

COBOURG PUBLIC LIBRARY HISTORY

In 1886, the library was a Mechanics Institute and Reading Room. The 128 subscribers from Cobourg and Hamilton Township paid \$1.00 per year for use of the library six nights per week. The total budget was \$200 per year.

By 1893, the circulation of materials had tripled to 3,613 items, and the budget doubled to \$446. In Cobourg, the new term "Public Library" was first used in 1895, when the operation of the Mechanics Institute came under the Public Libraries Act.

In 1899, a chimney-fire in December resulted in a loss valued at \$585, the equivalent of an entire year's budget.

In 1902, the Board began to consider the possibility of obtaining a Carnegie grant for a new library building -- the issue was still begin discussed in 1911, but nothing ever came of it.

In 1907 the library purchased its first 6-drawer card catalogue, and all items were catalogued using the Dewey decimal notation.

In 1908, the Librarian's salary went from \$75 to \$100 per year.

In 1914, the town grant was \$100 ; by 1919 it was \$300 and remained at that level throughout the 1920s.

By 1918, the library held 5,271 volumes, with an annual circulation of 16,923 books. Also in 1918, water damage from a plumbing catastrophe in the Domestic Science room above the library resulted in book damage and rendered the cards of the catalogue system "unit for use."

In 1923, suitable rooms in the Town Hall were requested, but nothing positive was gained.

In 1948, the inadequacy of the King St. premises was still the library's major concern. It would be 16 years before a larger building would be secured to hold the library -- although there were many suggestions over the years as to the proper place.

In the 1950s, a separate room for the children's collection was established -- the first facility equipped especially with children's needs in mind.

In the late 1950s, the tax levy was 20 cents per capita, the same as it was in 1937, and the library had one book per capita. The standard was \$1.00 per capita and three books per capita. Cobourg was one of only two towns left in the Province still operating under the "Association Library" set up. Two years later, the library became a free Public Library with an appointed board. Judge H.R. Deyman was its first chairman, and the members were Mayor Jack Burnet, Mrs. Jane Field, C. Gordon King, Mrs. Christine Gardiner, Mrs. Amelia Lawson, Mr. Grant Sine, Mrs. Lois Ann Verney and Mr. Alan J. McConvey. They held their first meeting October 1st, 1958.

In May 1959, the first fully-qualified professional librarian, Mr. Graham Barnett, was hired.

The library moved to the Trinity United Church Sunday School building in 1964. Fourteen thousand books were wheeled by trolley and shopping cart to the new location.

In 1968, an official Inter-Library Loan policy was adopted.

In 1973, a branch library was established in Gore's Landing.

In 1974, a children's department was added to the front of the Chapel Street location.

In the 1980's, a library branch was established in Bewdley. Also, outreach services to local old-age homes, large print and talking book collections were also acquired. Newspapers and documents relating to local history were microfilmed and indexed for easy access. The library's collection contained 47,000 books.

In 1986, the campaign for a new library in Cobourg started, and finally intensified in 1991 when the town council stipulated that the Cobourg Public Library Board must provide the amount of \$500,000 towards the funding, the remainder being provided by the province and town. This inspired the formation of the Cobourg Public Library Foundation and the slogan "Building for Tomorrow."

April 1994, the official ground-breaking ceremony for the new library, in the former Duke of York square.

In September 1995, the Library opened to the public, offering many new services, including CD-ROM research products, meeting room facilities and the Cobourg & District Historical Archives.

In May 1996, a public internet station was introduced, and is still popular today.

In September 1997, on the library's second anniversary, a bronze bust of Lt. Col. C. Gordon King, was dedicated to the facility, and is on display in the foyer.

In the immortal words of Col. King taken from his official opening ceremony speech :

"I forecast that even as the old library served this community for 31 years, so this brand new one will serve many more, well into the twenty-first century ... "diu floreat" - long may it flourish"

H.V.

Version # 2.

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There is evidence to indicate the presence of a public-use library in Cobourg as early as the 1830's. Referred to as a Mechanics Institute, the early library was designed to provide educational opportunities for workmen and tradesmen through books and lectures. Early sources indicate that the library was located at the Town Hall, but in 1889 the Mechanics Institute rented space in the Y.M.C.A. building (86 King St. W.) for an annual rent of \$40.00 per year. This location remained the library's home for the next 75 years. The Encyclopedia Britanica was purchased in 1891, and chess and checker games were added the following year. This synthesis

of continuing education and leisurely recreation continues to be implicit in the philosophy of public libraries to this day.

*** 1886 - Mechanics Institute and Reading Room had 128 subscribers from Cobourg and Hamilton Township. They paid \$1.00 per year for use of the library six nights per week. The total budget was \$200 per year.**

In Cobourg the new term "public library" was first used in 1895 when the operation of the Mechanics Institute came under the Public Libraries Act. Under the auspices of the Department of Education, the public library emerged to serve a broader public. The library was funded largely by subscriptions from its members, with additional support from the Province and from the local municipal government.

Board officials, elected by the membership, managed the Reading Room on a voluntary basis until 1899, when the first librarian's salary was offered. In December of that year, a chimney-fire resulted in a loss valued at \$585, the equivalent of an entire year's budget.

In 1902, the Board began to consider the possibility of obtaining a Carnegie grant for a new library building. The issue was still being discussed in 1911, but nothing ever came of it.

As the collection grew, handwritten lists of holdings became unmanageable. In 1907 the library purchased its first 6-drawer card catalogue, and all items were catalogued using the Dewey decimal notation.

In 1918, water damage from a plumbing catastrophe in the Domestic Science room above the library resulted in book damage and rendered the cards of the catalogue system "unfit for use."

***By 1918, the library held 5,271 volumes, with an annual circulation of 16,923 books.**

Clearly, the public library was growing. Over the next half century, an abiding theme of the library was to find more suitable housing. With the growth of the clientele, services were offered to all age groups. A highlight of the 1950's was the establishment of a separate room for the children's collection - the first facility equipped especially with children's needs in mind.

By the late 1950's, Cobourg was one of only two towns left in the province still operating as a subscription or "association" library, and its collection was not up to the provincial standard of 3 books per capita. The tax levy for library services was 20 cents per capita, far short of the recommended standard of \$1.00. The library premises was also judged to be wanting in a strongly worded report from the provincial Director of Library Services.

The changes suggested by the report were taken to heart, and the library became a fully tax-supported public library with a municipally-appointed board in 1958. Judge H. R. Deyman was its first chairman. In May 1959 the Board hired its first fully-qualified professional librarian, Mr. Graham Barnett.

The problem of the outgrown physical premises was also tackled. Page and Steele, the architectural firm which designed CDCI East, was consulted, and recommended that the library acquire 10,000 to 11,000 square feet. In the mid-1960's, the Town's purchase of the Trinity United Church Sunday School building on Chapel St. was a long-awaited achievement. The life-expectancy of a facility this size was 25 years. Excited about the new library, virtually every local

club and a great many individuals contributed to furnish and equip the two-story, 7,500 square foot building.

*** - The library moved in 1964. Staff and volunteers wheeled fourteen thousand books along King St. and up Division St. to Chapel by trolley and shopping cart.**

*** - An art gallery was established above the library; it later became the Art Gallery of Northumberland.**

With leadership and standards being set by the province, public libraries developed rapidly, with increasing co-operation between public libraries across the province. In 1968, an official Inter-Library Loan policy was adopted. Provincial incentives encouraged the library board, under the leadership of its Chairman, Dr. Jack Leeson, to negotiate a contract for service with the Township of Hamilton. The independently operated Gore's Landing library was brought into the system in 1973. A children's room was added to the library building in 1974. The seventies were years of growth, as membership and the circulation of library materials climbed steadily.

*** In 1979 the Cobourg Public Library circulated 106,742 items to 8,034 members.**

In the 1980's, a library branch was established in Bewdley; outreach services were extended to local homes for the aged; large print and talking book collections were first acquired. Newspapers and documents relating to local history were microfilmed and indexed for easy access; a government document collection assembled. The library began to automate its catalogue of holdings, making the sharing of materials between libraries and the management of a 47,000 volume book collection more efficient.

The expansion of services over two decades ensured that the library would again be looking for expanded premises by 1990. Accordingly, in 1986, the campaign for a new library in Cobourg began, and intensified in 1991 when the town council stipulated that the Cobourg Public Library Board must provide the amount of \$500,000 towards the funding, the remainder being provided by the province and town. This inspired the formation of the Cobourg Public Library Foundation. Under the leadership of its Chairman, Jeff Rolph, and Vice Chairman, Bob MacCoubrey, the newly formed foundation more than rose to the challenge. Community response was overwhelmingly positive.

Moffat Kinoshita was selected to design a 15,000 square foot public library and an archival facility to be operated by the Cobourg and District Historical Society.

*** 1993 - Council announced the naming of the future new facility in honour of C. Gordon King**

*** 1994 - The official ground-breaking ceremony at the Duke of York Square took place in April.**

*** 1995 - The new facility officially opened its doors in September.**

*** 1997 - On the library's second anniversary, artist Alice Luke Chenevert's bronze bust of Gordon King was installed in the lobby**

*** 1999 - The library design was awarded for excellence by the Ontario Library Association**

*** In 1999 the library extended its service to 7 days per week.**

The new library facility is accessible to the physically challenged, offers new services, and embraces the new technology of the information age with on-line and CD ROM products. The

Board has adopted a three-year Strategic Plan to ensure that the Cobourg Public Library continues to meet the challenges and needs of its community.

As Gordon King said at the official opening, "diu floreat" - long may it flourish.

January 11, 2000.

V.S.
