

THE BLUE MOUNTAINS PUBLIC LIBRARY

# The Leonard E. Shore Memorial Library: A Living Legacy

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On December 2, 1995, the Leonard E. Shore Memorial Library opened its doors for the first time. It was a proud moment, but it was a long time coming. As the Leonard E. Shore Memorial Library approaches the end of its second decade of service, it seems appropriate to celebrate how far we have come.

### How the Library Came To Be

Since 1860, a library of sorts had existed somewhere in Collingwood Township, but there had never been a dedicated library building. The collection was simply shifted from one temporary facility to another. The situation became more complicated in 1887 when the town of Thornbury voted to become a separate municipality, and so two public libraries were created, existing side-by-side but unconnected, for the next 108 years.<sup>1</sup> There had long been a desire to build a union library for the two municipalities, but the problem had always been funding; a survey conducted at the Fall Fair in 1979 asked the question, “Are you in favour of a joint community library?” and met with a positive response. Rescue came in 1995 with a 1.5 million dollar donation from the Shore Foundation. This donation would pay for the construction of a library building, but the community was expected to provide the land and to raise the money needed for library furnishings and materials. In the end, local fundraising efforts brought in more than \$400,000.

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<sup>1</sup> The Town of Thornbury and the Township of Collingwood amalgamated to form the Town of The Blue Mountains on January 1, 1998.

## Who Was Leonard Shore?

Leonard Eldon Shore was a prominent Toronto architect, a founding member of the firm that would become Shore, Tilbe, Irwin and Partners. Shore had been born in the Beaver Valley, on a farm near Victoria Corners, in 1902. Some of his earliest commissions had been in the Georgian Triangle area. Meaford Elementary School, Meaford General Hospital, Collingwood District Collegiate, Stayner District Collegiate Institute and Georgian Bay Secondary School were his designs. When Shore passed away in 1989, his family created a charitable foundation in his name and was looking for a suitable project to build in his memory. Members of the Thornbury and Collingwood Township councils (Collingwood Township councillor Peter Moreau deserves special mention here) heard of this and approached the foundation suggesting a new library to be shared by both municipalities. The Foundation loved the idea and hired Shore's architectural firm to design the new building. Michael Lordly was the principal architect, and Shore's old partner, Alf Tilbe, drafted the final revisions.

## An Award Winning Design

The new library's arresting design quickly became a town landmark. Lordly chose the exterior building materials to blend in with neighbouring architecture, remarking that the arching roof line would be noticeable, "but not overwhelming." The design won the Ontario Library Association's Building Design Award in 1996. A project to improve the interior of the story tower with murals and quilted mobiles by local artist Beverley Smith won the Robert G. Kemp Arts Award in 1997. The library occupies 10,000 square feet and was designed to hold

about 40,000 items, with office space for three staff. It was fondly believed in 1995 that this library would be more than sufficient to meet the needs of the community for many decades to come, but no one could have foreseen just how quickly the population of the town would grow in the new century.

## **A New Vision of Library Service**

Right from the beginning, the new library reflected a new attitude to library service. For one thing, the new library was open five days a week. In contrast, the old Thornbury Public Library, which had been housed in the public school, was only open on Saturdays and evenings. The library board also hired its first full-time employee, a professionally-trained librarian with a master's degree in library science, to run the facility. A computer network was installed, library circulation software was purchased, and computer records were created for all library materials. Public Internet access was introduced, and the collection diversified to include, not just books, but movies, music, audio books and an expanded list of magazines for both children and adults.

## **A Home to Fine Art**

The community wanted their new library to be more than just a home for books. They wanted a venue to display fine art as well. Accordingly, the architects included a gallery space in the design. The gallery, which also functions as place for public meetings, is a spacious room with high arched ceilings and plenty of natural light. A committee of volunteers, called the Arts

Advisory Council, was formed in 1996 to manage the gallery and to assist with cultural programs in the gallery space. Since that time, shows have been hosted in the gallery each month. Sometimes these shows are by amateur local artists enjoying the excitement of their first public group show, but often the artists who are featured have well-established national, even international, reputations. In recent years, the gallery has become one of the top three galleries in the region and is booked two to three years in advance.

Over the years, permanent works of art have been added to the library collection. These include the six bronze sculptures by Louise Gordon scattered throughout the library; the courtyard sculpture, “Peter and the Wolf,” by Michael Pocock; and the large “Alice in Wonderland” medallion by Ted Sivell, which hangs beside the fireplace.

## **Our Wonderful Volunteers**

The library has been blessed with a large group of dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers who play a variety of roles. Overall governance for the library is provided by a volunteer board of directors appointed by the town council. Other volunteers, like the AAC (mentioned above), help with art shows and programming. Some volunteers help process new materials. Some shelve library materials or manage our periodicals. Some assist patrons with computer training or help them with their genealogical inquiries. And some assist with fundraising. One of our most successful fundraising ventures was the annual library dinner dance, a black-tie, catered affair with full big band orchestra, held each spring in the Beaver Valley Community Centre from 1996 to 2005. Funds from events like the dinner dance helped to equip the library with new furnishings or computers. Thousands of dollars, for example, were raised to renovate the

gallery: to install a sound system, to renovate the kitchen, to re-cover the wall surfaces, and to provide better lighting for the art work.

## **A Place for Community**

The new library, it was felt, should be the beating heart of the community, a centre for discussion, celebration, and inquiry. Public programming was therefore essential. Right from the beginning, the library began to offer innovative public programs, and the community responded warmly to these offerings, so warmly, in fact, that we were frequently in danger of violating the fire code. In the early years, before the Marsh Street Centre was restored, the library sponsored many musical evenings. One of the highlights was a performance by the Penderecki String Quartet in 1999. The library organizes bus trips to venues like Canada Blooms, the Royal Winter Fair, the Stratford Festival, and the One-Of-A-Kind Show. The library continues to plan regular evening lectures on topics like health, financial planning, gardening, wine-tasting, local history, and travel. Over the years, we have also hosted many Canadian authors, including such well-known names as Dan Needles, Catherine Gildiner, Terry Fallis, Patrick Watson, Louise Penny, Judy Fong Bates and Wayson Choy. Since 2001, the Beaver Valley Association for Lifelong Learning has used the library's facilities to bring in university-style lecturers for popular courses on history and culture.

## A Place for Children

The library has always been a welcoming place for children, and an important part of its mandate is to encourage reading and to foster literacy; so it comes as no surprise that the second full-time employee to be hired by the library, in 1996, was a librarian hired specifically for children's services. Right from the beginning, there has been close cooperation between Beaver Valley Community School and the library. There are regularly scheduled class visits, and, for a number of years, beginning in 1997, the library hosted the OLA Forest of Reading Program with students from junior and intermediate classes who discussed Canadian children's books with volunteers from the community and voted on the best book of the year. This program was held in schools across Ontario, the results were tabulated, and the author of the most popular book received an award.

Since 1996, the quality and diversity of children's programming has continued to grow and to respond to the changing needs of the community. In addition to the standard story time, we have had, over the years, a summer day camp, a drama club, a gardening club, a puppetry program, a story time for babies, visits to the local observatory, a youth film festival, an afterschool craft program, a chess club, a mother-daughter book club and a summer reading program, to name but a few of the activities. In 2011, a special computer station with early literacy materials was added to the children's area. In 2007 additional part-time hours were added which enabled staff to increase their focus on programs and services to youth over the age of 13.

## **Library Accreditation**

In 2004, the library became an accredited Ontario public library. The accreditation program was a new initiative designed to raise the quality of library service in the province. Accredited libraries had to meet the conditions set down by the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Monitoring and Accreditation Council. Our library was one of the first libraries in the province to receive this recognition. Since achieving accreditation the Library has surpassed the minimal requirements and continues to look for cost effective ways to improve programs and services.

## **Parking Lot Expansion**

One problem the new library faced, from the moment it opened, was lack of adequate parking. In 2006, funds from the Shore Foundation and from the town were used to purchase the property behind the library and to construct a much larger parking lot. The lot opened in the spring of 2007, and we celebrated with the first annual Parking Lot Party, an exuberant community affair now held each June in the parking lot, with live music, children's activities, and a barbecue. The event is generously supported by a number of local and area businesses.

## **Accessibility**

The library works hard to be welcoming to everyone. The open concept design, the absence of stairs and the fact that everything is located on one floor ensures that there are no barriers to patrons using walkers or wheelchairs. The Kinettes, in partnership with the library,

operate a books-on-wheels program to deliver library materials to those who are not able to come to the library, and volunteers from Errinrung Residence bring a monthly collection of large print books to the residents of the nursing home.

In 2005, the Ontario Government passed the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA), and library staff participated in rigorous AODA training to prepare them to assist library patrons with disabilities. Since 2007 the web site was re-designed to make it easier for patrons with vision loss to use. Public washrooms and entrance doors were re-engineered to meet the new standards. The library also created a computer workstation designed for those with vision loss, which consisted of a high contrast keyboard, an oversize monitor, and special assistive software. Most, if not all, of these expensive changes were funded through government grants and donations from service clubs.

## **Green Fair**

Throughout the world, people are becoming more aware of environmental issues. Our town is no exception. In 2007, The Town of the Blue Mountains and the library partnered to hold the first annual Green Fair, which was held on the side lawn at the library under a large awning. The Green Fair is a chance to educate the public in conservation issues and also a chance for local businesses to show off their “green” initiatives and products. At that first Green Fair, the library also launched its “Greenspace,” a special collection of library materials focusing on environmental issues.

## Georgian Bay Reads

In 2009, the library participated in the first annual Georgian Bay Reads competition. Modeled on the successful Canada Reads program, Georgian Bay Reads promotes Canadian writing by pitting nominees from five local libraries in a debate to choose the best work of Canadian fiction. That year, our defender carried away the prize, and the following year we hosted the event in our gallery to a packed and appreciative audience.

## The Collection

Although the space is limited the collection has grown in number and format since 1995. Soon after the Library opened, modifications were made to the Board Room to add storage for a collection of local history books and other archival material. The library also joined several provincial consortiums which allowed for province wide access to on-line materials as well as DVD's. Since 2007 the Library has made several changes to the collection which were eagerly received by the community, such as establishing our own collection of popular DVD's, ordering multiple copies of high demand items to reduce wait times, developing automatic release programs to ensure that popular fiction was received quickly, and purchasing our own paperbacks to supplement the titles donated by the community. In addition, a program of on-going weeding was established to ensure that precious space was not being used to house materials that did not circulate. Taken together, the changes made to the collection ensure that it is relevant, useful and serves the needs of the community.

## **Expanded Hours**

In the beginning, the library was open five days a week, Tuesday through Saturday, but early surveys indicated that our patrons wanted to see us open even more. In 1995, with only one full-time employee, this was impossible, but as the Town grew, so did the library. By 2000, with a larger budget and three full-time employees, we were able to begin opening on Sundays. In 2007 Sunday openings were expanded to include the summer months, and to open one hour earlier so that patrons who drive from all parts of the municipality to attend Church in Thornbury could head for the Library on their way home. In 2010, in response to a community survey, the library opened on Mondays, and in 2012, the hours were expanded to provide consistent opening hours each weekday morning. Longer hours allow for better service and all of the expanded hours required the addition of only one part-time staff member.

## **Rapid Changes in Information Technology**

Looking back, the biggest challenges faced by the library have been in the realm of information technology. No one could have predicted in 1995 just how quickly various electronic devices would become an important part of our daily lives, changing the way we communicate with each other. The Internet is one part of this shift. In 1995, we had one public Internet workstation. Today, we have nine. We have also added wireless Internet access for the increasing number of patrons who bring their own laptops into the library. We launched our own web site in 2001, and the site has become increasingly sophisticated over time, as we have responded to the changes in the online world. In 2009, we migrated from our original

library circulation software, Winnebago/Spectrum, to KOHA, a web-based open source software. With our catalogue now on the web, patrons can not only look up books in our catalogue from home, but also they can place holds on them or, with the click of a button, renew materials they already have out. The advantage of using open source software allowed the Library to provide a sophisticated library system and service to the community for a fraction of the cost of vendor based systems.

Since 2010, we have seen the introduction of downloadable audio books and eBooks. The library has even subscribed to its own collection of eBooks to supplement the provincial collection, and so give our patrons a wider variety of eReading options and shorter waiting times for popular eBooks. There has been an explosion of online research tools, too — more than thirty databases are available to our patrons, many with full-text magazine and newspaper articles, giving patrons the benefits of a large research library in the comfort of their own homes. We have even seen the introduction of patron-directed interlibrary loans. Planning for the future of information technology will be one of the greatest challenges the library faces.

## **The Space Race**

By 2001, the library board realized that rapid population growth in the Town of the Blue Mountains would soon make the existing facility too small to meet the community's needs. This growth was spurred largely by the building boom which followed the announcement, in 1999, that Intrawest had become the majority shareholder in Blue Mountain Resort. By 2008, we had hit the wall. Despite the clever arrangement of new shelving, there was no more space for new library materials. For every new book we purchased, one had to be discarded. The

library had been designed to serve a community of 5000-6000 people. By 2008, the unexpected population growth meant we were serving a catchment area with a population almost double that. When the library board began to plan for future growth, it published the library's first strategic plan in 2002; the plan has been revised every four years since. In 2006, a service delivery study was commissioned to examine various options for meeting the future needs of library patrons in a growing municipality. In 2009, following the service delivery study, the library undertook a space needs analysis which identified long term requirements and identified short term actions which would improve the functionality of the staff and volunteer work room. These plans resulted in some initial steps to rectify the shortage of space. With grant funds, the work room was renovated to provide every staff member with a desk and workstation and the staff lunch room was converted into a volunteer work area. In the summer of 2009, the property at 177 Bruce Street South was purchased to allow for future expansion of the existing facility.

## **Facing the Future**

The library has come a long way since December 1995, but if the past few years have taught us anything, it is that the library world never stands still. Meeting the challenge of a growing population and responding to the constantly changing world of information technology will require dynamic and flexible leadership. Although the future holds many uncertainties, what is never in doubt is the community's affection for its remarkable public library.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Library Boards (in order of appointment)**

\*Note: Before 2006 and the passing of Bill 81, municipal elections (and the subsequent appointment of new library boards) were held every three years. After 2006, terms of office became four years.

#### **1995-1997**

Elizabeth McCullam (chairperson)  
Marie Bostrom (resigned 1995)  
Bob Gamble  
Mary Elizabeth Hoffmann  
Eleanor Maxwell  
Gerry McGregor  
Peter Moreau  
William "Sandy" Leishman (appointed 1995)

#### **1998-2000**

Elizabeth McCullam (chairperson)  
John Corrigan  
Gail Ardiel  
Steve Hoffmann  
William "Sandy" Leishman  
Gerry McGregor  
Peter Moreau

#### **2001-2003**

John Corrigan (chairperson)  
Gail Ardiel  
Sandi Hamilton (resigned 2001)  
Brenda Marshall  
Peter Moreau  
Bill Vernon  
Shirley Ward  
Ann Johns (appointed 2001)

## **2004-2006**

Beverley Johnston (chairperson 2004)  
Donna Van Brussel (chairperson 2005)  
Cathy Innes (chairperson 2006)  
Ellen Anderson  
John Corrigan  
Harold Holden (died 2004)  
Chris O'Shea (resigned 2005)  
Michael Martin (appointed 2004)  
Nancy Ardiel (appointed 2005)

## **2007-2010**

Cathy Innes (chairperson)  
Ellen Anderson  
John Corrigan (resigned 2007)  
Mary Little  
Michael Martin  
Jean Salvatore  
Dennis Stainer  
Christina Morrad (appointed 2007)  
Linda Grigg (appointed 2010)

## **2011-**

Cathy Innes (chairperson)  
Isabelle Reboh (vice chairperson)  
Linda Ardiel  
James Armstrong  
Linda Grigg  
Joe Halos  
Michael Martin  
Jean Salvatore  
Gail Whitbeck

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Library CEO's**

Ken Haigh	1995-2003
Bonnie Bradford	2003-2006
Carol Cooley	2006-2012
Terri Pope	2012-