

Elgin County Library fonds

Elgin County Archives

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ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Treasures from Ontario's Archives

Elgin County Library fonds

Elgin County Archives

The Elgin County Library celebrated its seventy-fifth Anniversary in April 2011. To mark this occasion, the Elgin County Archives would like to highlight the Elgin County Library fonds.

Records in this fonds were maintained by the Elgin County Library and then transferred to the Elgin County Archives when it was established in 2001.

The Elgin County Library fonds consists of records created, collected and maintained in the course of conducting normal business operations by the Elgin County Library, its predecessor bodies the Elgin County Library Co-Operative and the Elgin County Library Association, and the various independent public libraries amalgamated to form the Elgin County Library system effective 1 January 1966. The

fonds also contains records created by the St. Thomas Public Library as well as the Lake Erie Regional Library System and its predecessor body the Lake Erie Regional Library Co-Operative, as collected and maintained by the Elgin County Library.

The fonds will be of particular interest to researchers concerned with the formation, development and continuing administration of the Elgin County Library system and its constituent branch libraries in particular, and with the establishment of Ontario county and regional library systems in general. The fonds will also be of interest to students of government funding and administration of public libraries in Ontario, and those concerned with the organization and development of mechanics' institutes in Ontario.

Most of the independent public libraries eventually amalgamated within the Elgin County Library system can

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The Archives is the official repository of records of the County of Elgin since its incorporation in 1852 as well as those of its current and former constituent municipalities. The Archives also houses a number of private collections documenting the County's history and its citizens.

trace their origins to the mechanics' institute movement of the nineteenth century. Elgin County Library branches in Aylmer (1874), Belmont (1887), Shedden (1890), Dutton (1892), Rodney (1893), Springfield (1897), and Port Stanley [189-?] were originally established as mechanics' institutes. By the early twentieth century, and certainly following the First World War, most Canadian mechanics' institutes had either closed or merged into public library systems.

The Elgin County Library system was originally formed in 1936 as the Elgin County Library Association. The Association was formed largely as a result of the organizing efforts of Mrs. Della Ludy and Mr. G.V. Thornicroft, the secretary-librarian and chairman of the Rodney Library Board



The Elgin County Library Bookmobile, with staff Kathleen Metler, Ruth Prowse, June Morton and Dorothy Peskett, 1966. Photo courtesy of Elgin County Archives, Elgin County Library fonds, ECVF Box 110, File 2.

respectively. As early as March 1935 they began encouraging the several independent municipal libraries in Elgin County to form an association to pool collective resources for mutual benefit.

The Elgin County Library Association was formed and its constitution adopted at its inaugural meeting in the auditorium of the St. Thomas Public Library on 28 April 1936. At that time, it was composed of existing libraries in Bayham, Rodney, Shedden, Sparta and West Lorne.

The Association grew steadily in the late 1930s and early 1940s, welcoming additional member libraries in Port Stanley (1937), Port Burwell (1939), and Aylmer, Dutton and Springfield (1940). Between 1941 and its closure in 1945,

Association membership privileges were extended to the library of the R.C.A.F. Technical Training School in St. Thomas. In September 1944 the Association began providing book distribution/deposit services to rural schools throughout Elgin County.

In 1948, the Elgin County Library Cooperative was established. By 1961, the Cooperative had grown to include 12 libraries (Aylmer, Avon,

Bayham, Belmont, Dutton, Port Burwell, Port Stanley, Rodney, Shedden, Springfield, Vienna, West Lorne) 103 schools (207 classrooms),

3 high schools (East Elgin District High School, Sparta Continuation School, West Elgin District High School), 15 bookmobile stops (Eagle, Eden, Elgin Manor, Copenhagen, Cowan Park, Fingal, Iona, Lawrence Station, New Sarum, Sparta, Strathfordville, Talbotville, Union, Wallacetown, Yarmouth Centre) and a deposit station.

On 1 January 1966 all of the previous public libraries in Aylmer, Bayham Belmont, Dutton, Port Burwell, Port Stanley, Rodney, Shedden, Sparta, Springfield, Vienna and West Lorne officially started operating as branches of the Elgin County Library.

Effective 1 January 1986, the Elgin County Library Board was dissolved, its assets and liabilities were vested in the County of Elgin, and governance of the Library's operations devolved to



The Elgin County Library Puppets Program, with staff Carole Smith, Gail Fowler and Ruth Prowse, ca. 1970. Photo courtesy of the Elgin County Archives, Elgin County Library fonds, R7 S3 Sh3 B1 F38.



Left: Della Ludy, who served as Librarian at the Rodney Public Library and as a member of the Board of the Elgin County Library Co-operative, is honoured for 50 years of service with the County of Elgin, 1976. Photo courtesy of the Elgin County Archives, Elgin County Library fonds, R7 S3 Sh3 B1 F35.

the newly-formed Library Committee of Elgin County Council. Also that year, head office was moved into the Elgin County Administration Building, where it is located today.

On 1 January 1998, all standing committees of County Council were dissolved and

department heads including the Manager of Library Services began reporting directly to council.

In the last forty years, the Elgin County Library system has made many advances in service to the public. Some highlights include:

- A change from the book-buying cooperative model to a cultural centre for the communities of Elgin County as more extensive programming became available such as author visits and puppet shows.
- Preservation and transcription projects of local historical materials.
- Availability of information in different formats, such as large-print books, microfilm, cassette tapes, videocassettes, CDs, DVDs, and through the Internet.
- Development of online catalogue and Internet research tools.
- Creation of social networking sites and mascot, Larry the Library Card, to market library services and programs.

Today, the ten branches deliver invaluable and cost-effective programs and services to the rural communities of Elgin County.