


Mary Johanna Louisa Black



 Mary J.L. Black, c.1908: Credit Thunder Bay Historical Society Papers

b. Apr. 1, 1879, Uxbridge, ON; d. Jan. 4, 1939, Vancouver, BC

Education:

Received informal `homeschooling` in her youth

Attended (but did not complete) the first Ontario Department of Education one-month summer training course for librarianship at Toronto in June 1911

Positions:

1909-1937 Chief Librarian, Fort William Public Library

1917 Lecturer, Department of Education two-month training course in librarianship

Publications:

Black, Mary (1911/1912). "Our public library." Papers and Annual Reports of the Thunder Bay Historical Society 3: 6-7.

Black, Mary (1913). "Books for girls." Proceedings of the Ontario Library Association Annual Meeting: 74-79.

Black, Mary (1915). "Town survey in theory and practice." Proceedings of the OLA Annual Meeting: 72-80.

Black, Mary (1916). "The library and the girl." Ontario Library Review 1: 8-9.

Black, Mary (1917). "What seems to me an important aspect of the work of public libraries at the

present time." Proceedings of the OLA Annual Meeting: 30-34.

Black, Mary (1918). "Concerning some popular fallacies." Proceedings of the OLA Annual Meeting: 52-58 (OLA Presidential Address.)

Black, Mary (1918). "Walks and talks with Wilfred Campbell." Ontario Library Review 3: 30-31.

Black, Mary (1919). "Twentieth century librarianship." Canadian Bookman n.s.1: 58-59.

Black, Mary (1920). "New library legislation in Ontario." Canadian Bookman n. s. 2:18-19.

Black, Mary (1921). "Tales through the ages from the banks of the Kaministiquia." Papers and Annual Reports of the Thunder Bay Historical Society 16-12: 8-10.

Black, Mary (1924). "Early history of the Fort William Public Library." Papers and Annual Reports of the Thunder Bay Historical Society 16-17: 12-21.

Black, Mary (1924). "Place names in the vicinity of Fort William." Papers and Annual Reports of the Thunder Historical Society 16-17: 12-21.

Black, Mary (1927). "Canadian library extension meeting". Proceedings and transactions of the American Library Association, 49th Meeting: 338-340.

Black, Mary. (1928). "Adult education." Proceedings of the OLA Annual Meeting: 61-64.

Black, Mary (1931). "Ontario libraries." Ontario Library Review 15:132-138.

Black, Mary (1933). "Publicity for the older books." Ontario Library Review 17: 5-6.

Black, Mary (1934). "Fort William, Ontario, Public Library." Library Journal 59: 510-511.

Black, Mary (1935). "Ideal librarian." Ontario Library Review 19: 125-126.

Ridington, John, Mary J. L. Black and George H. Locke (1933). Libraries in Canada: a study of library conditions and needs. Toronto: Ryerson Press and Chicago ALA.

Associations/Committees:

1917-1918 President, Ontario Library Association

1926-1934 American Library Association, member of Extension Board

1933-1934 American Library Association, chair, Small Libraries Round Table

1934-1937 Canadian Library Council, executive member (ex-officio)

1913-1928 Secretary-Treasurer, Thunder Bay Historical Society

1929-1932 President, Thunder Bay Historical Society

1916-1918 President, Fort William Women's Canadian Club

Honours:

The Mary J.L. Black Branch library, opened in 1938, was named in her honour. It was recently

renovated for the second time in 2010 by the Thunder Bay Public Library at a cost of \$4,000,000. It is one of the handful of Canadian libraries constructed during the Great Depression to continue in operation.

Accomplishments:

Mary J.L. Black believed the mission of the public library was essentially utilitarian – to provide the right book to the right reader at the least cost. Her “ideal librarian” was one who held the spirit of public service and knowledge of people alongside the love of books. Libraries should reach out to every citizen and in this regard her work with the non-English speaking immigrant population was particularly noteworthy. Her personal town survey in 1915 to identify library needs exemplified her approach to library service. On a national scale, her work as a member of the Commission of Enquiry, funded by the Carnegie Corporation and conducted in 1930, remains a lasting contribution to Canadian librarianship. In her home city, she was active in service groups, promotion of history and local political and educational life. The poet, William Wilfred Campbell, was her cousin. She was the first woman to be president of a library association in Canada.

Sources:

Thunder Bay Public Library holds annual reports by Black and there are library board minutes for her tenure. The ALA Archives holds records of her activities and the Carnegie Corporation New York has information on her work on the 1930 Commission.

[Carson, William O.] (1917). “The librarian and library of Fort William.” *Ontario Library Review* 1: 92-95.

MacBeth, Madge (1918). “A bookish person.” *Canadian Magazine* 51: 518-520.

“Miss Mary J.L. Black is interviewed by *Globe*.” *Toronto Globe* June 18, 1927: 15.

Kirker, Ena. (1927). “The woman who put charm into a public library.” *Canadian Magazine* 68: 32, 41.

Abbott, Brook (1931). “An accidental librarian: Mary Black of Fort William, Ont.” *Canadian Magazine* 76: 18, 29.

“Mary J.L. Black dies in Vancouver.” *Ontario Library Review* 23 (Feb. 1939): 5-7.

Morrison, Ken (1994). “Mary J.L. Black of Fort William library.” *Epilogue; Canadian Bulletin for the History of Books, Libraries and Archives* 9, no 1: 13-22.

Scollie, Frederick Brent. “[Black, Mary Johanna Louisa](#).” In: *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 16. Accessed Jan. 18, 2018.

Giles, Suzette (2015). “Libraries named after librarians.” *ELAN* no. 57 (Spring): 6-7.

ELA biography compiled by Lorne Bruce

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