

Few changes for library in six decades moved from town hall to Y room in 1934

In six decades, Acton's library has had a surprisingly small turnover of staff. The first librarian appointed in 1898 was 16-year-old Miss Etie Laird, now Mrs. R. M. MacDonald. (Her reminiscences are in another story.)

The second librarian, starting in 1906, was Mrs. Dan Graham. Then came Miss Ethel Coleman, who later married the Rev. Ralston Brown and moved to the west.

In 1917 Miss Lettie Scott was appointed librarian. In 1914 the Presbyterian minister's daughter, Miss Margaret Wilson, was appointed assistant. (She became Mrs. McGilvary, lived in the west and is now in Toronto, her son, Ian McGilvary, teaches at Acton high school.) Miss Wilson left the library in 1917.

Miss Lettie Scott's assistant was her sister, Miss Laura Scott. They live in Kitchener now and come back to town for special events and the fall fairs. Lettie is Mrs. Joe Johnson.

One of the first things a young school girl, Isabel Elliott, did when she came to Acton in 1913 was to go to the library in the town hall and pay five cents for a library card.

Thirteen years later, in 1926, she herself was appointed librarian — a post she has held most capably for 41 years. She turned the first sod for the new centennial library in a ceremony several months ago.

The library for its first 36 years was in the town hall room beyond the stairway and across from the cells. Now it is the St. John Ambulance room.

Now books ready to go on shelves

Between 400 and 500 books will be added to the inventory immediately at the centennial library. This latest shipment was delayed a while to await the shift.

One big asset for students will be the fine new 24 volume set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. It has been supplied with money from the South Central Regional Library Board.

More reference books are required, and this has been suggested as a suitable gift to the centennial project.

Facts, figures for past year

Facts and figures from 1966: Acton library has about 800 members — all of them current — and a good half of them children who are especially keen readers. Some adults have been regular patrons for many years.

There are about 8,900 books in circulation in the library, and 1,000 children's books out at the Robert Little and M. Z. Bennett public schools.

Total circulation the past year was 44,515 volumes borrowed.

Membership in the library is not restricted to residents and ratepayers of the town. Rural members are welcome.

In 1926, when Mrs. Watson assumed the post she has held for four decades, Miss Laura Scott was her assistant. Mary Chalmers (now of Toronto) followed as assistant and then Helen Lamb, who is now a teacher in British Columbia.

Then over 30 years ago, Miss Madge Chapman began her association with the library, which has lasted ever since.

Old minute book treasured possession

A treasured possession of the library board is a yellowed old minute book, covering the years from April 1, 1898 to December 31, 1949.

Flowers penmanship related the first meeting 69 years ago. The first meeting of the Free Library Board was held this evening in the Council Chambers.

"The members were present as follows: Reeve J. A. McLachlan, M.A., J. K. Godden, M.A., H. A. Macpherson, Reeve Pearson, John Cameron, Thos. I. Moore and H. P. Moore.

"Upon motion, the reeve was elected chairman and H. P. Moore, secretary of the board.

"A letter from the Public School Board handing over the control of the Old Library to the Free Library Board was read.

"Moved by Rev. H. A. Macpherson, seconded by Thos. I. Moore that the Library tendered by the Public School Board be accepted and that our thanks be conveyed to the board for the same.—Carried.

"Moved by Thos. I. Moore, seconded by John Cameron, that the board be a committee of the whole to examine and assort the books of the Old Library.—Carried.

"Wednesday evening 6th inst. was fixed as the time for the performance of the work of the committee.

"The secretary was instructed to write the various publishing houses for copies of their catalogues.

"Moved by H. P. Moore, seconded by John Cameron, that this board request a loan of Two Hundred Dollars from the Municipal Council for the

Library source of education says chairman

Asked to comment on the centennial project, library board chairman George Y. Lee remarked:

"Our library must be looked to as the information centre of the community and the main source of continuing education for the young and old.

"I am sure it will give many happy hours to many people for years to come."

"When the assistance of a third person was required, Mrs. Stan Norton was appointed as assistant. When she left the position, Miss Esther Taylor was appointed assistant librarian.

During the years, more and more help has been required. Now when alternates are needed, Mrs. Jack Chapman and Mrs. George Williams come to assist.

purchase of new books, until the receipt by the board of the Government Grant to the Library Board.—Carried.

"Moved by Thos. I. Moore, seconded by Rev. H. A. Macpherson, that Rev. J. K. Godden, J. A. McLachlan, H. A. Macpherson, John Cameron, the chairman and the secretary be a book committee to select books.—Carried.

"J. B. Pearson, chairman. H. P. Moore, secretary."

A few months later, the book committee put in their expenses for a trip to Toronto to select books. It was all of \$3.75— for five men!

By August, the library had 88 members and 254 volumes had been issued. But membership was soon up over 150.

In 1900, electric light was installed.

By April, rules and regulations were set up for the new library.

"Residents or ratepayers of Acton and vicinity not under 14 years of age, known to the librarian or vouched for by responsible citizens, can draw books by registering their names and residency, and agreeing to conform to the rules and regulations, and adopted by the board. The librarian, when it is deemed necessary, may require a special deposit."

Only one book could be drawn at a time and the fine, after two weeks, was five cents a day.

"Noise and loud conversation are strictly forbidden." "The use of tobacco is forbidden in the rooms of the library."

The library nearly 70 years ago was open three nights a week — the same as it has been until this week — only the nights were different. Then the open nights were Monday, Wednesday and Saturday from 7 to 8.30 p.m.

One change came when the town's open night for shopping switched from Saturday to Friday.

The salary of the librarian was fixed at \$40 a year and here are some of the things she was required to do.

To enforce all rules, keep the books in systematic order, keep a record of membership, notify delinquents, keep the books, shelves etc., carefully dusted, "to be courteous at all times to members and to report to the board any discourtesy or misconduct on the part of those who visit the library" and such other duties as the board might require.

Miss Etie Laird (now Mrs. R. M. MacDonald) was given the position, the duties and the \$40.

Although at different times the library was open afternoons for school children and for several hours on Saturday, lately the hours have been the same as in 1898.

There are two teenage assistants as well, Miss Cheryl Lee, whose father is chairman of the centennial year library board and Miss Anne Watson, granddaughter of the chief librarian.

In 1934 the library was moved to the front room at the Y.M.C.A. building, in quarters provided for the town of Acton through a bequest of the late W. H. Murray.

The shelves were moved from the town hall and are still there, in quite good condition. Shelves built of wood years later are not in nearly as good condition.

Changes in all these years have been few, while readers have been many. The system remained pretty much the same, as did the friendly faces behind the book-piled check out counter. Conditions grew more and more crowded until the problem of improved accommodations became the prime concern of the library board of the day.

The system of providing books for the public schools afforded the most change. At one time, classes single-filed into the library to exchange books. (The librarians still remember with horror the day they discovered one weeping, repentant little boy in the corner where teacher had put him — and forgotten all about him—as they closed up.)

At one time librarians trekked to the school with heavy cartons of books.

Now library books remain in class and school libraries with school books to provide an even wider choice for the youngsters.

Doubly well-known in town through contacts at the library and in Watson's restaurant, the chief librarian looks back over many years of giving pleasure and assisting to obtain information. "It has been a long experience and a wide one," she says.

She is looking forward very much to the new quarters, and has made visits at various stages of construction.



SMILING TRIO of regular librarians greeted readers in the cramped quarters of the old room for the last time on Friday. Mrs. R. P. Watson, on the left, has been chief librarian for over 40 years. Her assistants are Miss Madge Chapman, centre,

and Miss Esther Taylor. With new equipment and new methods, they will be "open for business" again next Monday in the new building.

Named first librarian in 1898 Mrs. R. MacDonald recalls start

A lively young girl of 16, Miss Etie Laird was selected as the village's first librarian in 1898. Born in Acton, she has lived all her life here, and is now Mrs. R. M. MacDonald of 26 Willow St.

She has an excellent memory and her energy and enthusiasm remain with her.

She recalls that in 1898 she was also working in the post office, where she went to learn telegraphy. Families did not have phones as they do now; instead they sent urgent messages by telegraph. (She still has the key she used then!)

Salary, Mrs. MacDonald recalls, was \$10 a week, and she helped in the post office, too.

The post office was in a small building near the old post office, since demolished.

The commercial telegraphy was moved years later to the station.

The energetic young girl took on another job when her qualifications were surveyed and she was accepted by Free Press editor H. P. Moore and other bearded members of the board as the first librarian.

Some books were given from the public school as a start, and a good selection of "good" reading specially purchased.

The system was very, very

different at first, recalls Mrs. MacDonald.

She herself was in sole control of the books. The patrons — there were 80 at once, to start — each purchased for a quarter a special catalogue which listed all the books in stock. Then the subscriber requested by number the book he or she wished at the desk and Miss Laird would scurry to get it. There were often line-ups even out into the hall, and long-skirted Miss Laird was a busy girl indeed.

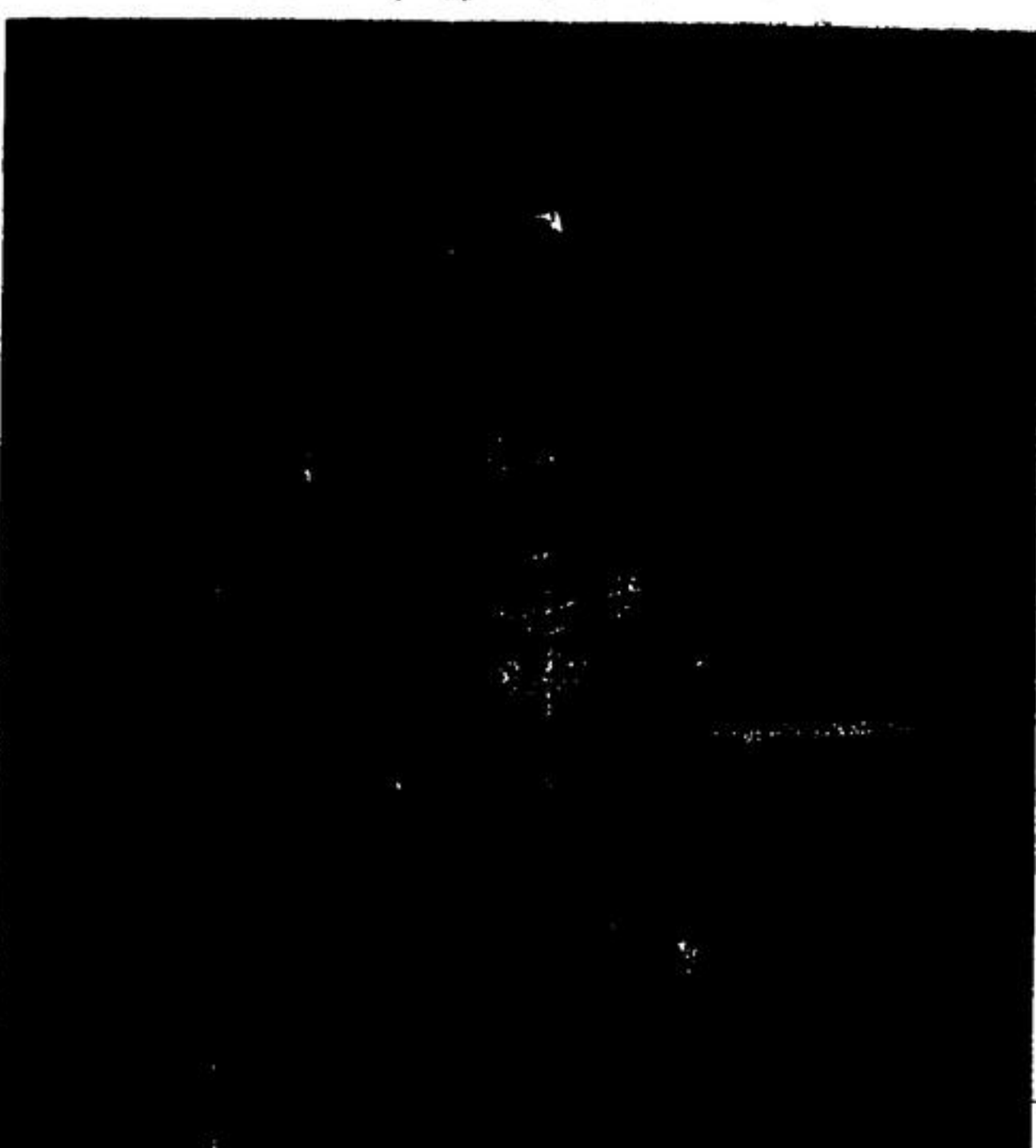
When new books were purchased — which wasn't often, the first few years — a supplement was printed to add to the catalogue of all titles.

Mr. Moore would come over to the library to assist Miss Laird in adding the new books to the shelves, but he always brought Mrs. Moore along for propriety's sake! Mr. Moore was notoriously strict, but they always got along well, says Mrs. MacDonald.

She was born in Acton, married here in 1905 and has never moved away. She thinks probably she is the oldest person in town who has lived here continuously. Her keen memory ranges through eight decades.

When she resigned, she was replaced by a widow, Mrs. Dan Graham, whose husband had been the municipal officer. It had been one of his many duties to fill the oil lamps on the streets, light them each evening and put them out each morning. Sidewalks were made of boards in those days.

\$40 a year girl



MINUTE BOOK beginning with the first meeting in 1898 is perused by the first librarian, sprightly octogenarian Mrs. R. M. MacDonald. She was hired that year at the age of 16 for \$40 a year.



VOLUME FRAME Bob Krul as he rounds a narrow corner on the last day the old library was open.

PUBLIC NOTICE ACTON CENTENNIAL LIBRARY

— NEW HOURS —

Monday to Friday - 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.
 Mon. - Wed. - Fri. - 7 p.m. to 8.30 p.m.
 Saturdays - 12 noon to 5 p.m.

ACTON PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD

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 ON THE OPENING OF ITS

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