Montreal Children's Library also played a role in advising and assisting communities on the Island of Montreal wishing to set up children's libraries, beginning with the neighbourhood of Notre Dame de Grace.

## 1953-1964

This decade saw the establishment of the Library's bookbinding service — one of its most successful enterprises. During the 1950s members of the Board set up volunteer book mending groups; through judicious purchases and gifts of bindery equipment, this venture grew as groups of experienced volunteers met weekly.

In 1954, the library began broadcasting regular book reviews on radio station CJAD. In 1956, the Library celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with a reception for its patron, Governor-General Vincent Massey.

By 1957 the location of the head branch at the Fraser Institute had become unsuitable. Dorchester Boulevard (which would be renamed Boulevard René Lévesque in 1987) had become a row of office skyscrapers quite remote from library users. The Institute moved to Notre Dame de Grace, a residential district west of downtown Montreal, while the Children's Library searched for quarters in a district where it would be able to serve under-privileged children. After considerable investigation, it found two large rooms in Strathearn School on Jeanne Mance Street, an area with a predominantly multi-ethnic population. Strathearn became the Head Branch, and a tremendous increase in both membership and circulation proved that this area was far more suitable as a library location.

Other branches opened during this period included Point St. Charles and Montreal North. The 1964 subscription campaign set a record high, raising more than \$18,000, and the provincial grant was \$8,500. The book collection rose to 40,134, and membership totalled more than 10,000 children — an increase in membership and holdings of 100 percent over ten years. There were six branches, a head office and bindery, and staff included a clerical assistant and six branch librarians, a storyteller, and some ninety volunteers working at the

branches and the bindery.

### 1968-1980

In 1965 Strathearn School needed use of its rooms and the library had to move again. It went to nearby Devonshire School, whose smaller quarters were accessible to an even greater number of children. Soon it was bursting at the seams. Fortunately, space for a new branch became available in Macdonald House, a mission built by the United Church of Canada on St. Dominique Street, where a room furnished to the Library 's specifications opened in February 1967. Macdonald House also provided a home for the books from the Montreal North Branch, closed in November 1966.

The Mackay Street Branch was closed in 1968 when the cost of maintaining it exceeded the number of children served. A substantial portion of the collection was loaned to a community clinic in Point St. Charles where a library was run by the parents under the MCL's supervision. Other books were moved to book stations in the Little Burgundy area which functioned as libraries, thus making books available to children in more sections of the city.

By the late sixties, most of the Library's users came from low-income families, many of them recently arrived immigrants. Many had poor reading skills; parents were often unable to help, and teachers were overwhelmed by large classes.

The problem of securing volunteer help became increasingly difficult, so more funds were allocated to pay part-time clerks. Circulation figures were no longer seen as an accurate barometer of the value of the work being done, since the children benefited so greatly from personal contact with the librarians and time spent on projects and activities taking place in the library. For three summers the Mackay Street Branch offered a remedial reading programme that was especially valuable. The 1969 \$55,000 budget was stretched as the library tried to do more for children who so desperately needed a "chance to grow up amongst books."

The audiovisual media developed in the 1970s gave the Library an additional way

to reach more children; for example, film strips of favourite stories were effective for children with reading and language difficulties. Story-telling remained an integral part of the programme in all branches, as it was found that visits of the story-teller to the schools increased membership and circulation. The budget cuts of 1978 forced elimination of the professional story-teller, but all of the librarians spent many hours story-telling. The Library also used contests, book sales, open houses and puppet shows to publicize its services.

Two new provincial government regulations caused budgetary and administrative problems in 1972. First, the book distributors' discount to libraries was cut from 33.5% to 15%. At the same time, the purchase of new books was restricted to only three Quebec suppliers. This latter change was unwieldy and caused major delays in book deliveries.

In 1977 the Montreal West branch ceased to be a part of the Montreal Children's Library when it officially became part of the Montreal West Public Library. All of the Library's efforts could now be devoted to children in the inner city.

During this same period, the future of the branch in Point St. Charles was in question. In spite of the Library's financial difficulties, the decision was made not to close it when a survey revealed how popular it was with English-speaking families in the area.

For two years, the Library had a mini-library in the Drummond Street Y.M.C.A. It proved popular with children in area day care centres and with parents taking part in Y activities, but ended when renovations to the building did not include space for a library. On the very day it closed, the Richmond Square Branch expanded into larger quarters.

Celebration of the International Year of the Child in 1979 provided a spur to the Library 's annual campaign; income grew from \$20,000 in 1965 to over \$25,000 in 1980. With the rising cost of books, salaries, and other expenses, the Library also relied heavily on its grant from the provincial government, which almost doubled from 1965 to over \$53,000 in 1980, when the annual budget stood at

\$88,000.

That same year, the burgeoning branch at Park Extension was able to double its space when the City of Montreal allowed it to use a room adjoining its quarters over the fire station. The new room was named in memory of Marjorie Gowans Scott, a faithful supporter.

Trends emerging in the 1960s continued. With the declining birth rate, the passage of Bill 101 (that required the children of immigrants to attend French schools, thereby decreasing significantly the English-language school population), and loss of the Devonshire School branch to the Montreal West Public Library, membership and circulation decreased from over 200,000 in 1965 to under 80,000 in 1979. Nevertheless, there was a noticeable increase in the use of the Montreal Children's libraries by children reading in Chinese, Portuguese, Greek and other languages. This was made possible by loans of books in languages other than English or French from the National Library's Multilingual Biblioservice in Ottawa, and from grants received specifically for the purchase of multilingual materials. In addition, increased numbers of books in French were being purchased for the Library's changing clientèle, especially at the Richmond Square and Park Extension branches.

### THE 1980s

To foster improved understanding of the Library's activities by new and continuing Board members, Board meetings were now held at the various branches rather than in members' homes, and each member was asked to take a special interest in the activities of one particular branch. In 1981, committees were established on which all board members were expected to serve: Personnel, Finance, Archives, Volunteers, Hospitality, and Nominating.

Also during this period, the Library forged closer links with the City of Montreal Library Services under Jacques Panneton, Bibliothécaire en chef of the city system. The Library requested and received an annual "planning session" at which the MCL could present its draft budget, including the desired grant from the City, and ask questions. These sessions proved extremely

useful in helping the Library chart out its own course during a period when the city was developing its plan for full library services across the Island of Montreal. It also gave the Library the opportunity to learn how much the City valued MCL's services to children, so that it felt encouraged to seek higher levels of assured funding to complement its fund raising. By 1982 the campaign generated over \$33,000 and the City grant had risen to \$70,000.

The early 1980s proved a time of change and innovation. The branch at Park Extension grew significantly, and in November 1983 the Toy Lending Library was opened and became an immediate success. Other successful activities included reading clubs, story hours for daycares, arts and crafts, reference work with students, and puppetry sessions. In 1984 the Library archives were moved to Head Branch to free more space for books, toys and children.

Devonshire School branch, where the bindery and the Head Branch had been located, closed after fifteen years, and its activities transferred to the Atwater Branch, which opened September 14, 1981 and was named the Judith Ewan Reford Branch, in honour of a deceased board member and campaign chairperson. The Library's first Toy Lending Library was established here, in February 1982, through the efforts of Librarian Kay Foy. Other distinctive services were a baby/toddler story-telling hour; a shelf on parenting; a book collection devoted to illness, disabilities, and hospitals; external library services for the nearby Montreal Children's Hospital and the Quebec Society for Disabled Children; and participation in a books-by-mail service run by Atwater Library. The Bindery continues its operations in this branch.

In 1984, Macdonald House Branch became the Sun Youth branch when it relocated to Sun Youth Building, which offers food and clothing banks to families in need, and houses a Chinese daycare centre.

In the same year the city opened a new library in Point St. Charles. The Children's Library branch was closed and its books, shelving and equipment loaned to

the Point's Y, where much of its collection still remains.

### THE 1990s

In 1991 Centennial branch was created when the Montreal Children's Library took over a small branch formerly operated by the Notre Dame de Grace Library for Boys and Girls closed for lack of funding. Located in a community centre adjacent to a Catholic elementary school, Centennial reaches out to the community by offering programmes to daycares, a weekly story-telling time provided by school students for mothers and toddlers, and other activities.

There are now five multilingual branches located across the city: the Main Branch on Atwater Avenue; Centennial; Park Extension; Richmond Square (in the area known as "Little Burgundy"); and Sun Youth. (Closing of the National Library's Multilingual Biblioservices has meant that multilingual books are available (in somewhat decreased numbers) from the Montreal Municipal Library, repository for part of the MBS collection.) Over the years, branches were moved, opened and closed. An exhibit at the 1994 Salon du Livre titled *150 ans de la lecture publique à Montréal* showed that the Library has occupied seventeen different locations in its years of operation — in schools, private English libraries and neighbourhood centres.

The Library's services include audio-visual programmes, toy lending, and book collections in Greek, Italian, Chinese,

Spanish, Portuguese and other languages in addition to English and French. Young patients at various hospitals are visited weekly by MCL librarians.

### CONCLUSION

With the changes in Montreal's linguistic balance and the existence of libraries in the city's schools, one might question whether a private English children's library should continue to exist.

A recent survey of children's services across Quebec revealed that public library programmes and services for children lag behind the rest of Canada. Quebec school libraries are also underdeveloped compared to those in other provinces. In Montreal, city libraries do not have the resources to offer a variety of story programmes to preschoolers, school groups and hospitals. The library continues to offer these valued services.

For sixty-six years, the Montreal Children's Library has been on the move: establishing new branches to respond to local needs, and innovating programs to keep abreast of the times. In a world of television, videos and computers, its goal today remains the same: to bring children and books together.

*\*Editor's note: The first part of this history (to the 1980s) is an abridgement of a document compiled by MCL librarians and Board members. Additional information and editing were contributed by Molly Walsh.*



## A Request to Our Members

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