

EDITORS' NOTE

While some writers are acknowledged in the book, the editors have chosen to allow some chapters to stand without specific author or editor credit. Material acknowledged as quoted from the Regina Public Library minutes may not be verbatim.

Unless otherwise specifically attributed, the opinions expressed in this book do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Regina Public Library Board or staff.

FROM THE EDITORS

SUSAN BIRLEY

The public library is a sacred place for many, where we first discovered the limitless treasure of books, freely available: a space for quiet time to read, to reflect, to learn, to interact with books and other materials.

The Regina Public Library (RPL) has remained at the heart of the community for over one hundred years, serving as both a haven and a source of knowledge, enrichment, and information for Regina's residents. This book attempts to chronicle the stories of those who helped to create the library and to maintain it, and those who found refuge and inspiration there through its many changes.

For me, the idea for this book began when I met Emily Woodward, who introduced herself as “the Princess of Wales,” an affectionate title given her by the patrons of the Prince of Wales Library, where she was librarian for over thirty years.¹ This started me thinking—how many similar stories are out there? When I learned that the RPL would not be writing a formal history to mark its centennial, I persuaded the Friends of the Regina Public Library to support a library history project that would collect anecdotes of former RPL board and staff

members. As the volume of potential information and stories grew, it seemed a larger project was possible. I approached Anne Campbell, a writer and long-time administrator at RPL, Jeannie Mah, artist, and researcher Bob Ivanochko to collaborate on a library history told from the viewpoint of the library community. Jeff Barber, director of the Regina Public Library, endorsed the project, and the library board provided financial support and a small office space by the Prairie History Room as well as access to the board minutes and annual reports going back to 1908.

We determined that this would be a history written from many perspectives in order to show how the library responded to the needs and interests of the community over time. It was difficult at first to find material to build the story, since the library has not organized its own archives; however, the Prairie History Room provided a good starting point. As our principal researcher, Bob Ivanochko patiently transcribed the board minutes, as well as reviewing microfilms of newspapers and other sources going back to the late 1800s. He wrote an early draft of the library history to 1936, which formed the basis of chapters 1 and 2. Jeannie Mah searched the photo collections of the City of Regina Archives, the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan (formerly the Saskatchewan Archives Board), and the RPL (uncatalogued) for images to illustrate the library story. Anne Campbell contacted former colleagues and current staff at the library for additional source material, interviews, and contributions to the library history. Many were asked for their stories about the library and its role in the community. I carted around boxes of files to self-imposed retreats in order to find the solitude necessary to filter through all the materials and write much of the narrative.

The source material for the narrative history was largely derived from library board minutes and library annual reports in the early years, as well as published and unpublished documents found in the RPL files, the Prairie History Room, the City of Regina Archives, and the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan. For the later period, the narrative was also complemented by interviews with staff and board and essays from current and former staff and board members, as well as writers, artists, filmmakers, community activists, culture workers,

historians, and academics. These source materials have been placed with the City of Regina Archives and the Prairie History Room as the Regina Public Library History Collection, for other researchers to use.

I would like to thank my co-editors, Anne and Jeannie, for their ongoing commitment and passion as we have spent much of the past six years researching, interviewing, writing, compiling, editing, and re-editing. Of course the material produced was far greater than we could reasonably accommodate in one volume, and we also spent much of the past two years consolidating.

As with any creative project, this story has been long in the making, but will hopefully prove entertaining and informative to library lovers and students of libraries.

ANNE CAMPBELL

Writing a history, whether of family or institution, is really a compiling of memories, some public, some recorded formally, and some still fresh in living memory. The shape and tenor of the memories create a specific story, and the story becomes the history. Or “a” history: the one revealed at a specific time, unique to the vision of the tellers and the compilers, all aware that others would see and create another version of the same “family” history.

And it is “family” history that applies to the story of the Regina Public Library. From the first small group of dedicated citizens who created the library and served on boards, and the first staff groups, to later boards and staff who brought the library into the modern era, to today’s board and staff who have placed the library at the centre of the electronic age—through good times, and more admirably through trials, budget crises, and questions of the library’s place in the community—the library has maintained the interconnections and loyalty seen in a family.

There is pleasure in satisfying curiosity when exploring roots, family or institutional, but as I explored the roots of our community’s library with my fellow editors—through archives, newspapers, library records, and interviews—what was revealed was not only interesting, but moving and even inspiring. Without exception, from its beginning to the present, our community has rallied in support of

library service, and the library has responded, many times offering innovative services not yet available in other cities and locations.

And there were many such offerings: on a personal note, as a writer and former RPL administrator, I am grateful to our library for leadership in payment to writers for the use of their work in library-held material; for being the first public library in Canada to house a writer-in-residence, with appointments ongoing since 1978; and for leadership in literacy training.

Revisiting the Library has deepened my appreciation for these and other initiatives which, over the years, created depth and amazing diversity of services for library users.

Our research and compiling have taken the form of an anthology, bringing multiple viewpoints to the study; there would be no “history” without these diverse voices, both historic and contemporary. I wish to thank these contributors, and also my co-editors, Jeannie Mah, working partner, and Susan Birley, lead editor. Our thanks also go to designer Duncan Campbell, managing editor Donna Grant, and all of the staff at the University of Regina Press for creating a beautiful and accessible book.

Inevitably, there will be errors and oversights, for which we take responsibility; for those with different views on our library history, we look forward to lively conversations. Whatever inevitable differences, I believe one thing can be agreed upon: from its beginning the Regina Public Library has been important to the community. Moreover, as I worked on this book, I came to understand that in times of duress, the library often became the actual heart of our community.

JEANNIE MAH

As a potter, I was happy to discover that clay played a role in the ancient history of libraries. The first books were made of clay! In early Babylon, imprinted clay tablets and beads were stored in clay chests and jars, or on clay shelves.²

Since 1908, dedicated citizens have worked to establish the Regina Public Library as the cultural hub in our growing city. When the Carnegie library opened, sheet music, as well as books, could be borrowed. Before the MacKenzie Art Gallery was formed, Central Library

mounted art exhibitions. Later, records, films, dress patterns, toys, CDs, DVDs, and art could be borrowed with a library card. These innovations established RPL as a centre of cultural excellence in librarianship, proof of a public library responding to the growing intellectual and recreational needs of our city.

With the firm belief that culture is knowledge, our Dunlop Art Gallery's international reputation is founded upon curatorial daring, thought-provoking lectures, and community engagement in visual literacy. Upon threat of the gallery's closure in 2003, local and national art supporters rallied swiftly to protest. This troubled time is still painful; we lost Miss Dunlop while the Dunlop's future was still unknown. Only in 2010 in the Luberon, France, after reading Gail Bowen's *The Brutal Heart*, could I find the distance needed to chronicle the Save the Dunlop campaign.

The RPL Film Theatre firmly believes that film is culture. I could not live without this cultural gem, offering world, art-house, and Canadian cinema, every week of the year.

Central Library, an iconic example of modernist architecture, as recounted by Bernie Flaman, Carle Steel, and Mark Wihak, is a material statement of our mid-twentieth century optimism for an inclusive and successful future. Opened in 1962, Central Library included future plans for expansion: a mezzanine could be added (1972), and if even more space were needed, a tower could be built on the lot west of the building. The Patkau "up and over" redesign of the Winnipeg Public Library, creating a useful social and elegant space, is an excellent example to consider as we "rethink" Central Library.

A library preserves history, memory, and knowledge. The limestone lintel that announced "Regina Public Library" on the original Carnegie library is ideally placed in the foyer of the modernist library to honour its own history. It is so beautifully carved—the R makes me swoon! Remnants of columns and capitals can be seen in the sunken garden.

A public library lends books, and, as ideas are exchanged, civilization grows. I am grateful for the vision of former RPL boards, chief librarians, librarians, and library workers for a public library that enriches our bodies, minds, and souls.

