
The Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books:

Toronto Public Library's Research Collection of Juvenile Material

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Toronto Public Library

Viewing in my mind your vast and enterprising country, it is a great pleasure to feel that Toronto possesses a storehouse of rare and valuable children's books which should enable students from all quarters of the globe to study in comfort the development and also the effects on young people of the books that have been written for them over the ages.

Edgar Osborne,
letter to Harry Campbell,
Chief Librarian of Toronto Public Library.
April 22, 1964.

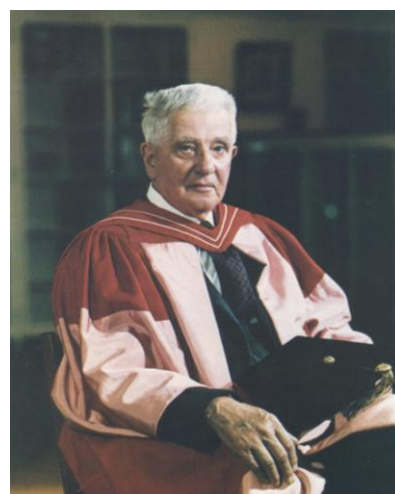


Figure 1. Edgar Osborne
(1890-1978)

At the time he wrote this letter, Edgar Osborne (1890-1978) had just received a doctor of laws degree, *honoris causa*, from the University of Toronto, in recognition of his contribution to Canadian literary history and education through the gift of the collection subsequently named in his honour. The conferral had been the highlight of a colloquium, joined by guests from around the world, held to celebrate the donation, made fifteen years earlier. Osborne had cause to be satisfied, for already the original 2,000 items had increased by some thousands, through gifts and purchases; the Collection was properly housed and a subject expert, Judith St. John, had prepared a scholarly catalogue of its holdings.

The Osborne gift was intended to reinforce the cultural ties between Britain and Canada, and was offered in recognition of the excellence of children's services being offered at Toronto Public Library. It was a gesture of support for a philosophy of service that celebrated the promotion of reading, and through this reading a shared cultural experience that would build connections between the Old World and the New. At the same time, it contained an acknowledgement, through its own contents, that children would be the final arbiters of the directions in which reading would take them. The Osborne Collection as it exists today celebrates a broader and more inclusive public than

it originally did; with a distinct Canadian identity, and it reflects the selection children have made of their favourites, year after year, as well as the careful collection building of librarians.

This paper will offer a brief overview of the first years of Children's Services at Toronto Public Library, 1912-1949, how the philosophy and practices of the department had inspired the gift of the Osborne Collection, and how the Collection has evolved up to the present time.

The Beginnings of Children's Services at Toronto Public Library



Figure 2. George Locke
(1870-1937)

In the early years, prior to 1912, children's services at Toronto Public Library depended on the good will, interest and knowledge of the local branch librarians. From the opening of the main library in the old Mechanics' Institute on Adelaide Street in 1884, in which books were kept in individual pigeonholes behind the desk, and in the first few branches, service to the young was rather low-key. 'Not for small children are public libraries', decreed the first Chief Librarian, James Bain (1842-1908), concerned that the quiet buildings not be turned into what he called 'kindergarten schools'. When asked, Bain explained that children who brought 'a line from their parents' were permitted to borrow books, but as this was not widely publicised, there were likely few knowing enough to take advantage of the offer (McGrath 2005, 82-3). As the Toronto Public Library expanded, the demand for service to children grew.

Colleagues at smaller Ontario library systems had successfully instituted children's programming, exemplifying a wider interpretation of the Ontario Public Libraries Act that promised service to all. When Bain's successor, George Locke (1870-1937), was appointed Chief Librarian in 1908, an era of modernization of services began.

There was a need for change. From Toronto's modest beginnings in 1720 as a French fur trading post, at the foot of what is now Bathurst Street, the settlement had become a bustling metropolis at the time of its incorporation as a city in 1834. The next decades saw exponential growth. Toronto was an embarkation centre for immigrants travelling further inland, and many stayed to work in factories and to provide services to urban workers. Toronto offered employment opportunities for displaced farm workers, and better schools for families that sought to better themselves. Yet with this expansion came inevitable problems of urban poverty and crime, particularly juvenile crime.

The 'save the child' campaign, which had begun in the late 19th century as a social movement comprising a number of child-service agencies in the United States and Canada sought to improve children's lives. The premise of the movement was that saving children from idleness would reap social dividends through decreased crime, creating an industrious, motivated population. An earlier model could be found in the 18th century Sunday School movement in Britain. Schools accounted for most weekday hours, but appropriate recreational facilities were needed if Saturdays and after-school hours were to be filled in safe, and preferably improving, activities. The movement offered

persuasive arguments for Canadian service institutions. At the 1913 Ontario Library Association Convention, Walter Nursey, Inspector of Public Libraries, explained its philosophy in terms of libraries, directly relating the provision of Children's Departments in libraries with a reduction in juvenile crime (Ontario Library Association Report 1913, 93). The Durham Report, published in 1839, that examined causes of the 1837 rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada in 1837, led to legislation broadening the educational opportunities for youth, including the building of schools, to which small libraries were later added. Yet, like Sunday School Libraries, most of these had no ongoing source of funding. Predictably, their lifespan depended on donations and volunteer labour, leading to closure wherever funds and extra help were in short supply. The book historian George L. Parker has described the strong contribution of Egerton Ryerson's Textbook Depository in providing books to children throughout Ontario, but the Depository had closed in 1876 (Parker 1985, 124). Children were then confined to the reading supplied by families, purchased at bookstores, or by post from catalogue stores like Eaton's. A few were able to borrow books from the Mechanics' Institutes, but selection and opportunities were limited.

Children from affluent, book-loving families in Canada would, in the early 1900s, have beautiful picture books, annuals and story books imported from Britain and the United States. Canadian publications would have been more humble; perhaps an animal story or two, and a Sunday school periodical. A typical bookshelf for such a child might include the



Figure 3. Books that might be found on a well-to-do Toronto child's bookshelf, early 1900s

following: picture books by Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane, Beatrix Potter; a Sunday pastime and cut-down classics, and *Alice in Wonderland*. For the majority, apart from a Bible, cheap or free reading materials might include some library books, but would likely feature the sensational-type stories considered by many to be harmful to the young, despite their disarming titles.

Figure 4 shows a typical selection of series books for boys spanning 1910-1950s that would not be considered 'improving' reading, and a cheerful annual for boys, *Chums*, popular, but as described by Annie Jackson in a paper on children's periodicals, considered rather "low," (Jackson 1917, 83-6) would be found on home bookshelves. These are the books kept by librarians for their professional use on a 'Horrible Examples' shelf, until they became part of the modern collection at Osborne.



Figure 4. Typical series books read by Toronto boys, 1910-1950s, and *Chums* (1913 issue and later *Chums* Annual)



Figure 5. Typical series books read by Toronto girls, 1910-1950s, and *Hulton's Girls' Stories* (c.1923)

An equivalent girls' bookshelf from the same time span includes series and 'inferior' publications, not generally considered appropriate reading (note the inclusion of one surprising title - *The Secret*

Garden - that was forbidden at Boys and Girls House branch until 1983, though it made its way into circulating collections in the 1960s). Even less appropriate was the cheaper and more exciting brand of girls' annuals, like *Hulton's Girls' Stories*.

The need to protect the young from the effects of bad reading had been instrumental in the founding of the Toronto Public Library, but despite stocking 3,000 juvenile titles in the main library on Adelaide Street and new collections in branches subsequently opened or added to the system, children's services remained a patchwork until George Locke became Chief Librarian. Among Locke's early changes were adopting the Dewey Decimal System from the Uniform Classification System (McGrath 2005, 101), opening the book stacks for browsing, and formally organizing a children's services department. The few librarians who had taught children's services at the Ontario Library Institute 'Institutes' (as workshops were then called), or were interested in serving children were incorporated into a newly formed department under the first head, Lillian H. Smith (1887-1983), who was hired in 1912.



Figure 6. Lillian Helena Smith (1887-1983)

Smith studied at Victoria College, University of Toronto, and had taken training at the Carnegie School for Children's Librarians in Pittsburgh. A Methodist minister's bookish daughter, she possessed a charismatic personality and a quiet but persuasive rhetorical style. For the next forty years, she enjoyed an almost unbroken series of triumphs and advances.

Smith's first action was to build a cadre of equally devoted staff members, whose primary loyalty was to her and by extension, to the children; at that point, no dichotomy was seen between the philosophy of service to children and that offered to adults, for "popular materials," apart from journals, had not become prevalent in public library collections. Her own inclinations, together with training at the New York Public Library under Anne Carroll Moore, had given Smith confidence in following the highest standards of book selection. In her important critical work *The Unreluctant Years*, Smith summarized the book selection philosophy followed throughout her career, quoting Walter de la Mare: "Only the rarest kind of best is good enough for children", and concluded 'we should instinctively reject the mediocre, and the unrewarding' (L. Smith, 1953, 14). As an unvarying statement of policy from the earliest days of the department, this was highly effective. It deflected any charge of elitism, for all children were given the best books, and provided a strong answer to those who challenged the experts.

Next, the librarians reviewed and built the collections, applying critical skills and the benchmarks offered by classic favourites in book selection. 'A fine book has something original to say, and says it with style', wrote Smith. Choices were made carefully, with general discussion, though Smith had the final 'say'. To illustrate, here are three examples of the less good and 'the best' in different genres that were used for teaching examples:

For any form of picture book, the librarians considered engagement in the story the key the element to enjoyment, therefore pictures and text must have equal importance in expressing persuasive action and emotion, and in moving the story along. Smith tactfully notes that Kate Greenaway may appeal to some discriminating children, but that on the whole, her work is stiff, stylized, and lacking expression. By contrast, L.L. Brooke is one of Smith's favourite examples of a persuasive picture book illustrator, to whom animals offer as much scope for expression as humans.



Figure 7. (l) Kate Greenaway. *Under the Window*. (1878), London: George Routledge. p. 28 (r) L.L. Brooke's *Golden Goose Book* (c.1930). London: Frederick Warne. Unpaged.

Successful stories, she taught, must not only be beautifully told and illustrated, but must not explain too much, underline morals, or talk down to the reader. Walter Crane's *Cinderella* is an aesthetic success, but a literary failure,

because of its socialist message. Watching *Cinderella* drive away with her Prince, the two vain stepsisters conclude: 'We have been idle all our lives – we'll try another way/ and be industrious instead – it really seems to pay'. Beatrix Potter is chosen instead as one of the best story writers for young children because of the originality and freshness of her illustrations. These are coupled with witty stories in fine prose, with a challenging vocabulary.

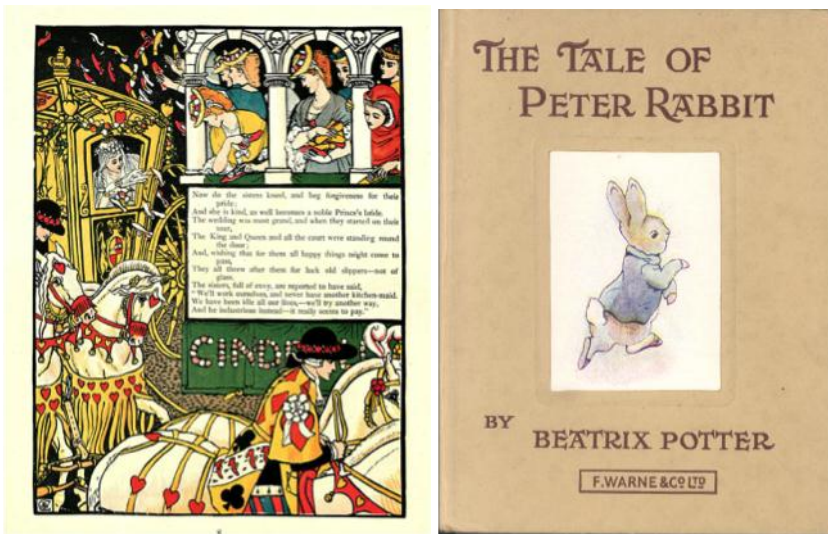


Figure 8. (l) Walter Crane. *Cinderella's Picture Book* (1897), London: John Lane. p.8 (r) Beatrix Potter. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) London: Frederick Warne. Cover.

In a final example, stirring poetry that rhymes, scans and pleases was selected, over moral, religious and obituary verse. Like Kenneth Grahame, whom she quoted, Smith found the fashions of earlier generations of poetry for children contained a surprising proportion of verse about 'dead fathers and mothers, dead brothers and sisters, dead uncles and aunts, dead puppies and kittens, dead birds, dead flowers, dead dolls' (Smith 1953, 102). Rather than imposing tearful verse, librarians were urged to choose classic nursery rhymes, coupled with delightful, expressive illustrations. A gifted interpretation was recommended, like Caldecott's, whose pictures for 'Hey

Diddle Diddle' could give such zest to the spoon and her dashing companion, the dish. Such a lively presentation of familiar verse cannot fail to convey delight, and to provide the foundation of a lifelong enjoyment of poetry.

The lack of emphasis on domestic publications was a reflection of the dearth of material, rather than avoidance of home-grown literature. By 1912, Canadian fiction for children (though still usually published abroad) was beginning to gain an international reputation. Novelists L.M. Montgomery, James De Mille, Ralph Connor, Marshall Saunders and Palmer Cox, the author and



Figure 9. (l) John Bunyan. *Divine Emblems: or, Temporal Things Spiritualized*. (1802), London: J. Mawman. p. 84. (r) Randolph Caldecott. *Randolph Caldecott's Second Collection of Pictures and Songs* (after 1919). London: Frederick Warne. Unpaged.

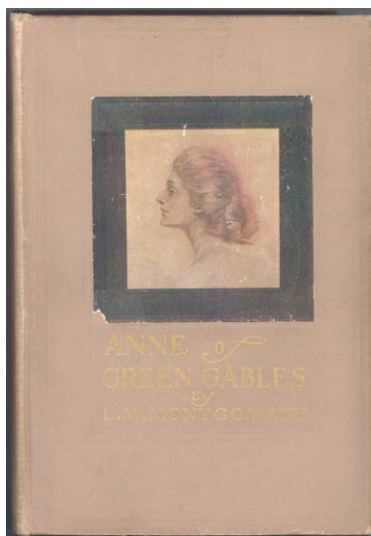


Figure 10. L.M. Montgomery. *Anne of Green Gables*. (1908) Boston: Page. Cover.

illustrator of the comic 'Brownie' books, had become popular in the United States and other countries. Canada had contributed its own genre to English-language children's fiction in the realistic animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton, Charles G.D. Roberts and Jack London. Unlike the British author Anna Sewell's sentimental horse story *Black Beauty*, which inspired the Canadian tale *Beautiful Joe*, or Kenneth Grahame's anthropomorphic tale *The Wind in the Willows*, these stories depicted the lives of wild animals in authentic detail. Though some critics objected to what they considered scientific inaccuracy, Toronto Public Library children's staff noted the particular value of these to the urban child, as thoroughly discussed in a paper by Adeline Cartwright delivered at the 1915 Ontario Library Association annual meeting (Cartwright 1915, 67). Domestic publishing, however, was limited in quantity and quality and would remain so for many decades, as discussed in Edwards and Saltman's *Picturing Canada: a history of Canadian children's illustrated books and publishing*, a University of Toronto publication (2010).

The collections themselves consisted of a reflection of the Protestant, white, middle-class conservative outlook of the popular writers of English-language children's fiction of the day, of the children's librarians, and also of the majority of children who used the Children's Rooms of Toronto Public Library in the early decades of the twentieth century. Authors such as Alfred Henty, Charles Kingsley, Robert Michael Ballantyne, George Macdonald, and James De Mille filled the

fiction shelves, and while there were no specifically denominational anthologies of poetry, the general anthologies on the shelves were replete with Christian verse. As in the schools, the library's history books for children contained *Our Empire Story* and similar works, which, like the school text *The Story of Canada* (1904), as historian Robert Stamp comments, 'contrasted the French failure through the following of absolutism, monopoly and feudalism, with British success through the wisdom of self government, freedom and equality' (Stamp 1982, 92). However, some balance was provided both by the librarians in storytelling hours, particularly those delivered by George Locke, in which tales of Jacques Cartier, Marie-Madeleine Jarret de Verchères and Adam Dollard were popular, and in the biography section of the collections.

Some titles mentioned in reports of story times, puppet shows and as children's favourites, such as *Floating Island*, *Little Black Sambo* and *Epaminondas and His Auntie*, are now largely relegated to the Osborne Collection and other historical research collections. Though librarians placed emphasis on literary and artistic quality in book selection, racial and sexual stereotyping reflective of the prevalent attitudes of the day was apparently either not noticed, or not considered harmful.

Smith occasionally used military terms in her reports, starting in 1931 to call deposit collections 'Outposts'. The language she uses in the 1931 Toronto Public Library Annual Report reflects more than a hint of unease:

The children of the District [of St. Christopher Settlement House] are for the most part rough and untrained, and unlike the foreign children of Boys and Girls House district and the University Settlement . . . We feel very strongly that the development of a reading taste in these children which will lead to a thoughtful understanding of international affairs and a real affection for their adopted country, is an effort well worth while, one which should result in lessening the social dissatisfaction prevalent in this district.

(Toronto Public Library Annual Report, 1931, 23)

Toronto Public Library owed its beginning partly to arguments that it would offer an extension of regular educational opportunities, though its popular support lay in the provision of recreational reading as well as instructive materials. Historian George Tomkins quotes Allan Smith on the concurrent educational developments:

English Canadians could be said to have adopted the American sense of mission, albeit always tempered by a sense of continuity with European civilization that was more marked than in the United States. This sense of mission became an ingredient of an indigenous Canadian nationalism, admixed with imperialistic ideas.

(A. Smith 1971, in Tomkins, 1977, 13-14)

The political stance of the children's librarians was expressed through similar language reflecting this sense of 'mission'. Through their work, informed readers would feel greater loyalty to the British Empire. That improved morals, manners and intellect were the other benefits to be had from reading good books, was a point of agreement between all librarians. One library educator, E.A. Hardy, quotes Stearns's *Essentials in Library Education*: "The interests of the child should be one of the chief concerns of the librarian", and the greatest care should be taken to provide reading

materials and story hours of the highest quality, for “it is always through the children that the best work is to be done in the uplifting of any community” (Stearns 1912, 66, 68).

In a visit to Toronto Public Library made in 1934, during which Osborne and his wife had an opportunity to see the work being done at Boys and Girls House, the service ideals must have been apparent. Michele Landsberg, who as a child used the St. Clements branch children’s room, and who grew up to become one of Canada’s leading social activists, looking back, recalls that ‘children’s lives in the 1940s were regimented; school was harshly coercive...Only my children’s librarians respected my intelligence as a reader, and cheerfully opened the world to me’ (Landsberg 1995, K5).

Smith took the further step of developing an eponymous classification system reflecting a more intuitive, child-centred approach to reading, graduated through ability. The classifications are listed on this statistical report. Adopted in 1930, the system was only replaced by Dewey Decimal classification in the 1990s. This happened largely for cost effective uniformity in cataloguing, and also because a heading like ‘things to do’ for leisure activities had become too broad. Parts of this system, such as ‘X’ for picture books, are still in use today, and it is still employed in the closed stacks of the Osborne Collection.

Another accomplishment was a series of publications, reading lists, and booklets, followed by the library selection tool and reading guide *Books for Boys and Girls*, first published in 1927, with new editions through 1966. This book was ordered by English-language libraries worldwide.

As the number of immigrants arriving from Europe grew, the children’s library deposits service, known as ‘Outpost’ work, provided useful illustrative anecdotes about the value of the Library and

Duplicate - Toronto Public Libraries

Boys and Girls Division <u>B.G. House Branch</u> Year <u>1948</u>		Last Year
X Picture Books	23016	21780
Z Little Children's Books	6957	6485
A Fairy Tales	10594	10423
C Myths	780	663
D Epic Heroes	1337	1404
F Famous People	4558	4455
G History	4955	5201
H Geography and Description	4709	4210
K Natural History	6515	6284
L Science	1026	843
N Practical Science	2868	2908
O Things To Do	2828	2506
P Art	446	464
Q Music	888	996
R Plays	864	896
S Poetry	1732	1937
W Standard Fiction	3245	2934
Fiction	37346	39629
Total Circulation	114,740	114,720
Percent. of Branch Circulation	24	
Days Open	302	301
Story Hours Held	86	246282-2659
Reading Hours Held	27	35313-300
Plays Given (<u>Puppet</u>)	44	302815-1201
<u>Puppet groups</u>		20 24
Registration	1951	1957
School Classes at Library	195	143
Classes Visited at Schools	0	18
Picture Collection Requests Filled	306	340
New Books Added	2556	2078
Withdrawals		
Discarded	1268	1112
L&P	106	52
T&B	277	220
	73	293
Total Stock	13764	12432

Children's Librarian in Charge

Figure 11. Boys and Girls House Statistical Report (1948). Archives, Boys and Girls House, Osborne Collection, Toronto Public Library.

reading in turning immigrant children into satisfied, intelligent Canadian citizens. A report prepared by Ruth Soward, the children's librarian whose work included service at the University Settlement House, was quoted at length in the Division's section of the 1933 Annual Report. Soward writes that of the twenty-five nationalities of children then enrolled at the facility, only one or two are of English parentage, yet the children, many of whose countries were hereditary enemies, sit peacefully sharing books (Soward, in Toronto Public Library Annual Report, 1933, 30).

Black children and white attended the same public schools in Toronto, but before 1950 this was not the case in all Ontario schools. At Toronto Public Library, neither published reports nor daybooks recovered to date indicate discrimination in the librarians' interactions with the children. The evidence indicates that librarians worked to provide equal service, with no distinction of colour or creed, to all children.

In the collections of native lore and legends, and in the Canadian Story Hour programmes, aboriginal peoples of Canada were well represented. Yet nowhere in the daybooks is any mention made of an aboriginal child visiting the library. There are references to visible minority children using the children's rooms prior to 1949, though no specific mention of aboriginal children.

Sheila Egoff, who began work in the Boys and Girls Division in 1942, recalled in a letter written to the present author that 'Lillian Smith believed with Walter de la Mare that "only the best was good enough for children" so therefore Lillian Smith's philosophy was to treat every child alike whether they were pink, green or blue. She was against watering down the Collections to appease any certain group at all. A child deserved the best . . .' (Egoff 2003).

As the department grew in size and reputation, a central office was needed. Smith and Locke shared an ambition for a children's library as headquarters, and this was realized in 1922 with the opening of Boys and Girls House, housed in an old mansion next to the Reference Library, now the University of Toronto's Koffler Student Centre and Bookstore. Boys and Girls House was intended to inspire a feeling of ownership in its young patrons, and to provide them with a model library. Until literally shaken apart by heavy use in 1963, the house, with its elegant Morris wallpaper and many fireplaces, was a favourite gathering place for generations of young Torontonians. The new Boys and Girls House building on St. George Street was close to the old location. Though it lacked the charm of the original house, it was better-suited to large-scale use, until community needs, and the exponential growth of the Osborne Collection, indicated that a multi-use building suitable for rare books and a circulating collection had become essential.



Figure 12. Original Boys and Girls House, opened 1922.



Figure 13. New Boys and Girls House, opened 1964

With rigorous book selection in place, the next plan tackled was to expand programs and outreach. The branches offered programs of various types, to draw children into the library, as well as going out with small collections of books to schools, juvenile homes,



Figure 14. (top, left) Earlscourt branch, Story Time (c.1930), (top, right) Puppet performance, Boys and Girls House, (c.1950), (bottom) Drama Club performance of Pinocchio, Boys and Girls House, (c.1940)

hospitals and Settlement Houses. Chief among these programs was storytelling. Careful training was provided to overcome the formal ‘elocution’ that typified much public speaking of the day. The ability to tell an engaging story meant hours of rewriting and memorizing cycles of classic myths, folktales and fairytales. Book clubs were attempted, but there are few records of any with staying-power; the later addition of puppetry and drama programs would have better success. Debating clubs were also attempted, and among the topics argued was ‘Does Canada offer greater advantages to the immigrant than Australia?’ (Toronto Public Library Annual Report, 1913, 12). Still, the training enabled librarians to seize the opportunity for impromptu performances. When the Dovercourt children’s room reopened in January 1919, after a two-week closure during a smallpox epidemic, the first act was to welcome the children with an unplanned story hour.

An extra educational element was added to the program in 1912 with the institution of Canadian History Story Hours. The gift of the John Ross Robertson collection of early Canadian historical prints, presented to the library in 1911, resulted in the creation of a special exhibition area, the John Ross Robertson Room. The Chief Librarian, George Locke, encouraged the use of the room for thematic storytelling, and great numbers of children attended sessions about pioneers, fur traders and explorers. Locke, author of the inspirational history book for young people, *When Canada Was New France*, delivered a number of Canadian story hours as a guest lecturer, but he did not take part in regular branch storytelling. In 1916, 15,000 children attended these sessions, and in 1917 Locke gave an address about the effectiveness of the Canadian Story Hour in promoting patriotism among the young at the Ontario Library Association’s Annual Conference entitled ‘Who is a Canadian and What Has a Public Library To Do With It, Anyway?’ (Locke, in *Ontario Library Review* 2:2, 1917, 61).

The Osborne Collection

In the introduction he wrote for the first volume of the Osborne Catalogue, Osborne described how he and his wife Mabel came to choose books to add:

As time passed and our Collection grew, we came to understand that the term "children's classic" could not be so defined to suit the range of our interests. We needed a wider definition that would include many of the books we liked as children, but which in no way imaginable could be termed children's classics...the decision, right or wrong, was that a book that had been read and re-read by successive generations of children came within range of our library....only time, combined with the involuntary and often unconscious co-operation of children, will decide which [contemporary books] will find entrance into the realms of the elect.

(Osborne Catalogue, Vol. I, xviii.)

The original collection of 2,000-odd titles spanned the years 1566-1910. The oldest item was a Plantin Press edition of Aesop's Fables in Latin. Osborne chose to end the time span of his collection at 1910 for a personal reason: that was the year he turned twenty-one. On the retirement of Lillian H. Smith in 1952, the 'model library' of contemporary books kept at Boys and Girls House, used as a show collection of recommended and especially fine books, was also retired. A broadening clientele had rendered this small selection obsolete for book selection purposes, so it was turned into a research collection of 'best books', – the Lillian H. Smith Collection of modern notable titles published from 1911 onwards.



Figure 15. Ms, Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon, "An Illustrated Comic Alphabet," (1859)

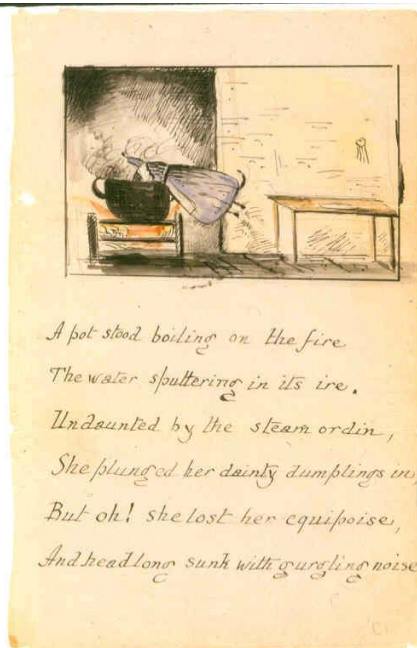


Figure 16. From Jane Vaughan Cotton ms. “The Sad Tale of Mrs. Mole and Mrs. Mouse,” (c.1850)

Another addition was the Canadiana Collection, first established in 1977, the year in which the first significant gift of Canadian children’s book art was donated – from James Houston’s *Tikta’Liktak* and *White Archer*. Much of the pre-Confederation materials written in or about Canada still reside in the Osborne Collection of materials published prior to 1910, and this rich resource includes books, manuscripts, art, and author archives. Among the intriguing holdings are Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon’s manuscript ‘An Illustrated Comic Alphabet’ (1859), and Jane Vaughan Cotton’s ‘Sad Tale of Mrs. Mole and Mrs. Mouse’ (c.1850), which can be seen in full text in Toronto Public Library’s online Digital Collection). Perhaps the best-loved item in the Collection is ‘The Celebrated History of the Three Bears, metrically related’ by Eleanor Mure (1831) an illustrated fold-out

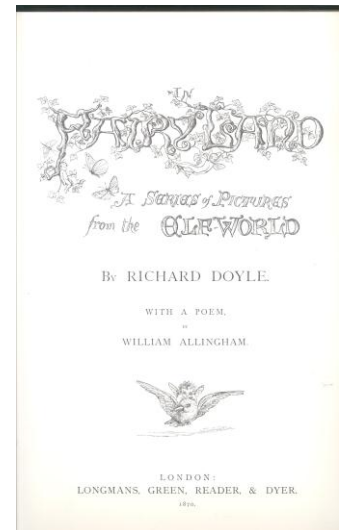


Figure 17. William Allingham, *In Fairyland* (1875 ed). Illustrated by Richard Doyle. London: Longmans, Green. Signed by Queen Victoria. Title page.

book noted by folklorists Peter and Iona Opie as the earliest extant written version of the nursery tale (P. and I. Opie 1974, 260-3). Other treasures in the original gift were Florence Nightingale’s childhood books, the gift to Osborne by Nightingale’s adopted nephew, Louis Shore Nightingale. Over time, new treasures were purchased or added, such as Queen Mary’s Collection of Royal Children’s Books, a gift of the Toronto Chapter of the I.O.D.E. (Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire) in Canada’s Centennial year, 1967. Among Queen Mary’s Collection are Victoria’s pink silk-covered geography text, signed ‘Princess Victoria’, and a copy of the brilliant folio picture book *In Fairyland* by William Allingham, which she signed twice.

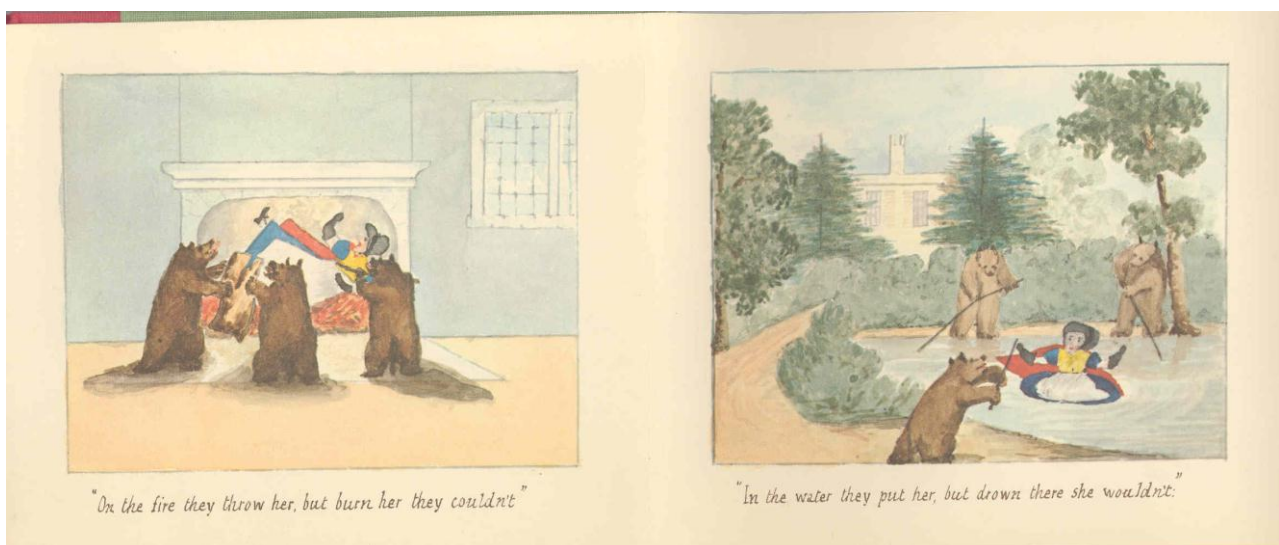


Figure 18. (l) Eleanor Mure ms. “The Celebrated History of the Three Bears, Metrically Related,” (1831).

A recent notable addition to the collection is the “Silvia Cole” manuscript (created 1719-20, a date determined by historian Jill Shefrin, whose forthcoming article in the autumn 2012 newsletter of the Children’s Books History Society will describe the manuscript in detail). This picture book about five-year-old Silvia Cole’s visit from her home in Amsterdam to her uncle and aunt in London consists of full- and half-page elegant watercolour illustrations, including a double-page spread, with a written account running beneath describing Silvia’s activities. The picture book was presumably written by a slightly older relative, as it praises good behaviour on the part of the child.



Figure 19. “Silvia Cole” manuscript, (1719-20). Unpagued.



Figure 20. Barbara Reid, plasticine illustration for *The Perfect Snow*. (2009) Toronto: North Winds.

Significant funds have been raised for special purchases, including a rare first edition of Isaac Watts’s *Divine and Moral Songs*, and recently, a first edition of the first English translation of the *Household Tales* of the Brothers Grimm.

The time span the collections covers continues to expand. A fourteenth-century manuscript of Aesop’s *Fables* on vellum is now the oldest book, but cuneiform tablets from Mesopotamia, used to illustrate the history of writing, date back to 2,500 B.C.E.

The Jean Thomson Collection of Original Art, named for a children’s librarian who eventually became the Head of Public Services at Toronto Public Library, was established in 1977, and now includes over 5,000 works. These range from a watercolour by Arthur Rackham through works by Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, Kate Greenaway, and Lockwood Kipling. Among modern pieces are works by Maurice Sendak (who donated his beautiful Gryphon drawing – now the symbol of the Osborne Collection), Janie Jaehung Park, Barbara Reid, Heather Collins, Celia Godkin, Mark Thurman, Ian Wallace, and Ludmila Zeman.

Over the last thirty years an increasing number of authors have sold, or more frequently donated, their papers. This part of the Collection was launched with a gift from Susan Cooper of the papers relating to her *Dark is Rising* series. Other archives were given by Arthur Slade, Brian Doyle, Lyn Cook, Donn Kushner, Kenneth Oppel, as well as many others. Related to these are literary letters.

A particularly special acquisition was the set of 52 letters by Beatrix Potter – her long correspondence with Ivy Hunt Steel, including picture letters to Steel’s young daughter, June. Other highlights are letters by W.H.G. Kingston, Palmer Cox, Andrew Lang’s widow (bordered with mourning bands, in which she claims a share of his royalties since she is the principal author of many of ‘his’ books), and especially, Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of Canada’s most famous children’s novel, *Anne of Green Gables* (Lang, unpublished letter, 1912). The gift of archives from one of Canada’s foremost publishers, Greenwood Books, comprising its first nine years of independent operations, complements many of the author archives, and offers fascinating insights into the emergence of Canadian children’s publishing on the international scene.

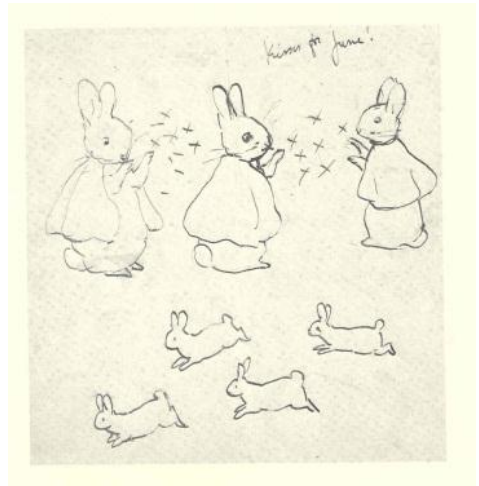


Figure 21. Beatrix Potter. Undated illustrated ms letter to June Steel.

Some books are closer to toys than to simple books. Harlequinades of the 18th century, early pop-ups and movables, Fuller’s elegant paper dolls and the lift-the-flap cosmetic books by Stacy Grimaldi, as well as the chirping, mooing, squeaking and peeping *Speaking Picture Book* (1890), find modern counterparts in the Lillian H. Smith and Canadian collections.

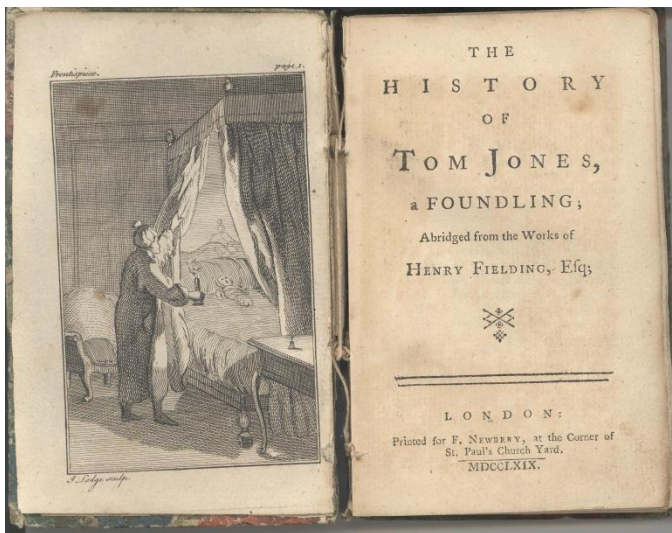


Figure 22. [Henry Fielding] *The History of Tom Jones*. (1769) London: F. Newbery. Abridged edition. 189pp. 12cm x 7 cm. Title page and frontispiece.

Books that unfold into Haunted Houses, into Misselthwaite Manor, Hogwarts, and Green Gables; books that pop into elaborate pyramids, space ships, Hannukah, Christmas, and fairy tale scenes, books from which Cinderella, Mowgli and Darth Vader leap up, can all be found on the shelves. There are over 300 early and modern movable books at Osborne. Like comic books, these are measures of the popularity of tales, and of the constant striving of publishers for novelties.

In a similar vein, ‘thumb’ Bibles from 1728 through a miniature Koran, the earliest colour-printed miniature books, Bryce’s *Tiny Alphabet of Animals* and *Tiny Alphabet of Birds*, and, as identified in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the ‘World’s Smallest Book’ in 2002, *The Horary Signs*, are held at Osborne. Perhaps most intriguing among the miniatures are the Newbery abridged editions of *Tom Jones* (1769), *Joseph Andrews* (1784), *Pamela* (1769) and *Clarissa* (1780).

The first head of the Osborne Collection, Sheila Egoff, appointed in 1949 and later to become the author of *The Republic of Childhood*, was instrumental in Osborne's decision to present his Collection to Toronto Public Library during his lifetime, rather than as a bequest. A vibrant young library intern in England, Egoff had sought out Osborne for assistance in transferring Toronto's gift of books to the bombed-out Bethnal Green Library, a friendship documented in Egoff's autobiography *My Life in Books*. Egoff's tenure was short, as she left to accept a teaching appointment in British Columbia. The position was filled in 1952 by Judith St. John, who undertook the task of compiling a catalogue of the Osborne Collection, preparing volumes I (1958) and II (1975). On St. John's retirement, in 1979, Margaret Maloney became head of the collection until retiring in 1995. The two Holp Shuppan facsimile series of Osborne materials, high-quality reproductions of over 30 notable Collection holdings selected and described by Maloney for the Holp Shuppan Company of Tokyo, was published in years spanning 1979 and 1981. The present author has been head of the Collection since 1995.

A key factor in the growth and success of the Collection has been the support of the Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith Collections. Arguably the oldest library Friends group in Canada, it was founded in 1966. The Friends support the Osborne Collection by raising funds for acquisitions, conservation and outreach, sponsoring annual lectures and publications. Their newsletter, *The Gryphon*, is published twice yearly, while the Friends website <http://osbornecollection.ca/> and Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-the-Osborne-Collection-of-Early-Childrens-Books/17552168943174> have both become increasingly popular sites for visitors.

The Osborne Collection is now located on the top floor of the Lillian H. Smith Branch. The closed stacks are located in a controlled environment, with lighting and shelving adjusted for rare books. A separate Gallery allows visitors to enjoy displays while class presentations or research take place in the adjoining Reading Room. The building also houses the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, an electronic library, and both adult and children's circulating collections. Design elements serve as a reminder that this is an important children's branch. Two bronze gryphon sculptures by Ludzer Vandermolen flank the front doors; the program room in the basement has electric lights that resemble torches, and decorative brickwork and medallions add to the atmosphere. A central staircase draws casual visitors up towards the fourth floor, where The Osborne Collection's display cases harmonize with the castle theme, as shown in Dusan Petricic's cartoon (below), and there are always exhibits to show Collection highlights.



Figure 23. Dusan Petricic. Original watercolour illustration of the Lillian H. Smith Branch of Toronto Public Library, opened 1995, home of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books.

Research and Reference Use of Osborne

When the first generation of children's librarians retired, they left their successors to serve a more empowered and demanding audience no longer willing to choose books from a limited range of interests and languages. At the same time, some of the restrictions of 'only the best is good enough for children' were abandoned – not because the underlying principle was false, but because of the difficulty in defining the terms and fulfilling the promise this rallying cry implied to a diverse and engaged public. Librarians, educators and parents, no less than young readers, also sought to explore the Canadian experience through Canadian publications, as new generations began to record aboriginal stories in print, to create picture books more reflective of Canada, and to record stories of immigration to Canada from countries around the world. Richter has explored the immigrant experience in *Creating the National Mosaic: multiculturalism in Canadian children's literature from 1950-1994*, published by Rodopi (2011) using the Osborne Collection as a primary resource for historical and modern materials.

The Osborne Collection offers a repository for outmoded books that were hailed as "classics" in their day, but in hindsight reinforced political and cultural agendas; and for popular books that were not, in their day, considered proper or improving, but have grown in public estimation, and for books that no longer have popular appeal. Obscure titles can be found here, as well as chapbooks, penny dreadfuls, Classic Comics and other materials that were once enormously popular, but through their ephemeral and cheap formats, have become rare. Osborne reflects the continued tradition of careful book selection from both angles: 'Horrible examples' sit alongside 'the best' in children's publishing, but these are now called, respectively, 'Auxiliary materials' and 'The Lillian H. Smith Collection'. Both are catalogued and handled as research materials. Most of the classics the early and current librarians recommended and promote are present here and in the circulating collections, in the latter, in multiple formats and in media not dreamed of when the originals appeared. These books have been cultivated, promoted and republished - partly with the help of librarians maintaining the market.

There are stories of questionable literary merit whose worth has yet to be proven by time; in the circulating collections they may be withdrawn; at Osborne they are evidence of evolving tastes and markets. There are books of proven worth that have been challenged, and have been retained in spite of repeated questions as to their suitability. There are also the few books that have been challenged and have been found inappropriately categorized as children's books. These are kept for study at Osborne, evidence of the decision-making process as opposed to censorship, where books might be removed from collections without cause.

Osborne is one place where children's books never go out of date. Paradoxically, it includes both the time-tested works, classics or simply long-loved, and the derided, the politically incorrect, the fascinating. A tribute to Edgar Osborne, it is the repository he envisioned of rare and valuable old books, free to study by students 'from four quarters of the globe', and accessible as quickly as our resources will allow in all the new formats the digital age brings; and as he might also have

observed, it is the literary history of a ‘vast and enterprising country’ that blends old and new cultures into a distinct national identity all its own.

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Biographical Note

Leslie Anne McGrath obtained her M.L.S. (1984) from the University of Toronto, where she obtained a Ph.D. (2005) in Information Studies, and in the collaborative program in Book History and Print Culture. She began working at Toronto Public Library in 1985, and has been the head of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books since 1995.