

Judith G. St. John

b. Aug. 14, 1914, Bolton, ON; d. Oct 17, 2007, Toronto, ON

Education:

1934 Diploma in Librarianship, University of Toronto

Positions:

1934-1952 Children's Librarian, Earls court and St. Clement's Branches, Toronto Public Library

1952-1955 Part-time curatorial care of the Osborne Collection

1955-1979 Head, Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, Toronto Public Library

1968-1973 Visiting Lecturer and Associated Instructor, Faculty of Library and Information Science, University of Toronto

Publications:

St. John, Judith (1958). The Osborne collection of early children's books [1476]-1910.: a catalogue. .Prepared at Boys and Girls House by Judith St. John with an introduction by Edgar Osborne. Toronto: Toronto Public Library and the University Toronto Press.

St. John, Judith. (1974). Where the saints have trod. Illustrated by Robin Jacques. London: Oxford University Press.

St. John, Judith. (1975). The Osborne collection of early children's books 1566-1910. Prepared at Boys and Girls House by Judith St. John, with an introduction by Edgar Osborne. Rev. ed. Toronto: Toronto Public Library and the University of Toronto Press.

Accomplishments/Committees:

1960 Canada Council Fellowship (to study early publishing in Britain)

1965 An international colloquium of children's book collectors and curators was held at the Osborne Collection. Edgar Osborne was honoured with an LLD by the University of Toronto. The colloquium was a resounding success and inspired the founding of the Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith Collections in 1966 - the oldest library Friends group in Canada.

Judith organized the John Masefield Storytelling Festivals held in 1961, 1966 and 1972.

Comments:

From *The Times*, Thursday, December 13, 2007

“Judith St. John was called upon to undertake a very special duty: stewardship of the Osborne collection at the Toronto Public Library. In 1934 Edgar Osborne, the county librarian of Derbyshire, visited Toronto, where he was deeply impressed by the services to children by the library there – advanced beyond anything on offer in Britain. Fifteen years later, seeking a worthy home for his own large collection of early children’s books, he offered the whole array to Toronto. In its turn, the library agreed to house the collection as an individual unit and to augment it. It is one of the most outstanding collections of English children’s books in the world. The library also agreed to prepare and publish a catalogue of the donation and in 1952 called upon one of its children’s librarians, Judith St. John, to undertake the work, initially as a part-time duty. It was a tough assignment, a venture into barely charted territory. But “Miss St. John”, as she was always known, brought to it not only a calm temperament and an affection for the books, but also a tenacious spirit in ascertaining the often obscure facts about their writing and publication. On its appearance in 1958 *The Osborne Catalogue* was immediately recognized as an important, as well as a very handsome, contribution to the bibliography of the subject. In 1975 she extended the catalogue with a substantial volume, the fruit of much liaison with librarians and scholars across the globe. A friendship developed with the British Poet Laureate, John Masefield, himself a writer for children. Through this friendship Toronto’s storytelling festival was established in its name.”

The publication of Judith’s obituary in *The Times* and *SundayTimes* is a distinction achieved by few, if any other Canadian librarians. It honours her work and devotion to the collection.

Sources:

McGrath, Leslie Anne (2005). *Service to children in the Toronto Public Library: a case study*. Toronto: Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. PhD thesis.

McGrath, Leslie. “Judith St John, 1914-2007” [a brochure]. Available from Boy’s and Girl’s House, Toronto Public Library.

Obituary, [The Globe and Mail](#), Nov.,14, 2007. [Accessed June 1, 2023].

Obituary. *The Sunday Times*, December 13, 2007.

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