

Flora Elaine Patterson

b. Dec. 28, 1930; d. Nov. 16, 2025, Willow Beach, Ont.

Education:

BA 1953 English and French (McMaster)

BLS 1957 (Toronto)

Positions:

1957–1963 Reference Librarian, National Library of Canada

1963–1965 Head, Serials Section, National Library of Canada

1965–1971 Chief, Serials Division, National Library of Canada

1971–1973 Chief, Public Services Division, National Library of Canada

1973 Coordinator for Public Services, National Library of Canada

1973–1991 Director, Public Services Branch, National Library of Canada

Publications:

Patterson, Flora, Sheila A. Egoff and Pamela Hardisty (1959). "Canadiana Collections," Canadian Library Association Bulletin 15, no. 4 (Jan.): 137–143.

Patterson, Flora (1958). "A new reference librarian looks at the National Library of Canada," Ontario Library Review 47, no. 1 (Feb.): 35–39.

Patterson, Flora (1965). "Why a National Library?" Atlantic Advocate 55, no. 8 (April): 63–64.

Associations / Committees:

Bibliographical Society of Canada

Canadian Association for Information Science

Canadian Library Association

Ex Libris Association

Friends of International Board on Books for Young People, Canadian Section

Ontario Library Association

Flora Patterson also served on a number of organizations including: National Library Advisory Board Committee on Bibliographical Services (National Library representative), National Library Advisory Board Committee on Bibliography and Information Services for the Social Sciences and Humanities (Secretary), National Advisory Group on Library Services for the Handicapped (Member), Sub-Group on the Processing of Serials, Canadian Task Group on Cataloguing Standards (Member), Ad-hoc Interdepartmental Committee to Coordinate the Federal Response to "Obstacles", report of the House of Commons Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped (Member). She was successively the Secretary, Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Reference Workshop, Ontario Library

Association (1959–1962). As well, she was a Member of Council for the Bibliographical Society of Canada (1968–1971) and positions as Councillor (1973–1976) and 2nd Vice-President (1977–1978) of the Canadian Library Association.

Accomplishments:

A long term senior manager in the National Library, Flora Patterson was in charge of the Public Services Branch for almost two decades. This branch included specialized services and collections provided by the Music Division, the Rare Book Division (including the Jacob M. Lowy Collection), Children's Literature Service and Literary Manuscript Collection. It also included the Reference and Information Services Division, the Reading Room Division as well as the resource sharing services of the Multilingual Biblioservice, the Union Catalogue Division and the Interlibrary Loan Division. During her time as Director the collections of the Library under her custody and the range and quality of services grew exponentially.

Comments:

On the occasion of her retirement in 1991, the following summary was published in National Library News:

“National Librarian Marianne Scott spoke of Flora’s many achievements at the Library, foremost among them being a marvellous tribute to herself: the Public Services Branch itself. Hope Clement, Associate National Librarian, reminisced about her long friendship with Flora, whose most sterling qualities she described as being her respect and support for her fellow workers and the value she placed on quality services. Nancy Brodie, Assistant Director (Reference) praised Flora’s commitment to the heritage role of the National Library and her concern for the preservation of the Library’s history.”

As an early employee of the fledgling National Library (1957–), Flora Patterson had a unique perspective on the challenges of the Library, its lack of space and staff at its Tunney's Pasture location in the Public Archives Records Centre as well as great expectations on the part of the Canadian library community. In an interview for a history of the National Library project she talked about: “the challenges of opening boxes and dealing with foreign exchange materials such as League of Nations or United Nations materials. We turned into a periodicals section dealing with materials that came from so many universities and other libraries. At the same time, there were so few of us to deal with these materials. It was overwhelming but also exciting.” And “dealing with microfilmed union catalogue entries was not easy. New accessions were reported in catalogue card formats. Standardization wasn't a hot topic in those days and libraries had a lot of different ways of cataloguing. On the other hand working with these various entries was excellent training for reference questions as it got you used to dealing with a lot of different possibilities.” And “Life at Tunney's was just an exciting time.”

Kathryn Mikoski and Betty Deavy reminisce about their friendship with Flora at this [Exlibris page](#).

Sources:

Janet Collins, "Flora Patterson retires from NLC," Feliciter, vol. 37, no. 2 (Feb. 1991): 1, 16.

"Retirement - Flora E. Patterson," National Library News, vol. 23, no. 5 (May 1991): 14.

Winston Mills, "Civil Service Roundup - Specialist Librarians More than Bookworms," Ottawa Citizen, April 18, 1959, p. 3.

Obituary supplied by her family November 2025.

ELA biography compiled by Paul McCormick

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