

Title: A History of the New Alliston Memorial Library. Page 1/4

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Alliston Memorial Public Library

The history of the Alliston Memorial Library has always been intertwined with that of the Alliston Women's Institute. The Institute founded the first library in Alliston as a memorial to those who gave their lives in the first World War. Through the hard work and persistent endeavor of this small group of ladies, the first library building was opened in 1922.

As the years passed, and Alliston grew larger, so also did Alliston's Library grow. In 1939, the Library came under the jurisdiction of the Province of Ontario, becoming Alliston Public Library. However, the Institute's interest in the Library continued, and they aided the Library in many ways.

In the spring of 1973, the Women's Institute changed places with the growing Library. The ladies moved their quarters to the upper floor of the building, leaving the larger basement area to be the Library's premises.

However, in a few years it became apparent that the Library was outgrowing this place also.

In 1976, after consultation with the Town of Alliston and the Women's Institute, the Library Board decided to apply to the Province of Ontario for a Wintario grant to aid in constructing an addition to the building. Nearly two years later, the Province replied that a grant would be forthcoming, but that the Library Board would have to obtain 2 new estimates on the condition of the existing building. To the great dismay of the Library Board, it was recommended by both estimators that a new building be constructed, as it would be uneconomic to repair their present building. This was a great blow to the concerned, as costs skyrocketing, and to construct an entirely new building presented a much greater challenge.

However, after much consultation with experts, application was again made to the province of Ontario for a Wintario grant, which would pay 1/3 of the cost of capital expenditure. During this period too, the Potato Festival Committee of Alliston generously promised \$90,000 from their profits to aid in building a new Library.

Finally, early in 1981, word was received that a Wintario grant would be forthcoming, and the Library Board immediately set about planning for a new structure.

With the Town of Alliston and the W.I. behind us, we were assured of success, although some people, not fully understanding the situation, were unhappy at the prospect of taking down the old Library. It was made clear, however, that the new building would still be shared with the W.I. and that it would still be a Memorial Building, retaining the official title of the Alliston Memorial Library.

Architects Smith and Milne of Newmarket were then hired to draw up a plan for a new Library on the same site as the old. The Town of Alliston purchased from Jean Deadman, at a cost of \$5000, a small section of land at the back of the Library, allowing access from the lane running behind the building. The new building was designed to be 2 stories high at the back, with the W.I. meeting room, kitchen and hallway, on the upper level. The Library was made as a split level area, with a single charge desk on the ground floor, and a ramp to accommodate the disabled. A large open area at the front would make a comfortable reading section with a large work room behind the charge desk and 2 offices. The upper level would have room for a number of work tables and 3 study carrels.

On March 8, 1981, the old Library closed its doors for the last time. With volunteer help from many persons, the Library contents were moved to the basement of St. John's United Church, which was to be our home during the building process. The old Library was quickly removed by Richard Boyes construction, Alliston and very shortly, building began, under Duiker Construction, Shelburne, on the erection of the new Library.

After 10 months at St. John's, in early March 1982, the Library again closed its doors to prepare to move into the brand new building. Once more, many volunteers aided us in moving, and setting in place the 15,000 books, and arranging the beautiful new furnishings.

On April 8th, 1982, the new Library opened its doors to the public. A campaign was under way at this time, guided by Mr. Burt Ford, finance chairman, to raise at least part of the \$150,000 still owing on the building. The generous Alliston and area people came forward and gave toward the new building and toward new shelving and furnishings. Over half the sum was raised in this way, and the Town of Alliston paid the remainder, thus requiring no raise in the Town's mill rate.

On June 4th, 1982, the official opening of the new Library took place. A platform was set up outside at the front of the Library, and the Alliston Band was in attendance. The Honourable Bruce McCaffrey, Minister of Citizenship and Culture, was the main speaker. Mr. McCaffrey and Mrs. Mina Stewart, last surviving member of the original Women's Institute group who built the first library, together cut the ribbon which opened the new building. Welcoming speeches were also given by the Hon. George McCague, Conservative member of the Ontario Government, Mayor Oakla Gray of Alliston, Architect Fraser Milne, Mrs. Del Somerville, representing the W.I., Mr. Ken Eatherly, representing the Canadian Legion. Mr. Ken Gradwell, Chairman of the Alliston Library Board, received an official key from the Architect, and spoke fittingly as did Jean Owens, Librarian.

After the outdoor ceremony, guests were invited inside to view the new premises, and a reception was held at the Canadian Legion building. The Legion ladies, aided by the W.I., provided lunch, and a social time was enjoyed by all those attending.

Since then, the Library has continued to serve an ever-increasing public.

Formerly, a part of the Georgian Bay Library System, with the passing of Bill 93 in Dec. 1984, Alliston Public Library became part of the much enlarged Trent region.

Library services now include an expanded and growing Inter-Library Loan service, with computerized access to Libraries across Canada and into the U.S., 16 mm. films; talking books for the poorly sighted, and multilingual and french books. A twice a week courier service linking several regions in Southern Ontario keeps the flow of materials between libraries moving quickly.

In late 1985, we purchased some classical music cassettes, and also some children's cassettes. We hope to add to these cassettes whenever possible. Recently, a number system for patrons has been put in place, with a view to a computerized book circulation in the future.

Our Story Hour, which has been held on Saturday mornings from 11am - 12noon for children 4-6 years, has flourished for 12 years. This is conducted by 6 volunteer helpers who take turns throughout the year. They are aided by the Library staff, and the many volunteer ladies have given faithful service over the years.

We have an Adult Book Club which meets once a month from October to May. Also, the last two years we have had a successful Kid's Summer Fun Club of games, films talks etc., conducted by our two students - Paula Wright and Shannon Hetherington.

As Alliston grows and prospers, so grows the Alliston Memorial Library. We have appreciated the financial support and the continued interest over the years of the Alliston Women's Institute. The kind assistance and the generous aid from the faithful group continue to be of tremendous benefit to the Alliston Memorial Library, and to the morale of the staff.

Thank you!