

Shelf life

Toronto Public Library News & Views

March 2008

Chapter on world's busiest library system closing with departure of chief librarian

By Anthony Reinhart (Reprinted with permission of *The Globe and Mail*)



City Librarian, Josephine Bryant

IMPRESSIVE AS IT was to be accepted to law school, Josephine Bryant decided to skip Osgoode Hall in favour of the one career that involves even more books. Four decades on, as she prepares to step down after 10 years as Toronto's post-amalgamation chief librarian, Bryant is glad she did.

"I'd like to tell you I had noble aspirations," Bryant, 60, says of her abrupt change of course as a young student all those years ago. In truth, she eschewed law for a far more practical reason.

"I was at a party and I was talking to this woman who told me about library school," says Bryant, who was 21 and had just earned a general bachelor of arts

degree at the university of Toronto. "I thought, I don't want to be a teacher, and I really don't have the financial resources to go to law school."

An avid reader and frequent visitor to the Carnegie Library near her childhood home in Whitby, Bryant had, "never made the connection between being a user and being someone who worked there."

She would more than make up for it in the career to come. When she retires in June, Bryant will hand over the keys to what has grown, on her watch, into the busiest public library system in the world for the population it serves.

The Toronto Public Library's 99 branches lend 30 million items and play host to 17 million visitors a year. Nearly three-quarters of city residents surveyed recently said they had used the library in the past year, 1.2 million people hold library cards, and the library's website scored more than 21 million hits last year — 17 times more than it did in 1999.

Numbers like those — along with a doubling of the number of free-access computers, 10 branches renovated in the past five years and seven more poised to reopen after improvements — tell a post-amalgamation success story that stands out on a civic shelf replete with darker tales of reduced service, deteriorating facilities and rising user fees.

"We are seen to have been the ones who have made amalgamation work for us," says Bryant, seated in her temporarily relocated office in the basement of the Toronto Reference Library, itself in the midst of a five-year, \$30 million overhaul.

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(l-r) Toronto Reference Library Capital Renovation Project architect Ajon Moriyama, Mayor David Miller, the Hon. Aileen Carroll and the Hon. George Smitherman.

Ontario Government invests in Toronto Reference Library

\$10 million to go toward the library's \$30 million revitalization project

THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT has announced a \$10 million investment in the Toronto Reference Library Capital Renovation project.

The Hon. Aileen Carroll, Minister of Culture, and the Hon. George Smitherman, Deputy Premier and Toronto Centre MPP, made the announcement at a news conference at the Reference Library March 27.

"This is a landmark day for Toronto Public Library," says City Librarian Josephine Bryant, "and a day for celebrating the important role that the Reference Library plays in the lives of all Ontarians."

The province's investment is matched by a \$10 million contribution from within the City of Toronto's five year capital budget. The remaining \$10 million is being raised through a private sector fundraising campaign being led by the Toronto Public Library Foundation.

"In 30 years, the Toronto Reference Library has assisted more than 33 million people to find the resources they need to excel in school, business and their communities," says Minister

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City Librarian

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First, Bryant, who had been in charge of the North York Public Library, had to make amalgamation work for herself by besting six other chief librarians for the top job. "To be perfectly frank, it was a matter of survival. There were seven chief librarians and there was only going to be one at the end."

During the interviews, she presented a five-point vision that, looking back, she can say she fulfilled: to make Toronto a leader among public library systems; deliver innovative, quality services; pursue organizational excellence; communicate effectively, and develop partnerships beneficial to the library.

First, however, she had to oversee the merger of seven existing institutions, each with its own way of doing things.

Faced with such a mammoth task, Bryant felt it was crucial for the new library to gain momentum with some early successes and forward-looking strategic plans, "because we thought if we just focus on the

massive minutiae associated with the organization of it, it'll bring us to our knees."

The plans were straightforward: programs for children and youth, recent immigrants and disadvantaged residents; acquiring new technology; promoting reading; making library branches into neighbourhood cornerstones.

"When I saw what was happening in places like Hong Kong and Singapore, and heard about what was happening in South America and Southern Europe ... they're all pumping millions and millions of dollars into public libraries."

"When people see a good product coming out of their efforts, it's very motivating," she says, which helped get everyone through the "exceedingly difficult" job of cobbling together the new system, which took place largely out of public view.

That same public's satisfaction with the new system and increased use of an expanded list of services helped Bryant, through the library's governing board, make the case at city council for a nearly tenfold increase in capital spending, from \$2 million in

1998 to \$19 million this year.

Bryant attributes some of her success to a renewed passion for public libraries, gained by studying other systems around the world. She made several trips funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation, a private think tank in Germany that promotes democratic and social reform.

"When I saw what was

happening in places like Hong Kong and Singapore, and heard about what was happening in South America and Southern Europe ... they're all pumping millions and millions of dollars into public libraries," she says. "The same thing's happening south of the border. They want good public space, they want good literacy skills and they want a civilizing institution in all of their neighbourhoods and communities."

With more than half of Toronto residents born outside of Canada, libraries are crucial

first steps for immigrants looking for free information about jobs, language training and social services. They return for free Internet access to connect with relatives back home, study for professional recertification, read newspapers from abroad and borrow materials for their families.

The fact that library use remains robust in an age of widespread home Internet use "speaks to the resiliency of the institution itself," Bryant says. "It is a product of the 19th century, the principle of [it] is to be the people's university, to make information accessible for everyone with no fees."

As she departs for an early retirement entirely of her own choosing, Bryant said she hopes her eventual successor feels as strongly about protecting that principle as she did.

"It's been a wonderful career," she says. "It's been very, very rich and rewarding, and I have no regrets about not going to law school."

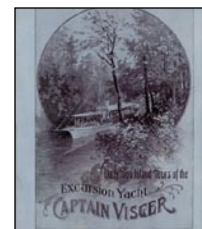
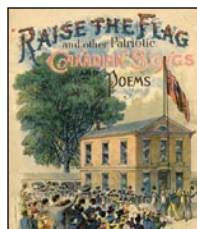
Library partnership yields exciting online student resource

Ontario Time Machine unveiled — make the leap into history!



ONTARIO TIME MACHINE (ontariotimemachine.ca), a new interactive history website produced through a partnership among Toronto, Hamilton and Kingston Frontenac public libraries, was officially unveiled in Hamilton during Ontario Heritage Week in February.

The Ontario Time Machine website introduces Grade 7 and 8 students to historical research using primary sources, including 19th century school readers, travel guides and a cookbook.

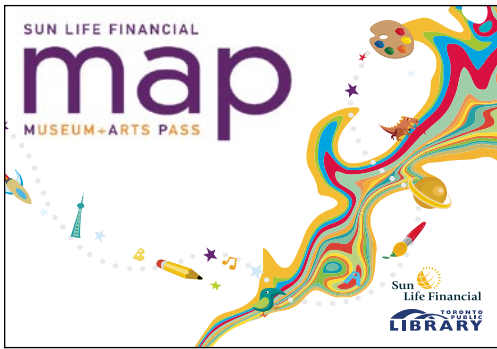


Digital scans of the books are presented in Toronto Public Library's proprietary page-turning software and enriched with photographs, historical images, annotations and sound files. Class activities supporting the Ontario history curriculum are also included on the site.

The partner libraries plan to promote Ontario Time Machine with a province-wide contest, slated to take place this coming fall. Watch the library website for details at torontopubliclibrary.ca.

Ontario Science Centre joins library in breaking down barriers to learning

MAP program to help build a new generation of innovators



TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY recently welcomed the Ontario Science Centre as its newest partner in the Sun Life Financial Museum + Arts Pass program, known as MAP.

The program significantly expands access to some of the city's greatest arts and cultural institutions, particularly for Torontonians living in priority neighbourhoods recently

identified by the City.

MAP provides families (up to two adults and five children, depending on restrictions by the venue) with full admission to some of

Toronto's most popular and enduring cultural institutions, including the Science Centre, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Bata Shoe Museum, Black Creek Pioneer Village, City of Toronto Historic Museums, the Gardiner Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum and the Textile Museum of Canada. The pass can be borrowed from 24 Toronto Public Library branches, spread out across the city, using a valid library card, much the way someone might borrow a book or a CD from the collection.

"We welcome the Ontario

Science Centre to this partnership. We're so pleased to help to better enable Torontonians to explore the rich educational content that the Science Centre has to offer," says City Librarian Josephine Bryant. "We thank the Ontario Science Centre for its enthusiasm and commitment to this program."

Sun Life Financial generously sponsors this program, continuing its long-standing commitment to making the arts accessible to all.



March Break magicians make children turn into libraries

Thousands of kids have fun at library March Break programs

MARCH BREAK SAW masses of children making their way into libraries to use the computers, get books, movies and music and, most of all, to attend some of the hundreds of great programs offered at library branches all over the city.

"Magicians always seem to be the big draw with the kids," says Maria Shchuka Branch librarian, Shannon

Keith. "We had an audience of 130 for Scott Dietrich. People showed up almost an hour beforehand to line up and make sure they got a spot."

But the magician wasn't the only one to draw crowds. "Each day we had children and their caregivers lined up well before the programs started," explains Keith. "Many families returned each day to participate, and

many would spend much of the day at the branch."

**Dear Librarian,
I have been here for me the march break. It was FUN. If I didn't have a computer I would use Computer 509 and go on KidsSpace for free. I wouldn't have to use my library card or anything. Just going to a free KidsSpace. I think the Library was fun the past few days of march break. I will be here tomorrow of course. Me and my brother thank the library! p.s. I LOVE THE LIBRARY. I thought it was going to be boaring [sic] because I thought I could only read. But for the past days. IT HAS BEEN FUN!!!!**

—comment from a young library fan sent to the KidsSpace comment page

In total, Maria Shchuka Branch held six March Break programs, drawing 400 children and their caregivers.

"All the numbers aren't in yet," explains Tina Srebotnjak, head of programming for

Toronto Public Library, "but preliminary counts indicate that our March Break programs are getting more popular every year."

As an example, Weston Branch saw over double its attendance from last year, with nearly 400 children and their caregivers attending March Break programs.

"We put more emphasis on getting teens into the library this March Break," says Srebotnjak. "We held a number of programs aimed directly at teens, including deejay workshops, drumming clinics and hip hop programs."

At Mt. Dennis Branch, a March Break party for teens drew "the highest number of teens we've had at the branch for a program," says Mt. Dennis librarian, Ann Keys. "They stayed for four hours with no sign of wanting to leave...but the branch was closing and they had to!"

"I think March Break was definitely a success," exclaims Keith, "and a lot of fun for the children — and for us!"

From Hanga to Manga: the graphic art of Japanese storytelling

OPENING SATURDAY, April 19, the TD Gallery presents an exhibition of woodblock prints (hanga), Japanese comic books (manga) and rare illustrated books. Japan's rich literary tradition has grown alongside a complementary respect and appreciation for stories told largely or entirely in pictures. The exhibition features a wide variety of these materials from Toronto Public Library's Special Collections, the H.H. Mu Far Eastern Library at the Royal Ontario Museum and the Japan Foundation Toronto Library. The exhibit is part of the library's Asian Heritage Month celebrations, which feature numerous programs and events. Visit the library website (www.torontopubliclibrary.ca) for details.

April 19 – June 28

TD Gallery, Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge St.



Kogyo Tsukioka (1869-1927), *Tsuchigumo* (detail). Published by Matuski Heikichi, c. 1926.

Reference Library

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Carroll. "This investment will help the library promote life-long learning and contribute to skills development in Ontario."

"The Toronto Public Library thanks the Ontario government for this significant contribution to the revitalization of the Toronto Reference Library," says library board chair Kathy Gallagher Ross. "As part of a broader partnership between the City of Toronto, the Ontario government and the Toronto Public Library Foundation, this investment will help achieve a shared vision of a flagship

public reference library for all Ontarians."

The Toronto Public Library Foundation will publicly launch the private sector campaign in mid-2009. This campaign represents the most ambitious broad-based fundraising campaign in Toronto Public Library's 125-year history.



Library Board Highlights

March 25, 2008

Potential site identified for new Scarborough library

The capital project to construct a new 15,000 square foot library branch in the Scarborough City Centre area is budgeted to begin in 2009 for a total cost of \$7.5 million. Library staff have been working for a number of years to find a suitable site for this new branch. A number of city-owned properties were reviewed in consultation with city staff and the local councillor. A preferred site fronting on 150 Borough Drive adjacent to the south-east corner of the Civic Centre has been identified that best meets the Library's requirements.

Strategic plan themes approved

With its ongoing mandate of providing library services that meet the changing needs of the people of Toronto, the library board approved draft theme areas for a new strategic plan. The themes include: Engaging diverse communities — in the city and in its neighbourhoods; Addressing the growing income gap — towards a city of opportunity shared by all; Our lives in digital times — libraries in the virtual world; Supporting creativity and culture: participation and access at the city and neighbourhood level; Supporting a sustainable library. The themes will provide a framework for upcoming public consultations scheduled to take place this spring.

Calendar of Events – April 2008

Screenwriter in Residence **Sugith Varughese** reads scripts and meets with screenwriters. Visit torontopubliclibrary.ca for details.

Apr. 21 to June 14
North York Central Library,
5120 Yonge St.

Independent investor **Gail Bebee**, author of *No Hype — The Straight Goods on Investing Your Money*.
Tuesday, Apr. 29, 7 p.m.
North York Central, Library,
5120 Yonge St.

Short story writers **Helen Humphries**, *The Frozen Thames* and **Shauna Singh Baldwin**, author of *We Are Not in Pakistan*.

Thursday, Apr. 24, 7 p.m.
Toronto Reference Library,
789 Yonge St.

For hundreds of programs and events all over the city, visit torontopubliclibrary.ca.

Shelf Life is published 10 times a year by the Toronto Public Library Board, 789 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4W 2G8.
Marketing & Communications Office: 416-393-7117.
Next Board Meeting:
April 21, 2008.

The Toronto Public Library Board meets monthly at 6 p.m., September through June at Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge Street, Toronto. Meetings are open to the public. Board Contact: Nancy Marshall 416-393-7215.

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