

# History of the Brantford Public Library

## 1835-37

Brantford's Mechanics Institute was started by Dr. Charles Duncombe. It was in a small basement and had approximately 100 donated books. It was closed because Dr. Duncombe and the other board members supported the losing side in the Rebellion of 1837 and they had to flee Brantford when government troops arrived.

## 1840

Brantford's Mechanics Institute was revived.

## 1866

The Mechanics Institute merged with the Zion Church Literary Society. This event led Rev. William Cochrane to become involved with the Mechanics Institute. He was elected as the chairman of the board and he remained in this position for many years.

## 1870

The Institute and most of the books were destroyed in a fire. It was later relocated above the YMCA building on Colborne Street.

## 1877

10,300 books were circulated, the majority of this being fiction.

## 1884

After the Ontario government passed legislation to permit municipalities to establish free libraries, the Mechanics Institute was dissolved and re-established as the Brantford Free Library on March 4, 1884. James Horning was chosen as the first permanent librarian (he held this post until his death in 1901). The first library board was: Rev. Dr. William Cochrane (Chairman), James B. Woodyatt, Wm. Watt Sr., Rev. Dr. Mackenzie, Dr. Kelly, Rev. Maxwell, Rev. Father Lennon, D. Hawkins, and Col. S. C. Jones.

## April 1902

Judge Alexander D. Hardy requested money from Andrew Carnegie. Mr. Carnegie donated \$30,000 towards the public library while City Council added \$5,500. Judge Hardy later asked for and received an additional \$5,000.

## July 1902

The Council finally decided to build the library on George Street. Up until this time the library had been in numerous locations.

## November 1902

Mr. E. D. Henwood was chosen as the new librarian. He later founded the Children's library.

## December 16, 1902

The library's corner stone was laid by Rev. Dr. Mackenzie, Chairman of the Library Board.

## 1902-04

The library was built with Stewart, Stewart & Taylor as the architects and the Schultz Brothers as the contractors. It was completed in the summer of 1904. The library was an example of the Beaux Arts style with features such as a large portico supported by cement Ionic pillars, a metal dome with multi-paned windows, and a large rotunda.

## July 4, 1904

The library at 73 George Street opened to the public. At that time there was a collection of 19,844 books.

## 1913

The stack room and basement were enlarged at a cost of \$15,000--\$13,000 was donated by Andrew Carnegie and \$2,000 from City Council.

## 1945

The Children's library was renovated.

## 1956

New steps were built. They were dedicated to Judge Hardy.

**January 19, 1975**

The St. Paul Avenue Branch was officially opened.

**December 1984**

The GEAC Library Automation System was installed, and was implemented during 1985.

**April 1989**

The City bought the downtown Woolco store for \$1.9 million after numerous years of studies and recommendations about building a library with more space than the Carnegie library. The building has 45,000 square feet of usable space on the first two floors and is located in the downtown core. Moffat Kinoshita Associates Inc. were hired as the architects.

**1990**

The budget for the project was set at \$5.1 million and Peter J. Vicano Ltd., a local construction company, was awarded the contract.

**January 1991**

Construction began on the building.

**1991**

Moffat Kinoshita Associates Inc. won the Hamilton Society of Architects Award of Excellence for their design.

**January 27, 1992**

The new Brantford Public Library at 173 Colborne Street opened to the public.

**September 1992**

The official opening of the Library was held.

**1993**

Moffat Kinoshita Associates Inc. won the Financial Post Design Effectiveness of Merit Award.

**Fall 1995**

Brantford Public Library won the Angus Mowat Award for Excellence in Public Library Service for its [Expositor](#)-sponsored Public Internet Access Program, which taught over 1,300 citizens how to "surf the Internet".

**December 1995**

A new automation system -- Ameritech's "Horizon" -- was installed on a client-server Novell network, making CD-ROMS available on the Library's new windows-based Public Access Computers.

**1996**

The Library received the First OLA Building Award for the Best Public Library.

**March 1999**

The Electric Library and the full Library catalogue were made available on the Library's Web site.

**September 1999**

Wilfrid Laurier University established the Laurier Brantford Campus. Brantford Public Library became the first public library in the country to offer support to university students.

**December 1999**

The Brantford Public Library's Web site was recognized by Industry Canada in its LibraryNet Best Practices 99 awards. The Library was selected for its use of the Internet to provide advice to book readers. "If you liked this author, try the authors on the following list" contains links to Web sites on the authors recommended.

**September 2000**

The Brantford Public Library joined the UNESCO model library network. It was the first public library in North America to be invited to join.

**January 2001**

Jim MacDonald, chairman of the Brantford Public Library board (1995-2000) was presented with the James Bain Medallion as the top library trustee in Ontario.

**May 2001**

The Library promoted their redesigned website with a contest. The winner received a busload of tickets and transportation to a Toronto Blue Jays game.

**October 2001**

The Birth/Marriage/Death Index to the Brantford Expositor was made available on the Library's website.

**May 2002**

Tuesday service was restored at the St. Paul Avenue Branch.

**June 2002**

Wendy Newman, CEO of the Library, became president of the Canadian Library Association (CLA).

**September 2002**

The UNESCO Model Library Network (UNET) met in Brantford. This marked the first Model Library Network meeting in North America. Delegates came from Zimbabwe, Spain, Malaysia, Sweden, Portugal and Estonia.

**October 24, 2002**

The Library received the Angus Mowat Award of Excellence in recognition of its Virtual Library partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University.

**September 2003**

Renovations started at the St. Paul Avenue Branch Library, the first major renovations done since it opened in 1975. The expansion gave the facility enough space to offer new collections - CDs and DVDs for the first time.

**November 2003**

The Virtual War Memorial, honouring soldiers from Brantford, Brant County, and the Six Nations who died in World War II, was launched on the website.

**December 2003**

Wendy Newman, CEO, retired.

**January 2004**

Rose Vespa, the new CEO, arrived.

**February 14, 2004**

On Valentine's Day the St. Paul Avenue Branch hosted a celebration of its renovated facilities.

**April 2007**

The 3rd floor Community Information Commons opened, providing additional study space, public computers, and an auditorium.

**October 2007**

The official opening of the renovated Main Library took place. The renovations included a back door for the public with another book drop, and a new local history room.