

# Robert Harold Blackburn



Robert H. Blackburn c.1958. Credit Leisure Cultural Activities Magazine (Alberta).

b. Feb. 3, 1919, Lavoy, AB; d. Sept. 18, 2019, Streetsville, ON

## Education:

1940 BA University of Alberta  
1941 MA University of Alberta  
1942 BLS University of Toronto  
1948 MLS Columbia University

## Positions:

1945-1947 General Assistant, Calgary Public Library  
1945-1954 Assistant Librarian, University of Toronto  
1954- 1981 Chief Librarian, University of Toronto  
1982 Librarian Emeritus, University of Toronto

## Publications:

Books:

Wallace, W. Stewart and Robert Blackburn (1935-1949). Encyclopedia of Canada. Toronto: University Associates of Canada.

Blackburn, Robert H. (1948). Branch library size and geographic range of service: a case study. New York: Columbia University.

Blackburn, Robert H., ed. (1949). Encyclopedia of Canada: Newfoundland supplement. Toronto:

University Associates of Canada.

Blackburn, Robert H. (1953). A joint catalogue of the serials in the libraries of the City of Toronto. 5th ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Blackburn, Robert H. (1968). Ryerson Polytechnical Institute: program for construction of a Library Resource Centre. [S.l.: s.n.].

Blackburn, Robert H. (1969). Financial implications of the Downs' report on Canadian and academic research libraries. [Toronto]: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Blackburn, Robert H. and David G. Esplin (1971). Brief submitted to the Royal Commission on Book Publishing. [Toronto]: University of Toronto.

Blackburn, Robert H. and David G. Esplin (1971). Supplement to the brief submitted to the Royal Commission on Book Publishing. [Toronto]: [The Commission].

Blackburn, Robert H. (1977). Management experience with COM catalogues in a large academic library. [Toronto]: [s.n.].

Blackburn, Robert H. (1989). Evolution of the heart: a history of the University of Toronto Library up to 1981. Toronto: University of Toronto Library.

Blackburn, Patricia Gibson and Robert Blackburn (1992). Patricia Gibson Blackburn: her memoirs and her ancestry in the families Chalmers, Edwards, Godwin, Gibson. Mississauga, Ont.: Robert H. Blackburn.

Blackburn, Robert H. (2009). Palma Olson Blackburn, 1888-1965: her family and her life. Mississauga, Ont.: Robert H. Blackburn.

Blackburn, Robert H. (2012). Against the snow and other stories and poems. Mississauga, Ont.: Robert H. Blackburn.

Blackburn, Robert H. (2012). Sir Francis Drake's last voyage: a verse - drama. Mississauga, Ont.: Robert H. Blackburn.

Blackburn, Robert H. (2014). From barley field to academe. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.

Blackburn, Robert H. (2019). Before I forget. [Mississauga, Ont.]: [Robert H. Blackburn].

#### Articles:

Newton, May L. and Robert H. Blackburn (1949). "A punched card charging system." Canadian Library Association Bulletin 6, no. 2 (September): 40-42.

Blackburn, Robert H. (1952). "Operation U.S.A." Canadian Library Association Bulletin 8, no. 6 (May): 166-167.

Blackburn, Robert H. (1952). "Operation: Europe." Canadian Library Association Bulletin 9, no. 1 (July): 8-9;

Blackburn, Robert H. (1953). "The job so far [CLA Microfilm Project]." Canadian Library Association Bulletin 10, no. 2 (August): ii-xvi.

- Blackburn, Robert H. (1955). "Canadian documentation." In *Future of bibliography and documentation*, edited by Elizabeth Dafoe: 7-10. Ottawa: Canadian Library Association.
- Blackburn, Robert H. et al. (1959). "Libraries in Canada today." *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 36, no. 4 (April): 99-127.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (1966). "Planning academic libraries." *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 43, no. 2 (February): 33-34.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (1966). "German University libraries." *Canadian Association of College and University Libraries Newsletter* 5 (May): 23-27.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (1969). "Automation and building plans." *Library Trends* 18, no. 2 (October): 262-67.
- Robert H. Blackburn H. (1970). "Photocopying in a university library." *Scholarly Publishing* 2, no. 1 (October): 49-58.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (1971). "Interlibrary cooperation." In *Research librarianship: essays In honor of Robert B. Downs*, edited by Jerrold Orne: 51-73. New York: Bowker.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (1984). "The development of Canadian academic libraries since 1947." In *Canadian contributions to library and information science; essays by Jean-Remi Brault and Robert Blackburn*: 7-14. Montreal: Graduate School of Library Science, McGill University.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (1985) "Winifred Glen Barnstead, 1884-1985." *Focus (Ontario Library Association)* 11: 16-17.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (1988). "Dewey and Cutter as building consultants." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 58, no. 4: 377-384.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (1991). "Anecdotes from the history of the University of Toronto Library: an address." [Reported] by John Macpherson." *ELAN* 9: 15-16.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (2002). "How I became a librarian." *ELAN* 32:8.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (2003). "The ancient Alexandrian Library: part of it may survive." *Library History* 19, no. 1: 23-34.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (2019). "Hugh Hornby Langton." In *Canadian encyclopedia*. Toronto: Historica Canada.
- Blackburn, Robert H. (2019). "Why I became a librarian (by mistake) and how I became a Chief Librarian." *ELAN* 66: 5-6.
- Blackburn was also a contributing writer in *The Canadian Historical Review*, and he wrote several biographical articles (Hugh Hornby Langton, John Langton and William Stewart Wallace) in the *Canadian Encyclopedia*.

## **Associations/Committees:**

Association of Research Libraries (first Canadian member and Board member)  
Midwest Interlibrary Centre (first Canadian member. Chaired its Board when its constitution was revised to broaden membership and to rename it as the Centre for Research Libraries)  
Canadian Library Association (President 1958-1959)  
Institute of Professional Librarians in Ontario (President 1963-1964)  
Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (founding President)  
Canadian Association of Research Libraries (founding Chair)  
International Federation of Library Associations. (IFLA's first conference outside of Europe held at the University of Toronto in 1967).  
Ontario Library Association  
Streetsville Public Library Board (Chair)  
Ex Libris Association  
Consulting editor on Canadian topics for Collier's Encyclopedia  
Member of International Advisory Board for the Journal of Library History

## Honours:

The Robert H. Blackburn Distinguished Paper Award presented annually by the Canadian Library Association was named in his honour.

The University Library built a state-of-the-art conference room, the Robert H. Blackburn Room, in his honour.

The University of Toronto, Faculty of Library and Information Science, honoured him as a distinguished graduate on May 4, 1989.

Blackburn received the University of Toronto 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary Chancellor's Medal in May 2007. He has received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Waterloo, McGill and Toronto.

## Accomplishments:

Blackburn served a distinguished career as Chief Librarian at the University of Toronto from 1954 to 1981.

"Under his leadership the Library built many world class collections [adding almost five million volumes] and became a world leader in development of information technology tools and services subsequently adopted by libraries around the world. What he would see as his crowning achievement was the John P. Robarts Research Library and the adjacent Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library which were conceived and built during his tenure, opening in 1973. With over 1 million square feet, the Roberts Library complex is one of the world's leading research libraries."

"The Fisher Library of rare books has inspired generations of students, but even more inspiring is the extraordinary collection that Bob started. One of the great Canadian treasures is the "First Folio Shakespeare", a book of enormous importance. Bob convinced the Fisher family to give it, and the rest of one of the most important Shakespeare's collections in the world to UTL, to be housed in the Fisher Library. That donation attracted many more great gifts over many generations."

"The research library and generations of students past and future owe him a great debt of gratitude."

During his career, Blackburn was also involved in the design of other Canadian academic libraries and of some small community libraries including the Streetsville Public Library Branch in Mississauga,

Ontario.

“He administered the Ontario New Libraries Project under the Ontario Ministry of Education, creating the initial 35,000 book collection for each of three new Ontario universities (Trent, Brock and Guelph) and for Scarborough and Erindale colleges.”

“Blackburn’s 1968 study of the future financial needs for libraries for the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada was used to plan the development of academic libraries throughout Canada.”

## Sources:

[Robert Blackburn](#). Obituary: Edmonton Journal, Oct. 2, 2019. Accessed Oct. 28, 2020.

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Alford, Larry (2020). “In memoriam, Robert H. Blackburn, February 3, 1919 to September 17, 2019.” ELAN 67: 23.

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Land, Brian (2008). “Tribute to Bob Blackburn.” ELAN 44: 16.

Wikipedia. [Robert H. Blackburn](#). Accessed Oct. 28, 2020.

[Robert H. Blackburn archival papers](#) are held at the University of Toronto Archives and Record Management Services. Accessed Oct. 28, 2020.

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