

# Helen Gordon Stewart

b. Dec. 19, 1879, Fletcher (Chatham-Kent) ON; d. April 5, 1971, Vancouver, BC



Helen Gordon Stewart, nd. Credit *As We Remember It*.

## Education:

????-1908 Teacher training (Central Normal School, Winnipeg, Manitoba)

1908-1909 Library training diploma (New York Public Library School)

1926 BSc (Teachers College, Columbia University)

1927 AM (Columbia University, Social Science)

1928 PhD (Columbia University, Social Science)

## Positions:

????-1908 School teacher in Carman, Manitoba

1909-1910 Children's librarian, New York Public Library

1911-1912 Assistant Librarian, Victoria Public Library

1912-1924 Chief Librarian, Victoria Public Library

1916-1917 Medical war service in London, England, and France

1927-1928 Acting Head, Department of Sociology, Wells College, New York

1930-1934 Director for the Carnegie sponsored Fraser Valley Regional Library Demonstration

1934-1936 Director for the Carnegie British Columbia Public Library extension program

1936-1938 Acting Associate Director and Professor, Graduate School of Library Science, Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge

1939 Consultant, South Carolina large county and unit development

1940-1948 Director, Trinidad and Tobago Central Library Service and regional library development for the British West Indies

## Publications:

- Stewart, Helen G. (1911). "Cooperation among the libraries of the northwest." In Proceedings of the third annual conference of the Pacific Northwest Library Association, Victoria, British Columbia, September 4, 5, and 6, p. 61-64. Seattle, Wash.: Dearborn Press.
- Stewart, Helen G. (1920). "Regional and county libraries." *Public Libraries* 25 (10): 387-388. [synopsis]
- Stewart, Helen G. (1927). *Adult education and the library*. MA thesis, New York: Columbia University. Social Science.
- Stewart, Helen Gordon (1934). "A dramatic moment?" *Library Journal* 59 (1 April): 306-307.
- Stewart, Helen G. (1934). "Advantages and difficulties in the administration of a regional library unit." *American Library Association Bulletin* 28 (9): 604-608.
- Stewart, Helen G. (1934). "Fraser Valley demonstration." *American Library Association Bulletin* 28 (9): 637-638.
- Stewart, Helen G. 1934). "Fraser Valley library." *Ontario Library Review* 18 (4): 146-149.
- Stewart, Helen Gordon (1934). "Social trends." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 28 (9): 484-489.
- Stewart, Helen G. (1936). "British Columbia and tax-supported regional units." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 30 (8): 692-694. [abridged address]
- Stewart, Helen Gordon (1936). "Uniting a rural region." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 30 (8): 748-750.
- Stewart, Helen G. (1936). "Vote for regional libraries." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 30 (3): 194.
- Stewart, Helen G. (1936). "Regional libraries in British Columbia." *Library Journal* 61 (20): 876-878.
- Stewart, Helen G. (1936). "Schools and the regional library." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 30 (10): 927-934.
- Stewart, Helen Gordon (1936). "What regionalism means." In *Papers and proceedings of the Southwestern Library Association, eighth biennial meeting, October 21, 22, 23, 24, 1936, Houston, Texas*, p. 59-65. Houston, Texas: [The Association].
- Stewart, Helen Gordon (1937). "Regional library development." In *Library trends; papers presented before the Library Institute at the University of Chicago, August 3-15, 1936*, ed. by Louis R. Wilson, p. 87-104. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Stewart, Helen G. (1940). "Regions in perspective." *American Library Association Bulletin* 34 (2): 95-96, 147-148.
- Stewart Helen G. (1949). "The regional library of the eastern Caribbean." *Pacific Northwest Library Quarterly* 14 (1): 27-30.

## Associations/Committees:

1917-1919 and 1932 President, British Columbia Library Association

1919-1922 Member, British Columbia Public Library Commission

1920-1921 President, Pacific Northwest Library Association

## Accomplishments:

When she was approaching the age of ninety, Helen Gordon Stewart was asked about using a power mower to cut her lawn. "I supply the power" she responded, a statement that sums up her entire career. She was a dynamic factor in British Columbia for three decades: the 1919 Public Libraries Act, formation of the Public Library Commission, as well as regional and union library systems were very much the results of her hard work. She was the second woman to hold the presidency of a library association in Canada, being nominated in September 1917 only a few months after Mary Black in Ontario. In the late 1920s, she furthered her education by working her way through university while acquiring a doctorate at Columbia. Subsequently, the Carnegie Corporation (New York) and British Columbia Public Library Commission selected her to head a successful project in the Fraser Valley region. After she 'retired' to Saanich near Victoria at the outset of the Second World War, she was enticed by the Carnegie Corporation to repeat her earlier regional successes in the Caribbean islands of the British West Indies. Because most of her work was completed by the end of the Second World War, she is truly recognized as a pioneer in Canadian librarianship.

## Honours:

1954 Honorary member of Pacific Northwest Library Association

1963 Honorary member of the Canadian Library Association

The British Columbia Library Association adjudicates the Helen Gordon Stewart Award. This award recognizes an outstanding career in librarianship involving achievements that brings honour to the entire profession. It also confers Honorary Life Membership in the BCLA.

## Comments:

Howard Overend summarized Dr. Gordon's career by stating: "Her work was a seminal force in the ruralisation of public library service in Canada and abroad, showing that a large tax-supported unit of service (a single purpose authority) was the most effective way to serve the library needs of people in several autonomous communities at the lowest cost." — Howard Overend, *Book Guy: A Librarian in the Peace* (2001)

## Sources:

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"B.C. Woman pioneered libraries in many lands." Toronto Globe and Mail, April 9, 1960: 10. Gilroy, Marion and Sam Rothstein, eds. (1970). As we remember it; Interviews with pioneering librarians of British Columbia, p. 16-48. Vancouver: University of British Columbia School of Librarianship.

ELA biography compiled by Lorne Bruce

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