

Turning Pages:

Celebrating 100 Years of the

Nelson Public Library



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602 Stanley St.
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nelsonlibrary.ca



The Nelson Public Library is situated on the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa, the Syilx, and the Sinixt peoples and is home to the Metis and many diverse Aboriginal persons. We honour their connection to the land and rivers and respect the importance of the environment to our strength as a community.

COVER & TITLE PAGE: Illustrations by
Douglas Jones.

All archival photos courtesy of the Shawn
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Museum of Art and History.

All contemporary photos courtesy of
Nelson Public Library staff unless otherwise
indicated.

ADDITIONAL PHOTO CAPTIONS:

Page 1: The Nelson Public Library in the
1930s. **Page 5:** Child reading, 1965 (*Nelson
Daily News* photo). **Page 10:** A study table
was reserved for Notre Dame University
students in the 1960s. (*Nelson Daily News*
photo). **Page 21:** Children at the Library's
Early Learning Stations, 2012. **Page 25:**
Suki Simington displayed her hand-painted
signs on her parents' Area E property
leading up to the referendum in 2010.
(Zoe Creighton photo)

The power of Story

Libraries are filled with stories. Some line its shelves, physically or virtually, while others grow from the ways in which the library touches those who use it. Still more stories come from the people who work and volunteer at the Library, and from the determined visionaries who understand its transformative power and its integral place in any community.

Celebrating the Nelson Public Library's Centenary is an opportunity to collect and share these stories. The fall 2020 exhibition at Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History allows library lovers and history buffs an opportunity to explore the story of the Nelson Public Library and to ponder the future of Libraries in our changing world.

The exhibit highlights the tremendous changes and developments in library services over the past 100 years, and while a librarian a century ago might struggle to imagine the library of today, the core values of the Library are as strong as ever: ensuring access to information and knowledge, encouraging life-long

learning, offering a welcoming space for all, and supporting freedom of expression and civic engagement.

This exhibition pays homage to the people who were determined to not only establish the library, but to see it thrive for the benefit of generations to come. It recognizes the children, teens, families, elders, and individuals for whom the library made a difference, and the librarians who opened doors.

Thank you to Library supporters past and present, and to Touchstones Nelson for helping us bring our stories to life.



Tracey Therrien, MLIS

Chief Librarian (lucky 13th),
Nelson Public Library.



ABOVE: Illustration by Nichola Lytle, whose work graces the wall of the Children's Library.

NEXT PAGE: The Library's 100th Birthday Open House, with Chief Librarian Tracey Therrien dressed in the style of a century ago.



Evolving Together: From Collectors to Community Hubs

Libraries and Museums have had similar trajectories—analogue evolutions in our origins as silent keepers of books and objects into our repositioning as vibrant sites meant for discovery, connection, and inspiration.

A partnership between Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History and the Nelson Public Library in celebration of the Library's centenary is therefore most fitting. We celebrate and critique our comparable pasts, while enthusiastically developing possibilities for even greater community interconnectedness, innovation, and knowledge sharing in the years ahead.

Turning Pages: 100 Years of the Nelson Public Library, is a multifaceted project of which we are thrilled to be a part. From September 12th to November 22nd, 2020, *Turning Pages* leaps from this book and onto the walls of Touchstones Nelson Museum's gallery space—visually showcasing the library's history and its dreams for the future.

RIGHT & NEXT PAGE: Nelson Public Library 100th Birthday artwork. Illustrations by Douglas Jones.

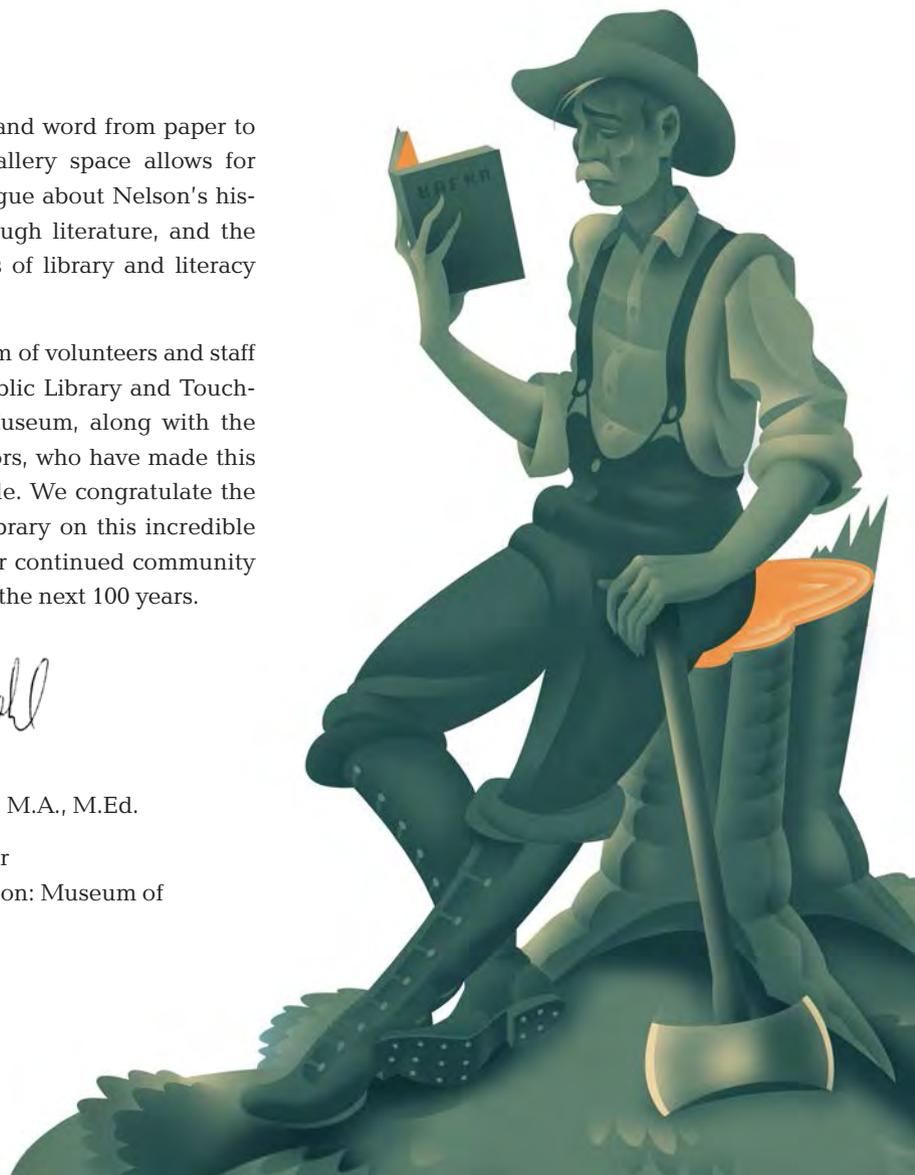
Bringing history and word from paper to the immersive gallery space allows for elucidatory dialogue about Nelson's history as seen through literature, and the hearts and minds of library and literacy champions.

We thank the team of volunteers and staff at the Nelson Public Library and Touchstones Nelson Museum, along with the funders and donors, who have made this exhibition possible. We congratulate the Nelson Public Library on this incredible milestone, and for continued community connections over the next 100 years.

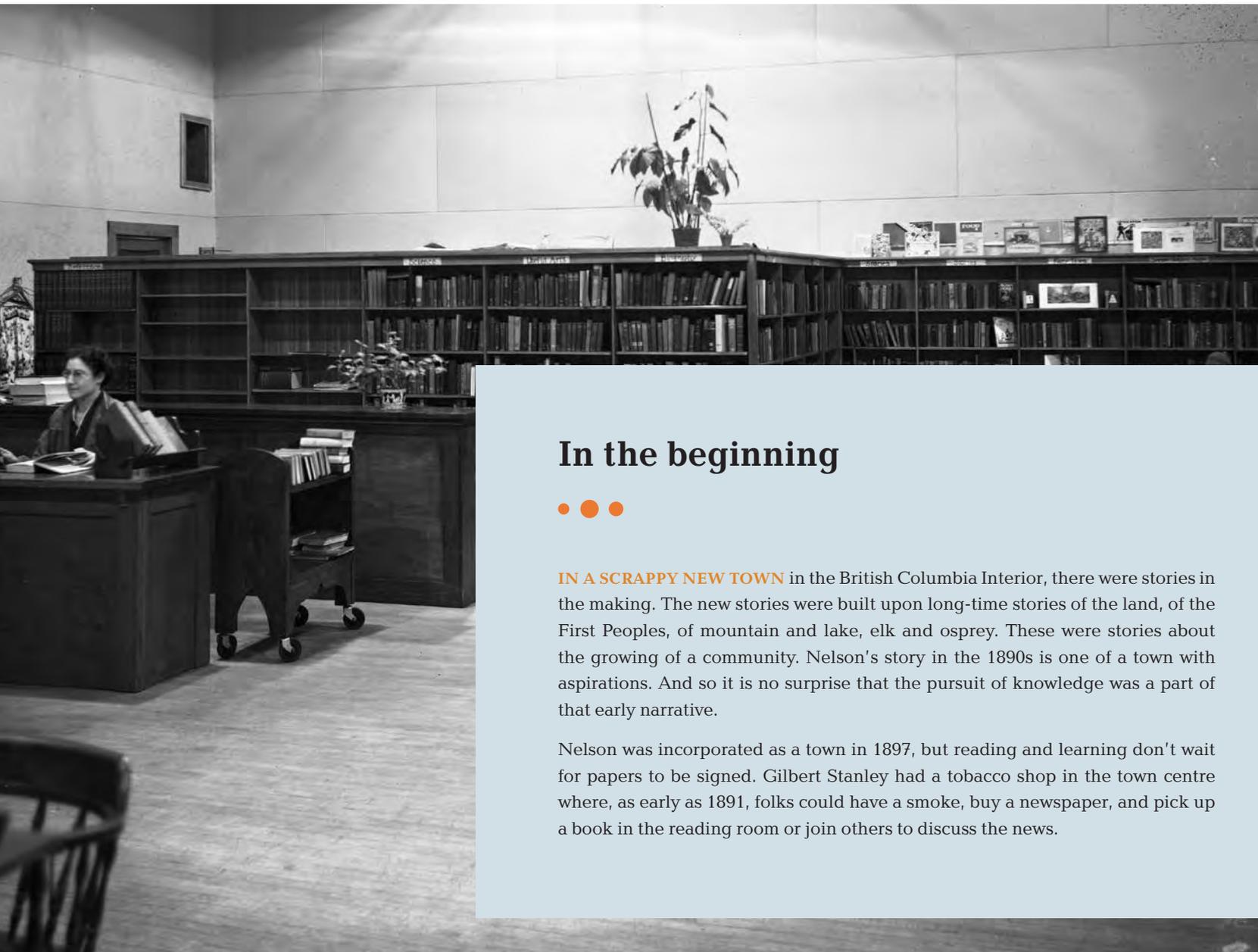


Astrid Heyerdahl, M.A., M.Ed.

Executive Director
Touchstones Nelson: Museum of
Art and History







In the beginning



IN A SCRAPPY NEW TOWN in the British Columbia Interior, there were stories in the making. The new stories were built upon long-time stories of the land, of the First Peoples, of mountain and lake, elk and osprey. These were stories about the growing of a community. Nelson's story in the 1890s is one of a town with aspirations. And so it is no surprise that the pursuit of knowledge was a part of that early narrative.

Nelson was incorporated as a town in 1897, but reading and learning don't wait for papers to be signed. Gilbert Stanley had a tobacco shop in the town centre where, as early as 1891, folks could have a smoke, buy a newspaper, and pick up a book in the reading room or join others to discuss the news.

There were a few such early libraries: The Nelson Public Reading and Amusement Rooms opened in the Victoria Hotel in 1895, and the Canada Drug and Book Company in the town's KWC Block kept a small circulating collection in back. But it was the assembly of a more substantial collection distributed through three rooms in the Broken Hill Block on Baker Street that offered the first glimpse of what a library could be.

"Everyone in Nelson is interested in the success of the free Public Library."

Nelson Daily Miner.
December 14 1898

"Yesterday a *Miner* reporter had considerable difficulty in making his way through the crowd of people gathered in the reading room to the librarian's office. The library has become very popular and that Nelson needs such an institution has been amply demonstrated," wrote the *Nelson Miner* on February 21, 1899.

On April 7 of that year, the Nelson Library Association became a new force in the drive for a properly funded and maintained civic library.



TOP: Horse and wagon in front of lending library, Broken Hill Block.

BOTTOM LEFT: Early Baker Street, Nelson.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Nelson Opera House, site of a Grand Ball in 1899 to raise funds for the fledgling library.

Growing pains and creative fundraising

TALK WAS CHEAP: John Houston, Nelson's first mayor, touted a \$300 grant to the fledgling library as a re-election promise, later upped to \$500 the day before the polls opened. He lost.

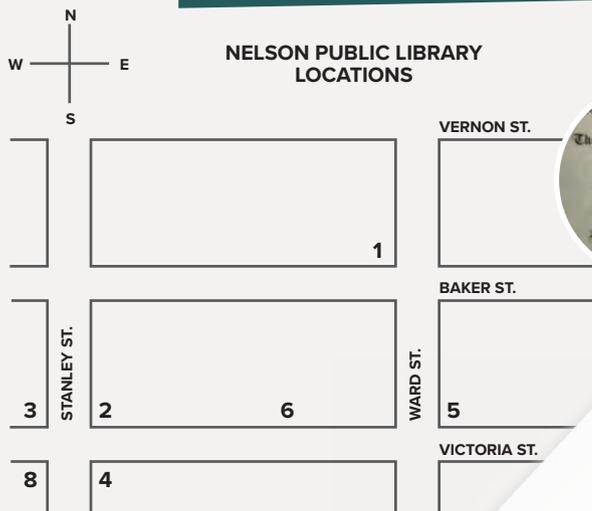
Undaunted, the Library Association continued to apply for funds—unsuccessfully at first—and make improvements, moving the collection to the 400 block of Victoria Street near Stanley on May 26, 1900, into a building belonging to Nelson politician

Harold Selous. There, the collection was likely augmented with volumes donated by members of the Nelson Club—who, apart from smoking, drinking, and card-playing, also served on the Nelson Library Association.

From the time of these early collections until the Nelson Municipal Library's official incorporation in 1920, the collection moved three more times: across the street on the northwest corner of Stanley and Victoria to a house also owned by Selous in 1910, in 1916 to the tall brick YMCA building on the southeast corner, and then in 1920 to a storefront in the Annable Block on Ward Street.

BOOKMARK

1. Broken Hill Block (479 Baker St.) 1898–1900
2. Selous's building (400 block Victoria St.) 1900–1910
3. Selous's house (323 Victoria St.) 1910–1916 (approx.)
4. YMCA (402 Victoria St) 1916 (approx.)–1920
5. Annable Block (567 Ward St) 1920–1927
6. A.H. Green annex (Victoria and Ward Streets) 1927–1937
7. Nelson Civic Centre (719 Vernon St.) 1937–1991
8. 602 Stanley St (1991–present)



1891 Tobacconist and news-dealer Gilbert Stanley keeps a reading room and “library” in the back of his shop.

January, 1895 The Nelson Public Reading and Amusement Rooms opens in the Victoria Hotel. Books may be borrowed subject to a subscription fee.

1898 Three rooms in the Broken Hill Block house a collection of books in Nelson's first real lending library.

March 8, 1899 Thanks to local fundraising, a shipment of 400 books purchased from a Toronto bookseller arrives at Nelson's lending library.

April 7, 1899 **Nelson Library Association is founded.** Barbara Anne Robertson (Mrs. J. Roderick Robertson) is its first president, with H.G. Harrison as librarian.

May, 1899 A successful Grand Ball held at the recently-opened Nelson Opera House raises funds for the library.

May 26, 1900 The book collection is moved to a building on Victoria Street near the northeast corner of Stanley Street owned by future mayor Harold Selous.

Barbara Ann Robertson, known in historical texts as Mrs. J. Roderick Robertson, was the founding president of the Nelson Library Association and, along with a formidable board, was a tireless advocate for Nelson's young library. A first order of business was to see if John Houston's election promise might yet be upheld despite his election loss, a library being for the good of the community. Initially, Council voted in favour of a \$300 grant, but it was overturned after the newly-appointed City solicitor raised objections.

The Association then embraced creative fundraising enterprises. In 1899, a Grand Ball with the library as beneficiary was planned for May at Nelson's new Opera House. A committee was formed, and decorations, refreshments, and a full program were on the drawing board as excitement built; ticket sales—at \$2 for gentlemen and just \$1 for ladies—were brisk. A report in the Nelson *Miner*, headlined "A Most Successful Dance," was delightfully colourful as it described bunting, flags, orchestra, and "tables groaning under the load of choice delicacies. . . . There was everything from the fluffy and deceptive 'kiss' to the somewhat hideous-looking but delicious lobster salad. Jellies kept up an agitated movement as the dancers glided over the floor."

It predicted that "The Nelson Library Association will net a neat sum."

In 1901, application was made to the Carnegie Foundation, then building public libraries around the world. It was not successful.

In 1906 the Nelson Library Association struck a Kermis committee. A "kermis," which originated in the Netherlands, was a festival comprised of indoor and outdoor entertainment, fairs, and games to benefit a cause. Nelson's would be a three-day extravaganza in Nelson's Exhibition Hall to benefit the Library. Imagine: booths celebrating costume, food, and culture of 12 nationalities; exotic souvenirs and crafts; gala evening entertainment including music, dance, and drama, and including a special dance performed by Nelson's children; and a Grand March featuring 100 performers in ethnic costume.

The library fund grew by \$1,000—equivalent to \$28,000 today. The success of this home-grown event prompted *The Daily Canadian* newspaper to write that "The Nelson people appreciate their home talent and are free from that despicable characteristic of so many small towns which pooh-pooh everything that is done at home to the laudation of the foreign."



Barbara Ann Robertson, founding president of the Nelson Library Association.

BOOKMARK

First board of the Nelson Library Association:

Barbara Ann Robertson (president),
wife of J. Roderick Robertson

Mrs. A. L. McCulloch (secretary), wife of A. L.
McCulloch, City engineer

J. Roderick Robertson, manager of London and
B.C. Gold Fields

Robert Hedley, manager of the Hall Mines

Grange V. Holt, agent for the Bank of
British Columbia

George Kydd, manager of the Merchant's Bank
of Halifax (Nelson branch)

George F. Beer, City alderman





Growing up, growing credibility



THE YEAR OF the Nelson Library's official incorporation came at a time of growth for the city, with expansion in lumber, mining, business, manufacturing, and fruit growing and processing. It also came at the end of a world war and an influenza epidemic; Nelson had come through a great deal. In 1919 the provincial government passed the Library Act, and the following year Dr. Helen Gordon Stewart of the Public Library Commission in Victoria travelled to Nelson to negotiate the handing over of the library from the Library Association to the City of Nelson. On January 19, 1920, the Nelson Municipal Library incorporation papers were signed.



Dr. Stewart envisioned a regional library system with Nelson at its centre, where residents would enjoy a purpose-built library—themes that would be raised often over the next century. But to begin with, Mrs. Agnes Cane was hired as custodian-librarian at an annual salary of \$1,020 funded through a City tax levy.

In March 1922 the Public Library Commission sent Marguerite Fahrni, a children's librarian, to Nelson to resolve the matter of an omission of children's services from the library's mandate. In fact, children were not permitted in the library without an adult, and they could not borrow books. Miss Fahrni bought suitable books, spent three weeks unpacking and shelving them, and redecorated for a friendlier children's area. In her report, Miss Fahrni stated that "Nelson is a most fertile field for library work. The district is large and the people enthusiastic. Excellent work is being done at present but it barely touches the fringe of library development."



Fred Irwin, pictured here in 1912 in his role with the Nelson City Band, served as secretary of first Library board in 1920—a position he held for 27 years.

Creative Fundraising



The *Seasonings* cookbook crew: Jocelyn Carver, Anne DeGrace, Heather Goldsworthy, Steven Cretney, and Elliott.

In 1899 Barbara Ann Robertson, Chair of the new Nelson Library Association, bit back disappointment at Nelson City Council's lack of financial support and began fundraising for the fledging library. There were cooking classes led by Miss Bessie Livingstone and a grand benefit ball held at the Opera House. In 1906 a "Kermis"—an exhibition and performance event—raised \$1,000, and a benefit entitled "Conversazione and Dance" held at the Phair Hotel featured a literary discussion before the dancing took over. Fundraisers over the years have included creative events and partnerships such as Oysters, Authors and Ale (with Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy), Storyteller's Saloon (with Touchstones Nelson), the cookbook *Seasonings: A Year of Local Flavour in Words and Recipes* (with the Kootenay Country Store Co-op) and its follow-up *Pairings: A Compendium of Beloved Recipes and Books from the Chefs of Nelson*. Each fall for several years the Library sold Nelson's Chocofellar chocolate bars re-named with literary-inspired titles, such as *Almond's Well that Ends Well* and *Pride and Pecans*.

The new board was chaired by respected physician W.O. Rose. Long-time Nelson Library Association secretary Fred L. Irwin carried on as secretary of the new board, lending his knowledge and also his signature to correspondence with Victoria. After another unsuccessful application to the Carnegie Foundation in 1906, Irwin wrote to the Public Library Commission seeking assistance and advice on a proposed move to the Green Building on Victoria Street, now the site of the Capitol Theatre lobby.

Although the response questioned the proposed location, the board went ahead and on August 1, 1927, a 10-year lease between Alfred H. Green and the City of Nelson was signed. The space was shared with the Nelson Women's Institute, an arrangement that continued into the next location and until 1961. Rent was \$780 annually, necessitating a freeze on the librarian's salary. Soon after the move Mrs. Cane retired and was replaced by Miss Margaret Hincks.

"The library is visited daily by from 40 to 50 people, some of whom have borrowing cards, while others merely spend a pleasant hour or two every afternoon reading."

Nelson Daily News, September 24, 1927



Dr. William Oliver Rose, Chair of the inaugural Municipal Library Board after incorporation in 1920.

1901 The Library's application to the Carnegie Foundation for a new building is unsuccessful.

June 1906 A Kermis—a festive event involving indoor and entertainments, games and a fair—is organized by the Library Association to raise funds.

1910 The Library moves to 323 Victoria Street, the northwest corner, into a residence owned by Harold Selous.

1916 The Library moves to the southeast corner of Stanley and Victoria streets to the YMCA building.

January 20, 1920 The City of Nelson adopts Bylaw No. 310 establishing Nelson's Municipal Library following a successful referendum. Former mayor Dr. William O. Rose is the first library board chair; Fred L. Irwin is the first secretary (and will continue until 1947).

June 15, 1920 The Library moves to a storefront in the Annable Block on the corner of Victoria and Ward streets. Children are not permitted in the library without parental supervision, nor are they allowed to borrow books.



A "temporary" location

AS THE GREAT DEPRESSION was causing economic downturn worldwide the Nelson Library's popularity rose, with a 35% increase in circulation between 1930 and 1933. The City responded stingily, keeping annual operating grant increases at pre-Depression rates. An outbreak of diphtheria in 1934 that required closure of public facilities for two weeks resulted in a slight drop in circulation that year.

The Depression inspired new building initiatives aimed at putting people to work to improve the economy. The Nelson Civic Centre building was one of those, its grand opening on November 29, 1936, a cause for celebration. It was intended for sports and recreation and there was no mention of a library, but in June 1937 tenders for renovation were requested towards the accommodation of a library in the former gymnasium, and by August the Library had taken up residence there "temporarily." And there it would stay for another 55 years.

Head librarian Hincks oversaw ongoing increases in circulation, in part due to the times, but also likely a result of new



programs she implemented: book reviews, talks, and storytelling for children, broadcast on local radio. In 1942 she stepped away from the role and Miss M.A. (Molly) Irving stepped in until 1954. During this time, at the urging of the Public Library Commission, the librarian became solely responsible for book purchases. Prior to this the Library board chose materials, which the Commission suggested had resulted in "a very uneven collection."

TOP: The former YMCA building, home to the Nelson Library from approximately 1916 to 1920.
RIGHT: Chief Librarian Gerda Stockell (1965–1978).





Chief Librarian Deb Thomas throws a line to Fran Riesterer at the Library Open House. The photo was intended to illustrate accessibility issues at the Civic Centre, the Library's "temporary" location for 55 years.

1920 Custodian-Librarian Mrs. Agnes Crane is hired to run the library, with her salary paid through a tax levy.

March 1922 The Public Library Commission sends children's librarian Marguerite Fahrni to resolve the omission of children's services from the library's mandate.

1926 After another unsuccessful bid for funding through the Carnegie Foundation, the Library Association begins looking for a new location.

August 1, 1927 The library moves into the Green Building on Victoria Street (now the Capitol Theatre lobby). The space is shared with The Nelson Women's Institute.

1932 Miss Margaret Hincks becomes the new Librarian, and a strong advocate for a regional library. The Library sees a 35% increase in use between 1930 and 1933.

August 1937 The Library moves into the renovated gymnasium in Nelson's new Civic Centre "temporarily." It will remain there for the next 55 years despite issues with lighting, ventilation, sound, heating, and access.



A library for the able-bodied



IN 1954, WHEN ANGELA HOLMES took on the job of head librarian, the Library was serving the community almost against all odds. Second-floor access was via a steep set of stairs and there were issues with heating, lighting, sound, and ventilation, as well as cramped quarters for the growing Library; clearly, the Civic Centre location was less than ideal. In 1959 library board chair C.B. Garland pitched the Library as the new occupant for the old post office at Ward and Vernon, but it became Nelson City Hall instead.



In 1961 a move on the part of City Council raised eyebrows—and ire. The Nelson Museum had been advocating for a move out of cramped quarters on Lake Street. Without consultation with either party involved, on February 27, 1961, City Council awarded a contract for a mezzanine to be constructed in the library to house the museum. To satisfy the Library's desire for more space, the Women's Institute would vacate the premises (this was also news to them). Outrage followed, with Council's treatment of the Library board described as "cavalier" in a *Nelson Daily News* editorial. The plan was abandoned.

By now, it was clear that "temporary" was a relative term. In the summer of 1962 the Library closed for seven weeks to undergo renovations at a cost of \$8,000. In 1964 Gerda Stockell picked up the gauntlet as head librarian, reportedly ruling with something of an iron fist.

Library Board chair Dr. C.E. Bradshaw, who had been vociferously opposed to City Council's attempts to solve problems unilaterally, did his best to promote a new

library as a goal for Canada's Centennial in 1967 to take advantage of large federal subsidies. Instead, another project was chosen.

And so the cramped, inaccessible location remained, and over the next 25 years each head librarian did her best with what was at hand: Eva Walters from 1978 to 1983, Bonnie Sullivan from 1983 to 1988, and then Deb Thomas, who was finally able to oversee a move to a brighter, bigger, and more accessible location. It would take a lot of work and three referenda to get there.

BOOKMARK

Chief Librarians

- Agnes Williamson** (later Cane) 1920–1931
- Margaret Hincks** (1932–42)
- Molly Irving** (1942–54)
- Angela Holmes** (1954–64)
- Gerda Stockell** (1965–78)
- Eva Walters** (1978–83)
- Bonnie Sullivan** (1983–88)
- Deb Thomas** (1988–2004 and 2005–06)
- Trish Miller** (2004–05)
- Wayne Cole** (2006–07)
- Charlie Kregel** (2008)
- June Stockdale** (2008–17)
- Tracey Therrien** (2017–present)

TOP RIGHT: Gerda Stockell (left) and Chief Librarian Angela Holmes, 1959. Photo credit: *Nelson Daily News*.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Chief Librarian Bonnie Sullivan, 1985. Photo credit: *Nelson Daily News*.



About that regional library

WHEN, IN 1920, DR. HELEN Gordon Stewart of the Public Library Commission looked ahead to the eventual development of a regional library, she likely wasn't thinking of 50 years down the road, and yet nothing had changed in that regard. Soon after the failure of the centennial project pitch, the Library Development Commission—successor to the Public Library Commission—launched a regional library survey of West Kootenay residents, resulting in firm recommendations toward its establishment.

The Library Development Commission then sponsored the All-Kootenay Conference on Libraries, with Notre Dame University librarian Ron Welwood as chair. Some 200 delegates attended the conference in May 1972, resulting in renewed enthusiasm. The City of Nelson helped draw up plans for a regional library with Nelson as its headquarters, just as Dr. Stewart had envisioned.

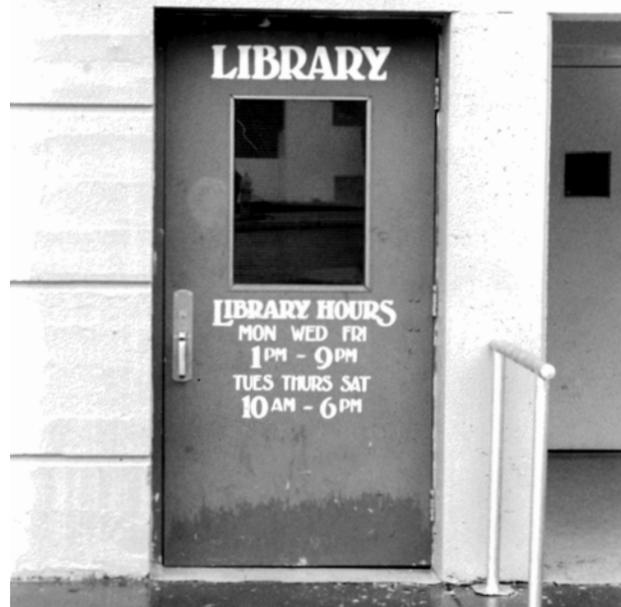
In 1974, library advocates from Castlegar, Creston, Cranbrook, Elkford, Fernie, Grand Forks, Greenwood, Invermere, Kimberley, Midway, Nelson, Rossland,

Salmo, and Trail collaborated to promote an integrated library system, creating the Kootenay Library System Society. Their aim was for all residents of the library districts to have access to library service through any service point in the system, regardless of where they lived. Although government funding was absent, a willingness to work together was identified and a new hopefulness in place.

Then, with an election and a new government, the tide shifted. Proponents of a regional library heaved a collective sigh of disappointment and shifted also. And so things would remain much the same for another couple of decades.

The push continues

WITHOUT A REGIONAL LIBRARY system on any clear horizon, the newly formed West Kootenay Library Association looked for opportunities for cooperation among area libraries while the Nelson Library's board held onto the vision of a new, purpose-built library. The field behind the Civic Centre was considered for a new building, while sites such as the



TOP: Entrance to the Library's Civic Centre location.

BOTTOM: Assistant Mary Johnson repairs books, 1965.

Land Registry Office on Vernon Street and Nelson's Fire Hall might be renovated.

In 1985, the Library Board appointed a New Library and Facilities Committee. Chief librarian Bonnie Sullivan hoped the new committee could help fulfill the dream: an accessible library with a dedicated children's area, room for special programs, quiet spaces, a gallery, and a whole lot more room for collections and people. As it stood, the current "temporary" library space was half the recommended size for a city of 9,200 people.

It became clear, once again, that the best-case scenario would be a new library that would also serve the region, spreading the financial burden over a greater area and providing access to more citizens. Although referred to as a regional library, the concept was more accurately a district library (as opposed to being spread across a number of municipalities). A telephone survey conducted by the recently-founded Friends of the Nelson Library found an average of 60% approval across those polled in Areas E, F, and H.

The results were enough to get an RDCK grant to undertake a feasibility study, which looked at three possibilities: a new library location; the absorption and management of the David Thompson

Friends of the Library

The Friends of the Nelson Library began in 1983 as an advocacy and fundraising group towards the realization of a new library. Over the decades they have spearheaded fundraising initiatives such as the popular book sales, but also through a shelf sponsorship campaign and some pretty innovative ideas. The Incredible Shrinking Tea Party, for example, involved a group of seven Nelson movers-and-shakers who each hosted tea parties for six, who each then hosted tea parties for five, and so on. Tea party participants donated to the cause, their numbers expanding exponentially. Tea parties were held in exotic places that included mountain tops, or embraced ethnic traditions such as the Japanese Tea Ceremony. Thousands of dollars were raised for Library collections and furnishings. In all, more than \$200,000 has been raised since their inception for the benefit of the Library and the community.

TOP: Reaching the Library Expansion fundraising goal was a community effort; as always, the Friends played a part. Celebrating are, L-R: Chief Librarian June Stockdale, Library Board members Paula Barnes and Dianne Harke, and Friends rep Heather Lyon.

BOTTOM: Heather Lyon (left) and Miriam Williams are two of the many dedicated Friends who sorted books for the popular annual book sales.



University Centre Library collection (the University had closed in 1984, but the library's collection was retained by the community); and the potential for a regional library to serve the city plus areas E, F, and a southern portion of H; and financing. The study resulted in 12 recommendations to Nelson City Council in January 1986—and was simply shelved.

For the Nelson Municipal Library board, its newly-appointed Library Action Committee, and the Friends of the Nelson

Library, this would not do. Work began toward achieving buy-in for a referendum on library services, and research began into various locations. The Library Action Committee examined three options: a new building, a renovation of an existing building, and the leasing of a facility. By this time, nobody was pulling any punches: the 1987 Annual Report stated that the Library was "Open to the able-bodied: Monday to Saturday."

To referendum!

BACK IN 1985 FAIRBANK Architects had been commissioned to look into the suitability of several locations for a new library, among them the CPR station, the City Parkade (by adding an additional level), the Wood Vallance building at Baker and Josephine streets, the soon-to-be-vacant RCMP building at Stanley and Victoria, and the former SAAN building



The Library Action Committee were enthusiastic advocates leading up to the 1988 referendum. L-R: Gordon Stein, Chief Librarian Deb Thomas, Frances Welwood, Malcolm Coupland.

on the northwest corner of Vernon and Hall streets. When a referendum appeared likely, the SAAN building was chosen as the most suitable potential site, being centrally located, wheelchair-friendly, spacious, and well-constructed. Conceptual drawings were commissioned and referendum plans, including public education, got underway for fall 1988.

Meanwhile, Bonnie Sullivan, an outspoken advocate for change, resigned, but not without some parting words in an article that appeared in the *Kootenay Sunday Journal* on April 24, 1988. "A library isn't a warehouse for books," she said. "You need room for people and programs." As for the community's ability to pay for it, "people forget that the Civic Centre was built during the Depression of the 1930s." She noted that 25% of new library members lived outside of Nelson, paying a modest subscription fee of \$15 annually. The article appeared along with a cartoon illustrating the myriad challenges of the outgrown Civic Centre location (pictured on the next page).

Nelson Public Library 100th Birthday artwork. Illustration by Douglas Jones.

As the new chief librarian beginning in April 1988, Deb Thomas dove into the drive for change. "We want a library which is accessible to everyone, the young and old, the able and the disabled.



February 27, 1961 City Council awards a contract for construction of a mezzanine floor in the Civic Centre's library location to house the Nelson Museum, without prior discussion with the affected parties. The City rescinds the contract.

Summer 1962 The Library closes for a seven-week renovation for a cost of \$8,000.00.

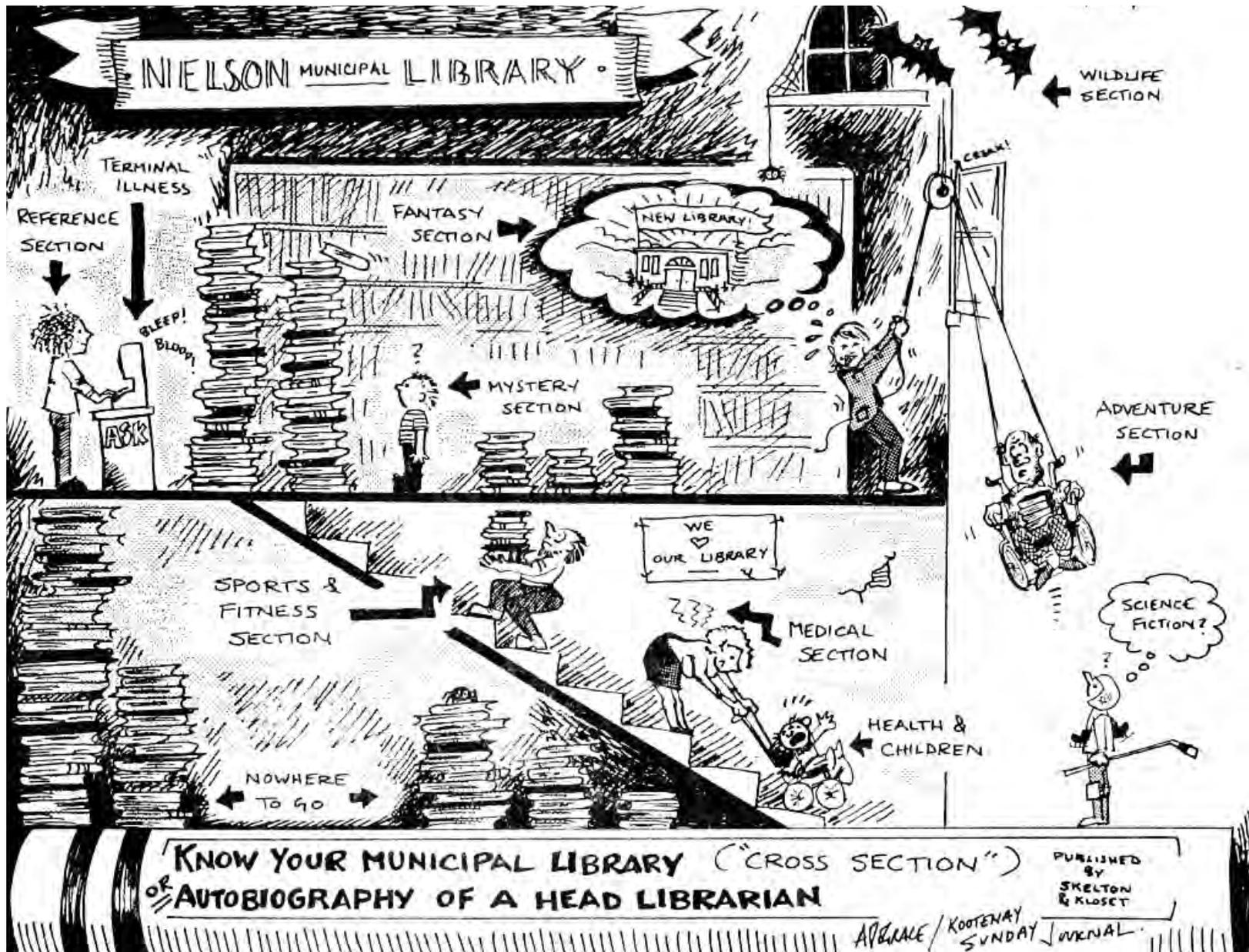
May 1972 The Library Development Commission in Victoria sponsors a conference on establishing a regional library service. The 200 delegates are enthusiastic, but political shifts cause the initiative to fizzle.

May 1983 **The Friends of the Nelson Municipal Library is formed**, with Elizabeth Wallach as Chair.

April 1984 The Nelson Municipal Library's "Library and Facilities Committee" develops a proposal for regional library service with the Nelson library as its base.

1985 The Library enters the computer era with its first automated system.





"I worked evening shifts, and every night at 7:00 you'd hear the sound of the movie coming through the walls—especially when there were explosions or action scenes—and the smell of popcorn. In the morning there would be popcorn in the book drop at the foot of the stairs."

Librarian Helen Blum, describing the quirks of the Civic Centre location.

We at the library see it as apple pie and motherhood—it is an essential service and a very vital part of the community," she said.

The Library went to referendum on November 19, 1988. The voting area included the City of Nelson, and Areas E, F, and a portion of H (south of Enterprise Creek). Letters to the editor had been heated, with proponents in favour for the benefit of the larger region, detractors opposed to any increase in taxes for a service they felt mainly benefitted city residents.

The requirements for a positive outcome called for 50% approval in all four areas. When the ballots were counted, Areas H and E did not get the required majority, and the referendum failed.

BOOKMARK

Community Engagement

Margaret Hincks might have been the Library's first Chief Librarian to reach outside the Library's walls when she broadcast storytimes on local radio in the 1930s. Community engagement really took off in recent decades, with children's programming and tech training making it out into the wider region through partnerships with Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy. Outreach to the Slokan Valley brought live librarians and a roving collection of items to borrow to Valley residents, and "inreach" happened when the library hosted City of Nelson budget open houses and "meet the candidates" evenings during civic elections, as well as the Library's "community desk" embraced by environmental groups, health advocates, human rights activists and others. Every new referendum sought feedback through community surveys, with some surveys launched simply to help the Library do a better job serving its users. Most recently,



Heather Joy Dahlgren and Avi Silberstein ready for the next episode of *Check This Out* on Kootenay Co-op Radio.

community partnerships resulted in book clubs and study groups: Amnesty International and the West Kootenay Ecosociety both co-sponsored book discussion groups, and in 2019 "From the Heart" brought folks together to learn about the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada. A dozen years ago library staffer Anne DeGrace began a popular bi-weekly column for the local newspaper called "Check This Out." In 2017 the Library came full circle to host its own radio show on Kootenay Co-op Radio.

More referenda on the agenda

THE CITY OF NELSON, with Area F and a defined portion of Area E (geographically closer to the city), went to referendum again on April 21, 1990, to determine the public appetite for regional (district) service. Again, all areas needed to show a majority favourable vote for the referendum to pass.

A picture was painted for voters as to what an expanded library could be: microcomputers, fax machines, and typewriters for public use, viewing and listening rooms, online catalogue, tutoring programs, and outreach services were among potential services in a new location, the still-vacant SAAN building. The Friends of the Library pulled out all the stops in advocating for the new vision.

Hopes were dashed: while the popular vote was in favour, the majority in defined Area E and Area F were opposed. At the crux of the opposition, it was believed, were higher taxes. The Library Action Committee accepted the defeat and soldiered on.

Third time lucky

IN 1990, THE CITY acquired the former RCMP building with the idea of housing the Nelson municipality's police force in the upper two floors and the library on the lower levels. The City would move ahead on its own.

Recognizing the new reality, the Library brought non-resident fees more in line with City taxes. It was not a punishment, chief librarian Deb Thomas stated clearly, but a reality check; these were the costs of service. With this, planning began for a city-wide referendum on an increase in tax contribution for the new library facility. Patron input was gathered, engineers consulted, and designs firmed up.

Fundraising began with a goal of \$100,000 for furnishings and equipment. Funds came from grants, foundations, and individuals; a benefit concert and other initiatives raised awareness and cash, and the Friends of the Library sold shelf sponsorships, later indicated by plaques on many of the Library's 1,500 bookshelves.

On June 22, 1991, the referendum was held. A 70% approval from the electorate was cause for jubilation, and Pelman Architects got to work on the renovations.



The Kootenay Kilties marched a small parade of Police and Library personnel, Civic dignitaries, and others to the opening of the new Stanley Street location.

The move in the summer of '92 took three days and many volunteers. A premiere opening and ribbon cutting on June 25 hosted by Deb Thomas and police chief Ron Brock was followed by public tours of the new digs and a "New Library Celebration and Boogie" at the Heritage Inn. The first day of business was July 6, with the Grand Opening in fall heralded by bagpipers in a march to the front doors.

The David Thompson Library collection that might have been incorporated into a

new regional library was not in the cards for the new Municipal Library. Plans began to distribute the collection: the Nelson Library acquired the Kootenaiana collection in print and microfilm to be housed in an archives room in the Library's lower level; archival documents went to the Museum, Archives, Art Gallery, and Historical Society; and art books and periodicals were eventually relocated to the newly-resurrected Kootenay School of Art.

BOOKMARK

By the numbers:

Number of referendums to realize the library we know today: **3**

Number of Chief Librarians since incorporation: **13**

Greatest number of Chief Librarians in a 5-year period: **5** (from 2003–2008)

Highest recorded circulations of physical items in a day: **813**
(in 2011, soon after expansion)

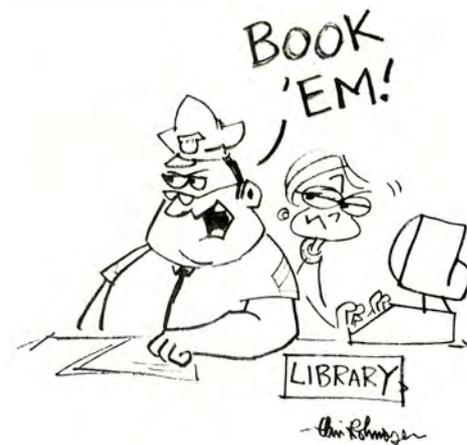
Oldest book in the library's Local Collection: *Camps in the Rockies*
by William Adolph Baillie-Grohman, **published in 1882**

Total number of ukuleles available to borrow: **10**

Longest serving Library Board member:
Fred L. Irwin (secretary from 1920–1947)



Vote "yes" Nelson — just one more time



TOP: Cartoonist Chris Rohmoser had fun with the shared tenancy in the new building, dubbed by some punsters "Books & Crooks." BOTTOM: The Nelson Public Library's front entrance today.



Headlong into the Information Era



THE LIBRARY HAD A BASIC automation system as early as 1985 that involved switching floppy disks to run programs and save data. The next iteration, in 1987, was a step up as a text-based system connected to a server at City Hall, but it did not use standardized library records and it had limited processing ability.

After that, things began to gain momentum. The Province provided a PC for inter-library loans in 1989; next came an office computer and a circulation computer, followed by a third computer that featured a CD-ROM with an atlas and encyclopedia for public use. The Library Board struck an Automation Committee to research mainframe systems, all with big price tags and training costs. A new system couldn't be delayed: the new facility attracted increased use—the children's department alone saw a 25% increase in circulation and program participation—but the looming cost of automation compounded already-increased costs of janitorial, electrical, and insurance elements, as well as staffing. A budget shortfall in the first year was covered by shorter hours and budget adjustments, with the City assuming the remaining deficit. The Library took a deep breath and carried on.

By 1995, the Nelson Municipal Library was the first in the Kootenays to offer public Internet access. The new online catalogue was a learning curve for some, but the Library offered one-on-one tutoring via community volunteers to increase digital literacy. The new automation system had yet to be purchased, however, and still the Library faced a budget shortfall. This time, negotiations between the City and Areas E, F, and H eased the financial situation.

Automation and Information

IT WAS A BEER BUDGET for a pricey endeavour: the conversion of the automated records to a standardized format was pricey enough, and the Library had yet to purchase a system to handle acquisitions, cataloguing, circulation, and public access—a considerable expense. Nelson's first librarians could never have imagined the costs of upgrading technological equipment, operating systems, and programs.

After a fair bit of budget angst, the Library was able to purchase the L4U automation system in 2000. It was installed along with a loss prevention system, catalogue computer stations were introduced, and the old oak card catalogue was retired for good. Unfortunately, L4U was glitchy enough that staff nicknamed it "Hell 4 U." By 2003, many Kootenay libraries were switching to a more versatile system called Mandarin, but for the Nelson Library, L4U would remain for another five years.

Meanwhile the Library began to expand its collection of databases. Staff computers and public access stations continued



November 19, 1988

A referendum is held on a regional library in Nelson and Areas E, F, and a south H, requiring a 50% positive vote in each to pass. Despite the hard work of the Library Action Committee, the proposal is defeated.

April 21, 1990 A second referendum for a regional library puts the vote to residents of Nelson, Area F, and a defined portion of Area E, with all areas required to vote in favour for success. Only Nelson brought in the majority.



June 21, 1991

Nelson residents vote yes for a new municipal library to be housed in the former RCMP building at 602 Stanley St. (the Nelson City Police to occupy the upper levels). The Library opens to the public July 6.

1992 The Nelson Municipal Library receives David Thompson Library's Kootenaia collection.

June 25, 1992 A soft opening of the Library/Police building is held, with the library opening to the public for regular business on July 6.

Programming

Storytimes are a staple of library programming, but it hasn't always been so. In fact, in 1922 the Public Library Commission sent Marguerite Fahrni, a children's librarian, to resolve the omission of children's services from the Nelson Library's mandate; before her arrival, children were not allowed to borrow books! It wasn't until the 1930s that Head Librarian Margaret Hincks introduced book talks and storytelling for children. By the time Nancy Radonich became Children's Librarian in the 1980s—a career that would see her telling stories to the offspring of her first audiences—children's programming, from baby sing-alongs to library camp-outs, was eagerly anticipated. In 1990 the BC Summer Reading Club began, and the Nelson Library was a quick adopter. Teen programming grew from book clubs to tech talks and beyond, and adults learned that the library was a place to meet authors, become informed on all kinds of topics, and learn new skills. In 2017 the Library joined the international Human Library organization, offering an opportunity to talk one-on-one with a human “book” as a way to foster understanding and make good on the Library's mandate to connect people with each other, with information, and with the world.

to be upgraded. Staff training was ongoing, the better to help library users access information, government forms, and other documents in these new, unfamiliar ways. Government programs offered funding to provide student tech trainers for the public.

Deb Thomas understood the role of libraries in embracing technological change while continuing to provide library users with information as well as access to books for pleasure. In a rapidly changing world, libraries were the new navigators.



Programs and partnerships

THE NEW LIBRARY SPACE allowed for greater programming opportunities; the standard fare of library storytimes was enhanced by a partnership with the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL), which in turn paved the way for future collaborations including out-reach book boxes in food banks and soup kitchens and the Book-Under-Every-Tree initiative, as well as a fundraising partnership in an “Oysters, Authors, and Ale” benefit evening. Before the expansion of the Library into the lower level, CBAL kept a small office and drop-in centre for community tutoring there.

The provincial government's 2004 report, “Libraries Without Walls: The World Within Your Reach: A Vision for Public Libraries in British Columbia” promoted collaboration between libraries across

TOP: Children's storytimes are a staple of Library programming. Children's Librarian Nancy Radonich and her sidekick Stanley Mouse charmed kids for decades

BOTTOM: Professional storyteller Shayna Jones captivates her audience in a special Library program.

B.C. With an appetite for collaboration between Kootenay libraries already established, a new organization combining libraries in the East and West Kootenays was formed in 2004. In 2006, the provincial government approved the Kootenay Library Federation, offering financial support from the Library Services Branch. The organization would share resources, undertake consortium buying, and launch a B.C. author touring program.

That same year the Province introduced the BC OneCard, which allowed members of any library in the province to borrow books from any other B.C. library. The Every-School-Child-A-Card program also launched that year ensured that all school-aged children had equal access to the library regardless of where they lived. For the Nelson Municipal Library, that meant families who resided in areas that did not contribute to the library through taxation had the same access for their children as taxpayers; at the same time, more families began to see the benefits of the library.

TOP RIGHT: Chief Librarian Eva Walters (1978 – 1983) accepts a cheque from I.O.D.E. members towards the audiobook collection.

An era of change

BETWEEN 2003 AND 2008, the Library came under the direction of five different chief librarians, each bringing their own specific expertise.

Deb Thomas, chief since 1988, took a year's education sabbatical in 2004. Trish Miller from the Surrey Library system stepped into the role. Miller worked on new partnership programs with CBAL and began work toward improving accessibility in the library's entrance. In 2005 Thomas returned for one year, continuing her work on technological improvements for the library; after just one year she decided to relocate to manage a public library branch in Burnaby.

In 2006 Wayne Cole stepped in, bringing with him experience in academic libraries as a reference librarian and in directorship roles. He worked to streamline workflow and strengthen policies, and he ensured that the new automated doors were installed on time and under budget. He retired one year after taking up the post.

Three chief librarians in three years had resulted in a deterioration of cohesion in the library, according to some. Charlie

Towards freedom to read



Today, the Library is a community institution that prides itself on barrier-free access to resources and to the space itself, but it wasn't always so. Librarian Angela Holmes (1954–64) was reported to have stated that censorship was unnecessary: Nelson readers wouldn't want to read a book like *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, so the Library wouldn't order it in the first place. Successor Gerda Stockell was proud of the Library's art book collection, which stopped at Picasso. "I have nothing but contempt for modern painters," Mrs. Stockell told the *Nelson Daily News* in 1965. Librarian Eva Walters (1978–83) worked hard to bring the Library "into the seventies" according to a Nelson Daily News article in 1978. She increased the library's collection of "talking books" and acquired cassette recorders so people with vision impairments could enjoy library resources, and improved the children's section, adding more storytimes. Reporting to the NDN that the library's washroom was once closed for 16 years when fearful librarians "wondered if a public restroom would become a refuge for winos and tramps," Walters worked to create a welcoming atmosphere for everyone. Now, the Library's policies ensure that all are welcome, and that the freedom to read is upheld.

Kregel was hired on a six-month contract to take a good look and make positive changes. Nicknamed "The Fixer," Kregel restructured staff positions, built stronger partnerships with Nelson City Council, senior staff, and other City departments, and made sweeping policy changes. He secured a \$100,000 Columbia Basin Trust grant to revitalize the library and its collections, and he advocated for better services for non-residents in a bid to build goodwill.

June Stockdale stepped into the chief librarian position in 2008, aiming to build on Kregel's inroads into local government and regional relationships. Stockdale's prior work as a Western Canada trainer for the Mandarin automated system opened the door for a long-awaited migration from L4U. Programs such as Slocan Valley outreach brought rural residents on board as never before. It was time to ask the question about expanding library service one more time.



TOP: Chief Librarian June Stockdale (2008–2017), dressed in 1920s finery, addresses the audience at the Library's 90th Birthday Open House in 2010.

RIGHT: Nelson Public Library 100th Birthday artwork. Illustration by Douglas Jones.



Can we get a yes?



SINCE MOVING TO THE NEW location, the Library had made gains: a larger, more welcoming space, more programs, and community outreach made a compelling case for the library as an essential part of a healthy community. Still, nearly 12,000 of the 49,000 British Columbians without taxation-supported library service were living within the Nelson Library's geographical range: areas E, F, and H.



Stats showed that 17% of Municipal Library memberships were from these areas, which were responsible for 30% of circulation, but contributed just 2% of the library's operating income. Additionally, anyone could use the facility; one month in 2010 saw 2,400 uses of the public computers, with no membership required.

After a feasibility study conducted by RDCK directors for Areas E, F, and H, the decision was made to hold a referendum. If passed, area residents would pay \$10.30 per \$100,000 of assessed property value, and directors from each Area would have a place on the Library Board. An educational campaign ensued, carefully positioned as a neutral explanation of the facts. Despite this, those who opposed an increase in taxation and questioned the future of libraries raised their voices in letters to the editor and handbills distributed in neighbourhoods.

When the polls closed on October 16, 2010, the results were close: Areas F and South H were in favour; E was opposed. This time, success was not contingent on all Areas voting in favour; the Library's service area would expand, and residents of Area E would be able to join by paying an annual subscription fee. Stockdale told *The Valley Voice*: "7,400

people have just joined the service through universal access, joining 99% of the province in the ability to freely access this essential service."

Although the name at the time of incorporation — Nelson Municipal Library — remained the same for legal reasons, the Library was officially rebranded as the Nelson Public Library.

connect

Nelson Public
LIBRARY

create

Nelson Public
LIBRARY

discover

Nelson Public
LIBRARY



Volunteers

The Library has always welcomed volunteers, although when the Library unionized in the mid-1980s, volunteer assignments were not allowed to replace the regular duties of staff. Volunteers ensure the shelves are in Dewey order, wash books, stamp bookmarks, and undertake special projects of all kinds. The Library move from the Civic Centre to its present location was an endeavour that saw countless volunteer hours and evidence of tremendous community goodwill, including that of Sandy Mitchell (top right) who washed the newly moved shelves. One of the Library's longest volunteers was Russel Nord, a smiling face and purveyor of jokes nearly every week for more than thirty years. At lower right, Russell receives recognition for his volunteer service, along with Mariposa Bressey, at the Library's 95th birthday event. At left, Hoda Ghamwary (top) and Marg Dietrich cheerfully wash book covers and straighten shelves. Hoda also served as a Nelson Library Trustee.



2000 The collection is barcoded, a fully-automated system is installed, and the card catalogue is retired in favour of online records. The new L4U system is not without flaws, however.

2006 The provincial government introduces reciprocal lending through BC OneCard, and equal access for school-aged children through Every-School-Child-A-Card. The Nelson Municipal Library can now offer publicly funded access to children in areas E, F, and H.

2007 A \$100,000 Columbia Basin Trust grant is secured to revitalize the library, particularly the collection.

2008 The Library transitions to the Mandarin Integrated Library System, with improved functionality and greater reliability. The library introduces outreach services to seniors and new online databases.

2009 An outreach service to the Slocan Valley is introduced. Downloadable eBooks and eAudiobooks are introduced through the Overdrive platform, allowing patrons to access electronic books from home. A self-check station is installed.

For the children

WHILE ADVOCATES OF expanded library services were hard at work, another major change was underway. The Library Expansion Project would see a new, dedicated children's library in the lower level accessible by both a wide staircase and an elevator; upstairs, renovations included a relocated circulation desk and offices, a welcoming teen corner, and an improved overall layout. The Technical Services and Children's Librarian office would move downstairs, and the CBAL Learning Centre would move to City Hall.

A fundraising campaign went into full swing, and the \$100,000 fundraising goal

was met with substantial help from a \$50,000 donation by local philanthropist Bruce Ramsay. In recognition, the new children's area was named in honour of his parents, William and Isabel Ramsay.

By October 2010 much of the expansion was complete, with the new children's area open for business. It was time for celebration: an open house showcased the changes and celebrated the Nelson Library's 90th birthday. It was also the launch of *Seasonings: a year of local flavour in words and recipes*, a literary cookbook and fundraiser created in partnership with the Kootenay Country Store Co-op.

The Summer Reading Club has been a kid-pleaser since the provincial program began in 1990.



BOOKMARK

The Library of Things

In the beginning, the folks that gathered in the back of Gilbert Stanley's tobacco shop in 1897 were mostly men who'd have a smoke and pick up a book or a newspaper in the reading room, perhaps pausing to discuss the news of the day. And sure enough, libraries were, for many years, collections of books that gained diversity and order as collections and systems grew. Over time, a library user might go home with a record album or a videocassette. Today, the way we read has changed, as well as what we can borrow. The Nelson Library's ever-expanding collection of borrowable things now includes, among other things, radon detectors, infrared cameras, exploration backpacks for kids, tiny programmable robots, laptop computers, and ukuleles. What might you borrow a hundred years from now? Take a look on page 35 at some of the ideas you gave us in our centenary survey!

BOOKMARK

TOP: Helen Blum remembers the Library's early technological forays.

BOTTOM LEFT: Heather Goldik provides one-on-one tech help to a new device user.

BOTTOM RIGHT: DJ Ginger explains music mixing in a teen program.

O, technology!

Longtime Library staffer Helen Blum and the Library's first computer arrived at around the same time in the mid-1980s. Of the cheap barcode wand that came with it "after a while just wouldn't read the barcode, no matter how often or at what angle," she says. It would be another two decades before the card catalogue would be replaced with an online version, and even longer before folks could interface with a website that would allow them to look up books and place holds. The Early Literacy Stations purchased in the 1990s by the Friends of the Library were controversial, as technology in the children's area has more or less remained, but public computers for teens and adults have been embraced from the moment they arrived and remain an important resource for those without

home computers. If, for the Library, embracing new technologies is about being ahead of the curve, its equally about ensuring access to all through public stations, and free tech training thanks to federal student programs and staff assistance. As personal devices galloped into collective consciousness, the Library set up a "technology petting zoo" so folks could try out the new gadgets; now, eReaders and laptop computers are available to borrow. Online, free databases via library subscription make access to information and learning available to anyone with a card. These include online courses and training on user-friendly platforms that open up new opportunities.



Moving forward...

OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS the Nelson Library worked to achieve its goals. Outreach to the Slocan Valley made good on referendum promises; expanded collections and databases were enhanced through fundraising events produced with Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy and Touchstones Nelson, and through a second cookbook, *Pairings: a compendium of beloved recipes and books from the Chefs of Nelson*; eBooks were promoted and their use supported. Public school connections and collaborations were enhanced. School-aged children in Area E had access to the library through a cost-sharing initiative.

In 2012, the Nelson Library migrated to the provincial Evergreen system known as Sitka. Now, the collections could be more easily shared between libraries. A self-check station allowed patrons a self-serve checkout option, freeing library staff time for reference questions and tech help for library users—which by 2012 had increased by more than 20% in just two years.

A public appetite for eBooks was evidenced in a 50% increase in circulation within a couple of years. The Library purchased eReaders to lend and installed a “technology petting zoo” so folks could

play with some of the new devices. Two “Quiet Rooms” were installed in 2015 for one-on-one tutoring, or just quiet spaces for folks to work in an increasingly busy and often unquiet library.

The Library began taking a role in the social wellbeing of the community, ensuring that the soup kitchen and food bank had free books to give away, and putting the word out that the Library is a welcoming place for everyone, far more widely accessible than it was in 1920. In 2017 and 2018 the library hosted a “Human Library,” part of a worldwide initiative to bridge divides between people through one-on-one conversations.

In mid-2017 June Stockdale retired. Incoming chief librarian Tracey Therrien brought new ideas for improved public service and innovation while keeping her eye firmly on a goal of best practices in all areas of the Library.

Today, the Nelson Public Library enjoys stable municipal support, something Library Association Chair Barbara Ann Robertson wished for back in 1920, when a grant of \$300 was approved, then withdrawn. One hundred years in, the City of Nelson now provides 80% of the Library’s overall budget, with the remainder funded by Regional District Areas F and H, and

the Province of B.C. The efforts of the Friends of the Library, grants for special projects, community support and partnerships, and individual donations are icing on the cake—birthday or otherwise.

...and into the future

IN 2017 THE LIBRARY BOARD created a five-year strategic plan following community consultation and a review of reports and predictions with regard to public libraries. The plan would position the Library for a strong future.

The three key focus areas are: community needs, spaces to connect, and sustainability, with a mission to inspire “a culture of discovery, creativity, and connection.”

Recognizing that a library’s collection can be more than traditional items, a library of things was developed. Among the new items anyone could borrow were radon detectors, tiny robots, exploration backpacks for kids, and ukuleles.

By the time the Nelson Library celebrated the 100th anniversary of its incorporation on January 19, 2020, plans were firmly

in place to install a Tech Hub in spaces carved out for the purpose on both floors. A recording station for audio/visual creation would include a camera, mics, headphones, lights, a green screen, and a computer and software. A digitization station would enable the conversion of analog files, such as photographic prints and slides, and VHS and cassette recordings into a digital format. And an editing station would feature state-of-the-art design and editing software. Additionally, laptop computers were purchased for loan, and a subscription to an online hub for tech tutorials was purchased.

The Nelson Library holds dear its mandate to be an egalitarian, inclusive institution, but it hasn't always been so, and there is much to be done. Missing from the Library's story are the voices of Indigenous peoples—this land's first storytellers.

To begin along the road of reconciliation, the Library is working to create new bridges of understanding. Blanket Exercises, which offer participants a better understanding of the effects of colonization, led by Indigenous educators and elders, have been both educational and deeply felt. The "From the Heart" study group brings people together through reading and discussion to learn about

the challenges faced by Indigenous people historically, and today. The Library's collection includes an increasing selection of material by Indigenous authors, musicians, and filmmakers. The Library is committed to continued learning, and to sharing learning opportunities with the community.

What will the future look like for the Nelson Public Library?

"The dream of a new purpose-built library, with ample space for programming and community activities, is something we believe is essential for the region," says 2020 chief librarian Tracey Therrien. "The Library hasn't been a warehouse of books for a very long time. We are a community hub, and a connector of people to knowledge and to one another. We are here to help navigate the future."



Chief Librarian Tracey Therrien.



2010 The library Board and the Friends of the Nelson Library begin fundraising for expansion to see a Children's Library on the lower level, expanded office space, and a relocated circulation desk.

October 16, 2010

Residents in Electoral Areas E, F, and South H vote on regional library services. The vote is successful in F and South H but fails in E. Areas that voted in favour receive universal tax-based service, with Area E accessing service through individual subscription. **The library rebrands as the Nelson Public Library.**

October 2010 An Open House is held to celebrate the completion of the Library expansion project and celebrate the Library's 90th birthday.

2016 A new 5-year strategic plan (2017–2021) is developed following community consultation and a review of reports on the future of libraries.

2017 A Human Library brings an international program to Nelson for one day. Library users can check out real people for a conversation to learn about their lives.

Here's what you told us about the Nelson Public Library



Photo by David R. Gluns.

"I had no idea a library could be so many things."

LVR Human Library user, 2017

"Mother Goose was my jam when I was a toddler. I like how the library has Robot kits, and ukeles to make music on. It was good to take a break from technology."

Olive, 12

"My sincere appreciation for the leadership, daring, and passion that has brought about such significant changes to what has become one of our community's greatest assets."

Library member, 2014

"Constantly building on wonderful"

written in the Library's 95th birthday card

"Libraries can magically transform the way I feel. I almost always learn something I did not know when I visit a library."

Bernadette, Library user



BOOKMARK

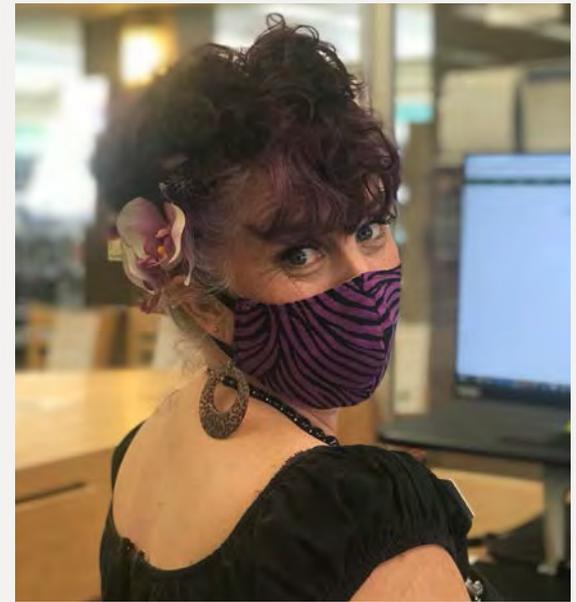
On being nimble: 100 Years and a Global Pandemic

Libraries strive to be responsive to community needs and challenges, do their best with shifting budgets, keep pace with the technology curve, and maintain high professional standards. The Nelson Library is no exception, constantly fine-tuning procedures and ensuring that policies reflect and strengthen the Library's mandate.

As needs change, the Library changes, too. Programs and collections now reach more families and seniors as mobile story times and roving collections travel beyond the Library's walls. Free tech training has helped folks keep up in an increasingly digital world. The Library's sharing of resource information

with organizations such as the Nelson Committee on Homelessness has built increased understanding of the disparate needs of Library users, including those on society's margins. As a public institution in a changing world, the Library works to ensure equal access and safety for all, so that everyone may enjoy the Library and its resources.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, the Library adjusted with this in mind. A staged reopening responded to the quickly-changing landscape of safety recommendations, with closed doors to on-site visits until health and safety could be



TOP LEFT: The Mother-Daughter Book Club moved outside in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Photo by Jake Maslak. RIGHT: Library staff adapt gracefully to new safety measures during a global pandemic. Pictured, staff member Shawna Pickard.

assured. An uptick in online borrowing and phone reservations for check-out items meant that reading still happened—perhaps more than ever—while book clubs and discussion groups moved online or outside.

By fall of 2020 the Library had re-opened for limited browsing, and folks could book a computer to do research, connect with friends and family, or access government forms, all in a safe environment. Online offerings increased, and story times relocated out-of-doors. Inside, smiles are still visible under the face masks donned by staff, reassuring folks that, whatever the future brings, the Library will be there.

Now, over to you.



WE ASKED LIBRARY USERS this question: in your wildest dreams, what kinds of things will you be able to do in your library in a hundred years from now?



Some of you saw technology as opening new doors—but you still saw books as a part of the experience.

- A place to meet the characters in books virtually, to interact with the authors, or that has the capability to take me into the world of my favourite books
- Taller shelves, and 'droids would fly up and get books for you
- Books that can translate into any language
- Books will float over to me in the subjects I'm thinking about

Some of you took it a little further:

- Borrow a jet-pak to fly up to Pulpit Rock and other mountaintop viewpoints
- Plug into a neural net and have information directly downloaded to my brain
- Virtual travel exactly like being in a different place: sound, smell, and tactile
- Hologram visits with people from the past
- Experience historical artifacts virtually, for example a tour of the Titanic.

Some of you saw new developments in the library space or collection:

- Coworking space! Host large scale, accessible events!
- Borrow household handheld appliances, tools, technology, seeds, and more
- Access experts on a variety of topics with whom you can talk face to face
- Drink a coffee while sitting by a fireplace. Hammocks. Roof garden.

And some of you hoped that things wouldn't change too much:

- A continued place of safe refuge for marginalized people, new Canadians, etc. to connect with others. A place of diversity, of people and ideas to come together to deepen and widen understandings.
- Still visit a book-filled library staffed by friendly folks: real humans with a sincere smile, just like now.

TIMELINE TOP: Nelson Public Library 100th Birthday artwork. Illustration by Douglas Jones.

TIMELINE BOTTOM: 2020 Mayor John Dooley shakes hands with 1920 Mayor J.A. MacDonald (played by actor Don Thompson) at the Library 100th Birthday Open House. LV Rogers High School drama students played the reporters.

2019 The Library of Things grows: the items members can check out includes tiny robots, ukuleles, radon detectors, exploration backpacks for kids, and more.

Late 2019 Plans are developed for a Tech Hub, with equipment and programs for analog media digitization, audio recording, and film for early 2020.

January 19, 2020 **The Library celebrates its 100th birthday** with an Open House on the 19th and a community celebration event at the Capitol Theatre on the 17th.



WE ALSO ASKED OUR NELSON PUBLIC LIBRARY COMMUNITY to get creative. Our categories included kids, teens, and adults, who answered a variety of questions about the library past, present (historians will note that the Nelson Library's centennial year was also shaped by a pandemic) and future. Then we had the very difficult task of choosing the best—and here are two highlights we just had to share.

From Gwendolyn Pusey, eleven years old

When I go to the library I'm free. And that's why I go. I'm there to read and to escape normal life. When I'm in a book I can live through an unrealistic world and life. I've always loved to read, and so a library is the place where I can do whatever I want, depending on the book I choose to read. Fiction has always called my attention and made me want to never put down a book, especially books that feel so real, it's like walking in the characters footsteps and seeing what they see. Sometimes I don't even realize I'm looking at words because I'm so focused on the images racing through my mind that is a story.

And now I'm a writer. I write the stories that I want others to read and love as much as I love to read other people's stories that were in the library and that I picked up one day to read and to give me inspiration to write.

I still read and always will because that is what I love to do.

"Since we moved to Nelson when my son was 4 and he's now 10, we've made library visits a monthly outing which has shaped his love of books, reading, and knowledge. Go Library—you are GOLD."

Isabella, Library user

"The library was a safe refuge when I was a kid, a place of learning as a teenager, a resource as an adult. I can't imagine a world without libraries."

Kim, Library user

"A place of refuge, a place of friendship, a place of acceptance, a place of rest, a place of learning... a library offers all this and more for its community."

Anonymous, Library user

"The library is common ground; a shared space like a park or beach, a place for everyone and all for free. Little else can make that claim."

Greg, Library user

From Jen Callow:

Library Takeout





Nelson Library staff ham it up in honour of longtime staffer Anne DeGrace's final day prior to retirement. At present, Groucho Glasses are not available to borrow from The Library of Things, but are kept on site an important tool for staff use.

Acknowledgements

I have many things to be grateful for, personally, professionally, and with regard to this exhibition and the companion book you are reading now.

After thirty-two years at the Library, I am personally grateful for the culture that shaped each day of my working life: a culture of respect and kindness; of wanting to make each day a little better for the folks we encounter; of helping to connect, inform, and inspire. I can't imagine a better culture to work in.

I retired in January of the Library's centenary year and had the privilege of being on staff for the birthday celebration weekend that marked the anniversary of incorporation. Now, I have had the privilege of working on this project with the exceptional team at Touchstones Nelson: Curator Arin Fay, Archivist J.P. Stienne, intern Ruby Creighton and Executive Director Astrid Heyerdahl. Huge thanks to this triumvirate, and to Chief Librarian Tracey Therrien and my successor, Heather Goldik for support and guidance.

A debt of gratitude goes to Frances Welwood (*Nelson's Library 1895–1985*) and

Eileen Holland (*The Story of the Nelson Public Library, 1896–2013*), whose books made my job easy. Thanks also to historian Greg Nesteroff, always there whenever I reach out for help, and to Steve Thornton for his editing expertise. The Centenary Planning Committee members were my helping hands: Tessa Bendig, Sue Adam, and Randi Fjeldseth, in addition to Tracey, Heather, Frances, and Astrid.

Finally, I wish thank our funders, Columbia Basin Trust, the City of Nelson, RDCK Areas E, F, H, Heritage B.C. Friends of the Library, United Library Services, Hall Printing, and Speedpro Signs for support for this exhibition and book, and to Nelson area businesses and individuals who came out with donations in cash and in kind, and with so much goodwill towards our centenary celebrations.

Here's to the next hundred years.



Anne DeGrace



Eileen Holland (left) and Frances Welwood (right)

Columbia Basin **trust**



Heritage BC


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 ***Speedpro Signs.***

 UNITED LIBRARY SERVICES

City of
NELSON

 Touchstones Nelson
Museum of Art and History

From gatekeeper to door-opener: The Nelson Library at 100 years

The notion of a library as a warehouse for books is a cliché long due for retirement along with the shushing librarian—and yet as a narrative, it owes a lot to history.

The Nelson Public Library examines its own evolution in this, its centenary year, in partnership with Touchstones Nelson, Museum of Art and History. In this book we chronicle a century of reading, learning, public programming, galloping technology, and an expanding societal role as the Library grew alongside the community. In today's narrative, everyone is welcome, books are but a part of the story, and the library is seldom a quiet place.

It is through an understanding of the past that we examine our potential, which is why this centenary project offers a rich opportunity as we craft the next chapter.

imagine

Nelson Public
LIBRARY

