

The art museum and the public library under a single roof

A nineteenth-century ideal pursued at the Toronto Public Library from 1883 to World War I

Mary F. Williamson

Volume 98, Number 2, Fall 2006

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065823ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065823ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

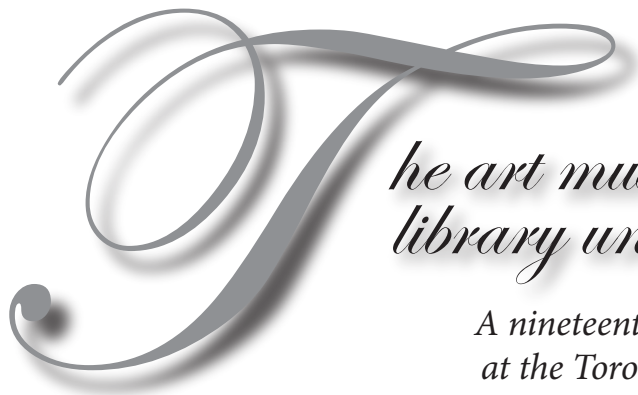
[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Williamson, M. F. (2006). The art museum and the public library under a single roof: A nineteenth-century ideal pursued at the Toronto Public Library from 1883 to World War I. *Ontario History*, 98(2), 135–160.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1065823ar>

Article abstract

When in 1883 James Bain became the first chief librarian of the Toronto Public Library he was a fervent subscriber to the growing international enthusiasm for the integration of public libraries, art galleries and museums under one roof. It was said that these institutions belonged to all citizens and not just to an elite, and that they shared cultural aims that could be accomplished if their inter-dependency were recognized. While various obstacles – not the least was funding – prevented Bain from achieving this ideal in Toronto, under his leadership the Toronto Public Library became a major player in the art life of the city as a venue for exhibitions by individual artists and artists' societies, and by acquiring thousands of works of art through donation and purchase. In the early 1900s all over Ontario, art lovers encouraged their fellow citizens to take advantage of art exhibitions and purchase opportunities in the public libraries, and to become involved in the creation and growth of library art collections.



The art museum and the public library under a single roof:

*A nineteenth-century ideal pursued at the Toronto Public Library from 1883 to World War I.**

by Mary F. Williamson

Now as to the relations that exist between [the] free library, art gallery, and museum: First of all their aims are identical, for they have in view the one end – the culture of the people; secondly, they appeal to the same mental faculties with which all men are endowed, in a greater or less degree; and thirdly, to a very great extent one of them – the museum – to carry out its proper functions to a great measure is dependent upon the other – the library.¹

In October 1891, James Bain Jr., Chief Librarian of the Toronto Public Library, in a special report to his board of management proposed that a public museum be established in the library building at Adelaide and Church Streets, the upper portion of which would be converted for the purpose.² The provincial government had been exerting pressure on the library to make room for the archaeological collections

of the Canadian Institute, and Bain dared to seize the moment to make a bid for a full public museum. This was a decisive time for the chief librarian. An English immigrant, and experienced publisher and bookseller's book buyer for many years in Toronto, Bain had enjoyed extensive business dealings with the Mechanics' Institute which had previously occupied the building. He had returned to England to take up a

* I wish to thank Antje B. Lemke, Professor Emerita of the School of Library Science, Syracuse University, who over twenty years ago gave me a copy of James Bain's 1893 speech to the World's Library Congress in Chicago, and thereby alerted me to a long overlooked dimension of public library history.

¹ James Bain Jr., "Museums, art galleries, and lectures in connection with public libraries" in US Secretary of the Interior. Bureau of Education. *Education report 1892-93* (Washington, 1892-93), 855, where he paraphrases British librarian C. Whitworth Wallis in "The connexion between free libraries and art galleries and museums," *Library Chronicle* 5 (1888), 6.

² Toronto Public Library [hereafter TPL]. "Board Minutes," vol. 2 (5 October 1891), 416; Toronto Public Library, *Eighth annual report, 1892* (1893), 3-4.

Abstract

When in 1883 James Bain became the first chief librarian of the Toronto Public Library he was a fervent subscriber to the growing international enthusiasm for the integration of public libraries, art galleries and museums under one roof. It was said that these institutions belonged to all citizens and not just to an elite, and that they shared cultural aims that could be accomplished if their inter-dependency were recognized. While various obstacles – not the least was funding – prevented Bain from achieving this ideal in Toronto, under his leadership the Toronto Public Library became a major player in the art life of the city as a venue for exhibitions by individual artists and artists' societies, and by acquiring thousands of works of art through donation and purchase. In the early 1900s all over Ontario, art lovers encouraged their fellow citizens to take advantage of art exhibitions and purchase opportunities in the public libraries, and to become involved in the creation and growth of library art collections.

Résumé: *En 1883, l'année où James Bain fut nommé à la tête de la Bibliothèque publique de Toronto, on promouvait avec enthousiasme et dans de nombreux pays, l'idée d'intégrer sous un seul toit aussi bien les bibliothèques publiques que les galeries d'art et les musées. Dans la mesure, affirmait-on, où elles avaient des buts culturels communs, la reconnaissance de l'interdépendance et le regroupement de ces différentes institutions, leur permettraient de mieux remplir leur mandat. De plus, cela permettrait aussi sans doute de rendre ces institutions, la "propriété" d'une certaine élite, plus accessibles à un large public. Différents obstacles et notamment celui des sources de financement, empêchèrent finalement James Bain de mener à bien ce projet; mais c'est cependant sous sa direction que la Bibliothèque publique de Toronto est devenue un des acteurs principaux dans la vie artistique de la ville. Tout en développant et enrichissant ses propres collections de nombreuses œuvres achetées ou léguées, elle contribua à l'organisation de nombreuses expositions qu'elle accueillit dans ses murs. Ses efforts étaient d'ailleurs soutenus par la communauté artistique et les amateurs d'art qui encourageaient le public non seulement à profiter des expositions et des nouvelles acquisitions, mais aussi à participer activement au développement des collections de la bibliothèque.*

business partnership in publishing, and while he was in England in 1883 he had received the call from John Hallam to join the Toronto Public Library as its first chief librarian.

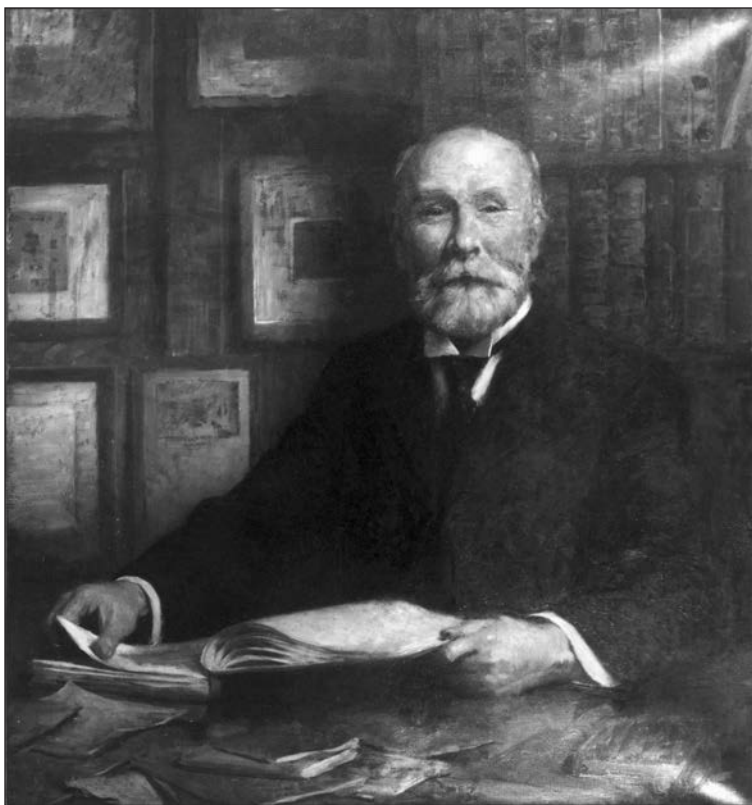
During the early years of the Toronto Public Library, James Bain had subscribed to the growing international enthusiasm for physically integrated library, art gallery and museum facilities. In the period from 1883 to World War I, the idea of a natural affinity of libraries, museums and art galleries took shape, initially in the Free Library at Adelaide and Church Streets and, immediately following Bain's death in 1908, in the new Carnegie building at

College and St. George Streets. For a variety of reasons, total integration was never more than a fantasy in Toronto. However, under Bain's leadership the Toronto Public Library became known for its collections of historical art and rare art books, and as a serious venue for art exhibitions. For over 100 years the Toronto Reference Library has been a haven for those seeking inspiration, information, art appreciation and sheer delight amongst the art treasures.

Ideas about multiple cultural institutions living under one roof were spinning around in his head when, in 1893, speaking at the conference of the American Library Association in Chi-

Portrait in oils of James Bain (1842-1908) by Edmund Wylie Grier. (Toronto Public Library)

cago, James Bain addressed his audience on a familiar theme: “Museums, art galleries and libraries.”³ By this time there was a growing literature on the cultural values shared by public libraries and museums, and a number of municipal museums and public libraries in Great Britain had been singled out for praise in that they were governed by a single management under one roof. Bain began his address by quoting and summarizing from books and articles based on experiences in the United States and Great Britain, incorporating rationales for the combined institution. Toronto’s own public library system by this time was just ten years old, but in keeping with the ideas he presented in Washington we know that Bain was contemplating a future for the Toronto Public Library in which the main library building would bring together books and works of art in natural association, and would make direct appeals to the artists and artisans in the community. Here, the experience of many British libraries provided a model.



The politicians who enacted a series of library and museum laws in England, beginning in 1850, were motivated as much by notions of the economies that could be achieved by constructing a single library and museum building as by the conviction that these institutions shared similar educational aims. Sometimes the deciding factor between separate or shared buildings related to funding, and whether the municipality, or the nation as a whole, was riding a wave of prosperity or grappling with recession. Many advocates of the combined institution, while acknowledging for the sake of the paymasters listening that

³ Bain, “Museums, art galleries, and lectures,” 850-61.

the potential savings were not insignificant, pointed to sound educational and cultural reasons why their communities should agree to the necessary community of interest among museums, art galleries and public libraries.

Professor H.S. Frieze of the University of Michigan was one of the first Americans to be heard on this theme: “[Great Britain] has opened museums of industrial and fine art in connection with free libraries as a new and legitimate instrumentality for education and elevating the people,” he argued in a speech delivered in Washington in 1876, which would be recalled for years afterwards.⁴ He was envious of Great Britain where the kinds of library-museums he had in mind had already been hailed as successful adjuncts in the industrial economy, but lamented the fact that in the United States the Boston Athenaeum was the only art museum in the country connected with a public library. Like many of his fellow citizens, Frieze was an admirer of the progress of public libraries in the USA, but the construction and appreciation of museums, and the teaching of art, lagged far behind Great Britain. While rich Americans were already highly visible at rare book auctions in England, the day had not yet arrived when the captains of industry would take up collecting works of art with the same single-minded energy. In time, art ownership, as a more conspicuous

and glamorous hobby, would overtake the private pleasures of rare books and manuscripts. The subsequent founding and funding in the United States of imposing museums to house their masterpieces, soon vying in importance with collections held in Europe, is a matter of history. But before all this, art museums were largely made up of copies of European masterpieces or objects of local interest. Speaking in 1876, Frieze acknowledged that even the most interesting museums in the world to some extent consisted of well-executed copies of the great masterpieces of statuary and painting together with collections of engravings and photographs. The situation was obvious: “The propriety of connecting such museums, if established at all, with public libraries, is too obvious to need any lengthy discussion. Their aims are kindred, indeed identical.”⁵

But were their aims identical? Frieze defers to Ralph Waldo Emerson to reinforce this view. Noting that travellers often return from Italy with engravings and copies of artworks they have admired, Emerson had commented in 1870:

I wish to find in my own town a library and museum which is the property of the town, where I can deposit this precious treasure, where I and my children can see it from time to time, and where it has its proper place among hundreds of such donations from other citizens who have brought thither whatever articles they have judged

⁴ H.S. Frieze, “Art museums and their connection with public libraries” in *Public libraries in the United States: their history, condition and management. Special Report. Pt. 1* (Washington: 1876), 434-44.

⁵ Frieze, “Art museums,” 440.

to be in their nature rather a public than a private property.⁶

Emerson raised several points that resonated with advocates of the combined free library and museum. One was that the institution would not be dependent upon public funds – and even in Great Britain this was generally accepted – but rather would expand as local benefactors developed a sense of pride in becoming donors. Dr. H.A. Homes, the New York State Librarian, observed in 1881: “The sight of so many educational influences combined in a single institution – science, the industrial and fine arts, and books – cannot fail to impress the minds of wealthy citizens with a high opinion of its value to the town, much more than if they were separated, and perhaps remote from each other.”⁷

Following the annual meeting of the American Library Association (ALA) in 1893, James Bain told his board:

It was an interesting feature of this year’s meeting to observe the change which has taken place in the minds of trustees and librarians as to value of museums in connection with library work. While three years previously all the American [chief] librarians had been opposed to ‘engrafting’ museums on the public library system, by 1893 the pendulum had swung to the other side.⁸

The naysayers, who tended to raise the subject at ALA meetings, did not so

much disagree with the principle of a single institution as object to having to stretch precious tax dollars to include museums. But in some corners of the library world there was a growing conviction that librarians should cosy up to well-heeled citizens in their communities who might be persuaded to extend their largesse to publicly supported libraries that housed museums and galleries. The highly regarded Chicago librarian Charles Cutter reported in 1897 “the great wave of interest in art which has swept over the country in the last decade has made it imperative to establish some sort of an art department even in town libraries.”⁹ Cutter no doubt had an eye on discerning art collectors in his own city.

Another important point implied by Emerson in his 1870 essay was that, as free institutions, the museum and library must admit everybody at no charge. The institution belongs to all citizens, and not just to the educated and privileged elite who customarily patronized subscription libraries and member-supported museums. It is this principle that would become a major point of contention at the Toronto Public Library in 1909.

Artisans were the principal target of British legislation for establishing libraries and museums. In a new world economy, where in an unaccustomed orgy of

⁶ R.W. Emerson, “Domestic life” in *Society and solitude* (London: Sampson, Low, Son & Marston, 1870), 117-18.

⁷ H.A. Homes, “Libraries with museums,” *Library Journal* 6 (1881), 82.

⁸ TPL, “Board Minutes,” vol. 2 (6 May 1892), 505.

⁹ C.A. Cutter, *Library Journal* 22 (Feb. 1897), 87.

consumerism industrialized countries were vying to make and sell goods, the further education of artisans and working men was understood to make the country more competitive with its European and Asian rivals. The English publisher and public libraries promoter Thomas Greenwood, speaking on behalf of the “vitalizing influence” of schools of art, pointed out that art classes encourage high standards of excellence and reward artistic ability, very different from ordinary schooling that is mere routine. Young members of the artisan classes were learning new skills in the design and production of pottery, glass, textiles, lace, silver, iron, brass, electro-plated wares, and wallpaper. The Museum at South Kensington (now the Victoria & Albert Museum) was prepared to make short-term loans of library books and art objects relating to decorative art to support instruction in schools of art. In the 1880s, when Greenwood first recorded his observations, public libraries in even the smaller towns in England were reporting attendance by the hundreds at art classes on their premises.¹⁰

Having been inspired by a lecture on “Technical Education” at the annual meeting in 1879 of the Educational Association of the United States, Canadian artist Lucius O’Brien asked: “Is it not time that the artizan should now receive attention, and that at least as much interest

should be taken in training him for excellent handiwork...” He was adamant:

To develop the intelligence, cultivate the taste and train the hand and eye to skilful work, is art education; and we not only owe it to the artizan to give him this education and to lift him from below the machine, to his rightful place above it, but it is our interest to do so.

O’Brien was convinced that the country’s wealth and commercial supremacy depended upon imparting practical culture through technical education. “England’s system of art education was born of this commercial necessity.”¹¹

But how might books and periodicals fit into a picture of technical art education for young workers who were to be the salvation of the economy? Municipal authorities would have been tempted by grants to public libraries that offered to cover purchases of premises and furnishings for art classes. But beyond such mundane, albeit basic considerations, there had to be an underlying philosophy of interdependence that linked art education, museums and art galleries to the provision of books and technical periodicals. By 1888 the experience in Birmingham had shown that because

the books on art and art workmanship are as a rule beyond the reach of the ordinary workman, and his appetite, having been whetted by a slight description of some object or process in the Museum, he must of necessity have recourse to the library to acquire further knowledge.¹²

¹⁰ Thomas Greenwood, “Lectures and science and art classes,” in *Public libraries*. 4th ed. (London: Cassell, 1894), 476-78.

¹¹ L.R. O’Brien, “Art education – a plea for the artizan,” *Rose Belford’s Canadian Monthly* 2 (May 1879), 584-91.

¹² Wallis, “The connexion,” *Library Chronicle* 5 (1888), 9.

The young art student may have been told to read a particular book. Of course he could not afford to purchase the book for himself, but it was assumed that on his own he would in the natural way move between the art class and the museum and the library in quest of further information and inspiration.

This experience was not to be limited to artisans. James Bain had in mind all men and women, boys and girls, when, towards the end of his Chicago speech, he offered hints for managing a museum that was to be housed in a room or rooms in the public library. He admonished his audience to “never permit, even temporarily, any cases or pictures to be left in the library proper, as a doorway would be opened at once to talking and disorder which it will be difficult to correct.” However, once collections of specimens or pictures have been placed in a well-lighted location, and a special assistant hired – he suggests “a young lady with college training, with a real love for the work” – everything would be in place for the proper management of the library museum.

The connection with the books must be closely maintained, not only by giving references to special books, but by exhibiting side by side the special illustrations referring to them, or by erecting in close proximity small shelves on which can be placed the most convenient manuals.¹³

In the British context, Thomas Green-

wood recommended that printed lists of books available for consultation in the free library should be posted on museum and gallery walls “so that the artisan may refer to them and see at once the best books elementary and advanced, he can consult with advantage.”¹⁴ Whitworth Wallis, Director of the Birmingham Art Galleries and Museum recalled that “visitors – mostly of the artizan and poorer class” – regularly make enquiries

as to the best books to be read on such and such a subject. At Birmingham [he boasted] they have prepared labels or lists which hang in the various galleries...Such terms as Majolica, Hispano-Moresque, Gothic, Renaissance, Cloisonné enamel, and countless others, are ‘caviar’ to the multitude of our visitors.¹⁵

There would be auxiliary activities, such as lectures and exhibitions, which might reinforce the museum and library experience. Greenwood was amused by how “the lecturing system” had become something of a rage in North America. James Bain advocated free lectures because, if they have “for their subject the contents of any of the cases or of books bearing on them, a wider interest is roused in both library and museum.” He continued: “Let your lecturers be men, however humble, who understand their special work, not mere general talkers.” Open nights, and loan exhibitions about once a year, were possible schemes to attract new patrons.

¹³ Bain, “Museums, art galleries, and lectures,” 859.

¹⁴ Thomas Greenwood, *Museums and art galleries* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1888), 50.

¹⁵ Wallis, “The connexion,” 9-10.

Valuable paintings are becoming more numerous in the homes of our wealthy citizens, and, except in rare cases, can be readily borrowed for public exhibition. Temporary exchanges with other libraries and art galleries of special pictures could be effected, and a brief newspaper notice that a new object of art or picture could be seen at the public library would stimulate regularly the public attention.¹⁶

Whitworth Wallis had a local twist in mind when he ventured to suggest “the

direct bearing upon the industries which are practiced in that locality.”¹⁷

In Ontario, the general public had not been immediately involved with these issues, but Chief Superintendent of Schools Egerton Ryerson by the mid-nineteenth century had begun to address the need for libraries and museums in his own way. As early as 1848 he had campaigned for libraries in connection with the public school system,¹⁸

and in 1856 he finally succeeded in his ambition of establishing in the Normal School building an Educational Museum for Upper Canada. Here visitors were invited to admire copies of the Great Masters and sets of engravings that had been selected by Ryerson himself, and to consult a library of art books. An art school was located on the premises nearby. The museum collections were maintained

and new artifacts were added into the early 1900s when it was reported they were scattered or destroyed.¹⁹



In 1883 the Toronto Public Library took over the Mechanics Institute building (1854). When the Carnegie library opened in 1908, the building became the Church Street branch. From *The Ontario Library Association: an historical sketch 1900-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1926), 190.

advantage to be derived from the exhibition in the branch libraries of a case containing objects having if possible, a

¹⁶ Bain, “Museum, art galleries, and lectures,” 860.

¹⁷ Wallis, “The connexion,” 10.

¹⁸ [E. Ryerson], “The importance of education to a manufacturing and a free people: lectures by the Chief Superintendent of Schools,” *Journal of Education for Upper Canada* 1 (Oct. 1848), 298.

¹⁹ J. George Hodgins. *Documentary history of education in Upper Canada*. vol. 12 (Toronto: L.K. Cameron, 1905). Chapter XI, 129-30, deals with the “Establishment of the Educational Museum and Library for Upper Canada, 1856,” and Chapter XII, 130-37, with “Principal contents of the Educational Museum for Upper Canada,” from 1855 to the date of publication. The probable fate of the collec-

With passage of the Free Libraries Act by the Ontario Legislature in 1882, free library supporters in Toronto worked quickly to bring the Toronto Public Library into existence the following year. To some extent the library and cultural needs of the artisan sector of the city's population had been served by the Mechanics' Institute, a centre offering educational and cultural activities to artisans, and already well established in all the major cities of Canada, the United States and Great Britain. The mission of the Toronto Mechanics' Institute, founded in 1835, was to educate mechanics, that is skilled workers including artists and craftsmen, who were employed in the agriculture and manufacturing trades. The later years were marred by disagreements about goals and practices that ultimately led to the demise of the Mechanics' Institute movement. But while it existed, for the Toronto artist members the institute fulfilled a critical need. In return for an annual subscription fee, they could take advantage of a series of exhibitions held between 1847 and 1865 to expand professional opportunities to exhibit, sell and win awards, to take evening classes in drawing, and to consult a library of fine and applied arts books and magazines.²⁰

The 1882 provincial free library legislation specifically encouraged ordinary

citizens to petition for a publicly funded free library in their community. In Toronto the Mechanics' Institute transformed itself into the Toronto Public Library. Under the Act, the Library Board of Management was required

from time to time, to procure, erect, or rent the necessary buildings for the purposes of the library or of the library, news-room and museum (as the case may be); to purchase books, newspapers, reviews, magazines, maps and specimens of art and science, for the use of the library, news-room and museum...²¹

In anticipation of the legislation, the Toronto City Council allowed Alderman Hallam to go on a three-month study tour of libraries in Europe in 1878, and again in 1881 and 1882. Hallam, an ardent bibliophile, was not simply enjoying prolonged holidays in France, Germany and Great Britain on his constituents' time. On the heels of his second study tour he responded to the doubters with a thirty-six-page report on the tour with *Notes by the way on free libraries and books with a plea for the establishment of rate supported libraries in the Province of Ontario by John Hallam* (Toronto: 1882). In the *Notes* Hallam applauded the British cities where public libraries, museums and art galleries fell under a single administration, and where there was "popular patronage"

tions is addressed in a footnote.

²⁰ The papers of the Toronto Mechanics' Institute (1831-1900s) are in the Baldwin Room of the Toronto Reference Library (L1). Information about art-related activities can be found in the minutes of the board, exhibition committee, finance committee, letterbooks of the Secretary-Librarian, and membership records.

²¹ Province of Ontario. *Statutes*. 1882, C. 22, no. 4, 60. "An Act to provide for the establishment of Free Libraries."

of the combined facility. Funding was allocated to museum articles as well as books and periodicals, and several had received magnificent gifts of paintings and artifacts.

The Toronto Public Library was brought into existence in 1883 with the full support of the city council, and with Hallam appointed chairman of the Library Board of Management. The measure of John Hallam's dedication to the task of bringing this about is revealed in a 234-piece manuscript collection in the Toronto Reference Library. Chief librarians, library trustees, and library enthusiasts in the United States and Europe responded throughout 1882 and 1883 to a letter from Hallam in which the alderman apparently requested advice and suggestions. Librarians whose names resonate today, among them W.F. Poole of the Chicago Public Library and C.A. Cutter of the

Boston Athenaeum, took considerable trouble to share with Hallam their philosophies of library service.²² Of particular interest here is Lucius O'Brien, who just three years earlier had been appointed the first president of the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts. In a six-page letter to John Hallam, on behalf of the art world of which he was a prominent representative, the artist urged "some joint action in regard to the library building. We must have suitable rooms for Art purposes, mainly a picture gallery both for exhibition[s] & for a permanent collection of works of Art." O'Brien went on to deplore the lack of suitable rooms for the forthcoming exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy which was to be opened by Governor-General Lord Lorne and his wife. He expressed delight that Hallam was in favour of combining music and art with library materials.²³

²² The collection of letters forms part of the fonds of the Toronto Public Library. It comprises 234 pieces in two volumes, and is titled "Letters concerning the founding and administration of a public library in Toronto. 1861-1884." A few of the recommendations make somewhat bizarre reading, for example the municipal librarian of Paris – perhaps in a mood to introduce aesthetically pleasing variety into the library – suggested that "different coloured bindings indicating the country from which the books come, is an excellent idea." P. Gagnon – presumably the great bibliophile Phileas Gagnon of Montreal – wrote offering to sell his library: "the most important collection [of French and English-Canadian works] being into private hands that I know in Quebec." Fortunately, Gagnon's Library was not purchased by the new Toronto Public Library and eventually went to the City of Montreal in 1910.

²³ The remaining text of Lucius O'Brien's letter reads in full:

Your suggestion of combining music & art in this matter strikes me as a good one. A large hall properly lighted from above would answer both as a concert room & picture gallery, & the rooms in connection with the Library might be so arranged en suite, as to answer admirably for reception or conversation on any great occasion.

We should have a picture gallery to hold such a permanent collection as might be acquired by purchase or donation, like that of the Art Association of Montreal, and if such a collection was begun it would soon increase by the liberality of our wealthy citizens, & some such collection of art work is an essential supplement to the educational aim of the Free Library. I dare say you have noticed how the rooms in the National Gallery in London are often thronged by artizans & others in their working clothes, spending a leisure half hour there with evident pleasure. I think our people would not be found less intelligent or appreciative if they had the opportunity.

Such a gallery might be open free during the day (except at time of Special Exhibitions) and the fact of pictures being upon the walls would not interfere its being used for concerts or other public assemblies, but

The new masters of the Toronto Public Library inherited from the Mechanics' Institute a book collection that held little worth retaining, and they were determined to concentrate on building formidable collections on top of the remnants. To mark the opening in 1883, architect John G. Howard donated art books and art exhibition catalogues, and sets of art, architecture and illustrated magazines. It was a short step to making a commitment to further materials about art and architecture, and in April 1884 the Library Committee resolved to obtain at \$4 per volume a complete set of *L'art* magazine, a leading art publication which had been launched in Paris eight years earlier. Each issue featured original engravings and woodcuts. During the next two years the library took out subscriptions to *Charivari* (where Daumier was a principal illustrator), *Art Amateur*, *Journal of Photography*, *Art Journal*, *Decorative Art*, *Magazine of Art*, *Portfolio*, *Art Magazine*, *Décoration*, *Art Interchange*, *Architect*, *Architect & Building News*, *Builder*, and to several illustrated magazines from France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States.²⁴ In 1885 John Hallam donated his personal library which included over twenty-five key English and French-language

volumes on the fine arts.²⁵ In 1889 the library began to publish catalogues of the reference and circulating collections. Even at this date the reference library, rather than the circulating department, was the first location for fine arts books, listing them under Painting; Freehand Drawing; Illuminating; Engraving and Etching; Decorative Art; Furniture; Architecture (there were eighty-two titles in 1889, the earliest published in 1823); Sculpture; Costumes; Needlework; Pottery, Porcelain and Plate. The circulation department concentrated on practical works about drawing, painting, ceramics, modelling, and a few titles in art history.

But James Bain had no intention of limiting the scope of the library simply to providing useful reading matter to readers who might enter the building. His *ex-officio* presence on the board where he recommended new purchases, encouraged him to express his own ideas about the future of the arts in the library, ideas that he shared with his ally Chairman Hallam. During the fall of 1885 he reported with some satisfaction to the board that he had invited employees "of large manufactories of the City to spend an evening in the Library for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the

would rather enhance its interest.

Lectures in connection with the Library would also require some such accomodation.

I have no idea how far these crude suggestions would work in with your scheme – but if you think anything is practical we might talk it over and possibly hit upon some proposition which I might lay before our Society of Artists & the Academy.

January 25, 1883. TPL, "Letters concerning the founding," vol. 2, last item.²⁴ Reports of new acquisitions are found in the TPL, "Library Committee Minutes" (missing during the years 1888-1894); reports of major acquisitions are in the "Board Minutes" and in the *Annual Reports*.

²⁵ See *Catalogue of books and pamphlets presented to the Toronto Public Library* by John Hallam. (Toronto: 1885), 43-4.

Portrait of Francis Gore, Lieut-Governor of Upper Canada. (Toronto Public Library). When the portrait was purchased in 1890 for \$100 the library thought it had acquired a work by Sir Thomas Lawrence. The story that came with the painting was that Lawrence had painted it in 1814; that it was given to Col. James Givins who brought it to Canada in 1815; and that it hung for forty-five years on the walls of Givins' cottage near present-day Givins Street. After the death of Givins' daughter Cecil, the portrait went to the library. See Landmarks of Canada vol.1 (1967), 31, no. 362. Another version of the story that takes the attribution away from Lawrence is told by Fern Bayer in The Ontario Collection (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1984), 204-5.



literature pertaining to their handicraft.” These meetings were so successful that he was asked to continue them during the winter. He also sought the board’s approval for opening the library “from 8pm till 10pm at intervals during the winter to those citizens who feel desirous of seeing the rare and valuable art books. The number not to exceed 150 at any one time.” Towards this end, advertisements were to be placed in newspapers.²⁶ Already members of the public who were employed in the craft industries, or might be enticed to become interested in art, were being targeted. In 1889 the provincial Free Libraries Act was amended, empowering boards of management “to organize and manage evening classes for artizans, mechanics and working men in such

subjects as might promote a knowledge of the mechanical and manufacturing arts.”²⁷ The Toronto Public Library board made a “long study of the situation,” but the results of its deliberations are not reported. The same year John Hallam stepped down from chairing the library board. In 1890 the board made its first purchase of a painting, launching a tradition of acquiring works of art of historical interest for the permanent collections. The sum of \$100 was approved for a portrait, purported to be by Sir Thomas Lawrence, of Francis Gore, third Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada.²⁸

²⁶ TPL, “Board Minutes,” vol.1 (12 November 1886), 411.

²⁷ TPL, *6th Annual Report 1889* (1890) [unpaged]

²⁸ In connection with a portrait of Gore by George Berthon in the Ontario Art Collection, Fern

Until now, thoughts of a museum or art gallery sharing space with the library collections under one roof had not been more than a gleam in Bain's eye. But in 1891, when presented with the opportunity of taking over an already existing museum collection and installing it in the upper portion of the library building, Bain went ahead and presented his board with a full-blown *Special Report* on a proposal for the establishment of a public museum according to the provincial statute of 1882, a museum which would be provincially rather than locally administered and funded. The impetus had come from the Canadian Institute, which was looking for a permanent home for its collections of archaeological and mineral specimens given to it by curator David Boyle. A museum committee was struck immediately to deal with alterations and repairs to the second-floor space, to in-

vestigate and visit similar institutions in large cities in the United States, and to consider how the artifacts might be exhibited. Bain's *Special Report* was printed in 250 copies "for wide distribution," and some thought was given to the hiring of librarians and curators "as may be found necessary from time to time." Almost immediately the board received a communication from the Ontario Society of Artists, which also wanted to be involved.²⁹ That the library would house a museum must have seemed to everyone a *fait accompli*. Here all the treasures offered by the Canadian Institute, the York Pioneers, and the Ontario government, estimated to be worth several thousand dollars, "will be gathered together and placed conveniently at the service of the public."³⁰ *The Evening News* kept its readers advised of the progress of the proposal between 9 October and 11 December.³¹

Bayer writes that the painting is based on an undated, unsigned oil portrait of Gore in the John Ross Robertson Collection of the Toronto Reference Library. See *The Ontario Collection* by Fern Brayer (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside for the Ontario Heritage Foundation, 1984), 204-5. She states that the attribution to Lawrence is not supported by British art historians. Bayer refers to a portrait of Gore owned by the Hon. William Allan which was exhibited in 1852 in the Assembly Chamber of the Parliament Buildings. The TPL acquired several works of art from Allan's Estate – William Allan died in 1853 – which suggests that in the absence of information about the source of the purchase the portrait acquired in 1890 was the one once owned by Allan.

²⁹ TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 2 (11 December 1891), 427.

³⁰ With the possibility of a museum building on the horizon, it seemed that everybody who was saddled with bothersome collections of artifacts was elated at the possibility of unloading them on the new museum. The government of British Columbia offered 350 specimens of gold, silver, lead and copper for permanent exhibition. TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 2 (17 November 1891), 418. When John Hallam heard that the Ontario government hoped to transfer artifacts held by David Boyle for the museum at Niagara Falls, he reacted in a letter dated 11 February 1892: "I don't want to see a Museum full of monstrosities or curiosities of no practical use, blood-stained coats, grim skulls, old bones, broken swords, buttons and epaulets." TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 2 (12 February 1892), 457. The York Pioneers, a society of local historians, contacted the board in support of the idea of a public museum "where archaeological specimens in its possession might be deposited." TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 2 (9 July 1892), 520.

³¹ Five stories on the proposed museum appeared in *The Evening News* in juxtaposition to the

Some moneys were spent on the building renovations, but in 1891 the city's real estate boom had collapsed and the treasury was empty. Toronto was suffering from the effects of a serious depression. Even Alderman Hallam, no longer Chairman of the Board, wrote to the board on 11 December 1891 to urge members to drop the museum scheme. "The taxpayers," he wrote, "are in no humor to spend money on enterprises of this kind," adding that the board "on no account [should] spend any money to the injury of the Library."³² While the advantages of housing a museum in the library had earlier engaged Hallam's support, the influential politician believed that the people he represented

should finally win the day.

It might be useful at this point to take a quick look at what exhibition spaces did exist in the 1880s and 1890s for the display of works of art.³³ The purpose of the mechanics' institutes had been the dissemination of 'useful knowledge' to its artisan members. Thus its main emphasis was on manufacturing art and design rather than on the fine arts, that is the scientific side of the arts, which plays directly into the industrial economy. However, its annual exhibitions gradually became showcases for paintings, drawings and sculpture lent by their middle class owners rather than articles of manufacture.³⁴

customary tabloid-style dramas, e.g. "Parson elopes with married parishioner!" On 9 October *The News* reported that the Ontario Government had refused to provide funds for a Provincial Museum, but James Bain "has taken an active interest in the movement for the establishment of such a museum as the one proposed..." The next day it summarized the comments in support of the Museum on the part of each member of the board. Alderman A.R. Boswell insisted "The museum should be so attractive that public interest would be aroused." On 15 October, under the headline: "Will Go Through," it was reported that the board presumed, on the basis of offers of collections of artifacts, that only a little money for purchases would be needed. According to Bain, "All classes appear anxious to see the museum started." One of the sentiments that arose in board discussions was: "as a means of stimulating interest in early Canadian history it will also be of service." On 18 November, one board member changed his mind and withdrew his support because the city was "now going through a period of financial depression." Nonetheless, on 11 December, under the headline "Success at last," an appropriation was made to renovate and decorate the Music Hall which had been occupied by the Atheneum Club, and to make major alterations to the library entrance and main staircase. Arrangements for the transfer of the collections held by the Canadian Institute and the minerals stored in Niagara had been finalized.

³² TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 2 (8 January 1892), 434-35.

³³ There had been talk for some time about establishing an art museum with exhibition space for contemporary artists in the city. One group agitated in 1888 to turn the lower floor of the Horticultural Pavilion into studios (*Saturday Night* 1 (3 November 1888), 1. Early in the new century, believing that the University of Toronto deserved its own museum, businessman and art collector Sir Edmund Walker and a small group of prominent citizens began to discuss the possibilities. The outcome in 1912 was an Act establishing the Royal Ontario Museum, and in 1914 the Museum moved into its own building. See Lovat Dickson, *The museum makers: the story of the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1986).

³⁴ For a full history of art promotion and the Toronto Mechanic's Institute, see Ellen L. Ramsay, "Art and industrial society: the role of the Toronto Mechanic's Institute in the promotion of art, 1831-1883," *Labour/Le Travail* 43 (Spring 1999), 71-103.



Exhibitors at Ontario Society of Artists in the Carnegie Library Art Museum Gallery. Standing left to right : William S. Broadhead, Owen Staples, Lawren S. Harris, Robert Gagen, Mabel A. Johnston, Henrietta Vickers, Emily Louise Orr (Mrs. J.E.) Elliot, P. Shepberd, Frank R. Halliday, Herbert S. Palmer, William C. Johnstone, George A. Reid. Seated: Thomas W. McLean, Francis H. Johnston, Charles W. Jefferys, J.W. Beatty, Harriet M. Ford, Mary Heister Reid, Minnie Kallmeyer, Harriet Joan Lavis (Mrs. J.E.H.) Macdonald, Mary E. Wrinch, E. Wylly Grier. Photo from Toronto Star Weekly, April 8, 1911, courtesy Toronto Public Library.

For painters, engravers, bookbinders, carvers, and craftspeople of all talents and both genders, the fall agricultural fairs stretching back into the early 1800s represented almost the sole opportunity to display, and win prizes for, their work. But they lasted for only a couple of weeks each year, and works of art and handicrafts were set against a background of farming equipment and bull enclosures. A permanent Industrial Exhibition was established in Exhibition Park in 1879, renamed the Canadian National Exhibition in 1903, and given its own imposing art gallery in 1902 where the latest works by well-known international painters, graphic artists and photographers were studied and enjoyed by local artists and appreciative audiences up until the 1950s.

The Ontario Society of Artists, from its founding in 1873 mounted regular exhibitions at members' studios and in various temporary – and largely unsatisfactory – society quarters. Egerton Ryerson's educational museum in the normal school offered visitors fine copies of selected masterpieces in European art collections. And then there was a parade of periodic exhibitions which were held in the parliament buildings, the city hall, the St. Lawrence Hall, the Crystal Palace, the Horticultural Pavilion in Allan Gardens, the Temple Building, the YMCA, and other suitable spaces as could be identified by sponsors.

With the prospects for a museum in the library having evaporated, James Bain continued to watch over the paintings and engravings that already bright-

ened the Central Library's walls, and to court artists and donors. Through 1892, tenders were received for the refurbishment and decoration of the library's music hall, and for the "renovation" of the paintings that had hung on the walls after they had been examined by an expert who pronounced them to be "in good condition." Forty engravings in the possession of the board were framed "at a cost not exceeding \$125 and placed in the entrance hall."³⁵ John Ross Robertson, the owner of the *Toronto Telegram*, gave the library a collection of Canadian manuscripts and documents in 1896, the prelude to a avalanche of artworks related to Canadian history that in later years were to overwhelm the library.³⁶

Bain was always alert to art collections that might be purchased or donated to his library, and he encouraged exhibitions of paintings and prints at the main library and at the branch libraries. Along with public libraries in the United States the Toronto Public Library had hosted a travelling exhibition of Arundel Society reproductions

of the old masters. The prints "have tended to awaken an interest in art and the history of these times," he noted.³⁷ It was through contemplation of Italian and German religious art presented in colourful engravings, heliographs and chromolithographs that the Society sought to educate and provide the means for self-improvement.³⁸

Relishing his role in making the public sit up and notice the public library, the chief librarian continued to keep his library open for special evenings when treasured volumes on art could be shown off. In 1897 members of the Women's Art Association were the object of "Mr. Bain's great kindness" when he arranged two art evenings for them, "when the beautiful works on art and artists were shown."³⁹ In January 1898, the board received a request from Frank Yeigh, a man of letters and a director of the YMCA, to borrow "a few treasures" for a proposed Art Loan Exhibition to be held at the Central YMCA on Yonge Street.⁴⁰ When artist J. Mower Martin offered in 1898 to hang three

³⁵ TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 2 (6 May 1892), 490 and (14 October 1892), 533.

³⁶ TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 3 (8 May 1896), 187.

³⁷ Bain, "Museums, art galleries, and lectures in connection with public libraries," paper read to The World's Library Congress in U.S. Secretary of the Interior. Bureau of Education. *Education report, 1892-93*, 857.

³⁸ The story behind the Arundel Society prints is told by Alan Bird in "An earnest passion for art: the Arundel Society," *Country Life* 159 (3 June 1976), 1513-15. A role for pictures in the library, that is reproductions of great works of art both for loan and as wall decorations, was recommended by E.A. Hardy (a long-time officer of the Ontario Library Association) in his *The Public Library: its place in our educational system* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), 89-93.

³⁹ "Studio and Gallery," by Lynn C. Doyle, *Saturday Night* (17 April 1897), 15.

⁴⁰ *The art loan exhibition* ("the largest collection of loan pictures ever gathered in Toronto") was arranged by the Woman's Auxiliary of the YMCA for the week 29 January to 4 February 1898. In the absence of an exhibition catalogue, newspaper accounts (e.g. *The Globe* from 20 January to 3 February 1898) gave detailed descriptions of hundreds of specimens of fine and decorative arts, curios, docu-

of his paintings in the main entrance, the offer was enthusiastically accepted by the board. The following year Mary Dignam, President of the Women's Art Association of Canada, made a special request of the board to lend "oil paintings and eleven engravings to be used to illustrate a Portrait exhibition being held in the interests of Art, and the history of Local portraiture in Toronto." The request was happily granted "on condition that the Association has all expenses, keep same insured and undertake to return them in good order."⁴¹

The name of Alfred Sandham, who was to become a fixture in "his special room in the library," surfaced for the first time in 1898 when Sandham's History of Canada, consisting of 15,000 views and portraits inserted into 120

beautifully bound and hand-tooled volumes, was offered to the library and accepted for purchase. Over a ten-year period many more volumes of extra-illustrated Canadiana were compiled by Sandham who was a practitioner of the art of "grangerizing," and an indefatigable collector of engravings. When he died in 1910, in his obituary Sandham was extolled as an artist "of no mean ability" who added some colour work of his own in the form of heraldic devices. The *Daily Star* focused on the illustrated compilations, which the "gifted antiquarian" had sold or donated to the Archives in Ottawa, and to other libraries as well as to the Toronto Public Library.⁴²

James Bain was committed to legitimizing his library as the premier art

ments, books and newspapers, displays of amateur photography and American illustrations. James Bain was mentioned among dozens of lenders.

⁴¹ TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 3 (10 March 1899), 333 and (14 April 1899), 377. The *Loan portrait exhibition under the management of the Women's Art Association of Canada* was held from 3-15 April, 1899 in the Temple Building on Bay Street. Close to a thousand works borrowed from Toronto collectors are described in the 125-page catalogue. The Toronto Public Library lent ten portraits: Lieut.-Colonel Gore, Governor of Upper Canada, ascribed to Sir Thos. Lawrence (#39); Engraving of Sir Francis Bond Head, Lieut.-Governor of Upper Canada, engraved by C. Turner after Cook (#44); Engraving of Sir George Murray, Lieut.-Governor of Upper Canada, engraved by H. Meyer after Lawrence (#45); Lithograph of the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, Governor-General of Canada, lithographed by D'Avignon after Hamel (#48); Duke of York, by Doo after Sir Thos. Lawrence (#760); the Rev. Alexander Macdonell, R.C. Bishop of Kingston, proof before letters (#761); Headmasters of Upper Canada College, sketch made for the history of the College (#762); Five members of the board of Upper Canada College, sketch made for the history (#763); the Rev. John Strachan, Bishop of Toronto, by Warner after Berthon (#764); Lithograph copy in colours of "Death of Big Snake," by Fuller and Becke, Toronto, 1856, "the earliest and only high class colored lithograph done in Canada." (#836).

⁴² There are several newspaper clippings about Sandham in the TPL "Scrapbooks relating to the Toronto Public Library" (reel.1, 222, 234 and 312) e.g. a story headlined "Books on Canada for the Library" in the *Daily Star*, 8 October 1910, and his obituary on 28 December 1910. Two series are particularly mentioned: his "History of Canada" in 120 volumes, and a 45-volume extra-illustrated *Canadian Antiquarian and Numismatic Journal*. There are several references in the "Board Minutes" and the "Library Committee Minutes" to agreements to purchase Sandham sets. The library's current manuscript holdings list a few volumes from three other Sandham sets. The catalogue of Library and Archives Canada shows two sets by Sandham.



"The Foreclosure of the Mortgage" by George A. Reid, R.C.A. Soon after the artist completed the painting in 1893 it was displayed for six months at the Toronto Public Library near the entrance. The painting was acclaimed at exhibitions in Chicago and San Francisco and at the Royal Academy in London, but near the end of World War I was destroyed in a fire. Along with "Mortgaging the Homestead" it was considered to be the artist's finest work. Reproduced from Massey's Magazine 1 (January 1896), 11.

exhibition space in the city. Local artists continued to appreciate the benefit of having their work exhibited in the library where thousands of readers each year would be exposed to it. George Reid offered to hang his painting *The Foreclosure of the Mortgage* in the main hall of the Central Library. The Library Committee accepted the offer on the condition that it was "entirely at his risk in regard to insurance and otherwise," and for six months library users were treated to a free viewing of the 1893 painting which went on to win medals and critical acclaim in the United States and England.⁴³

James Bain was not a man to pass up opportunities to increase the library's stock of historical paintings if he thought his board could be coerced into finding the funds. When in October 1902 an outlay of just \$100 would

cover a collection of watercolour paintings of historical sites in Upper Canada, painted around 1824 by the British topographic artist Major J.E. Woolford, the chief librarian was quick to recommend its purchase to the Library Committee.⁴⁴ Grand opportunities waited around the corner.

In November 1902, the Library Committee received an offer from the executors of the late the Hon. George Allan to purchase Audubon's *Birds of North America*—the great elephant folios. In a special report, Bain recommended the purchase and the committee members, and subsequently the board, lost little time in agreeing to pay out \$1,900 in five instalments. They were told that this was

the exceeding rare first edition printed from the copper plates and coloured under Audubon's personal supervision. While such a book cannot become one very frequently consulted owing to its size and the danger of injury to the plates, yet it is the final tribunal

⁴³ The story of the painting's creation, exhibition, huge popularity, and destruction by fire at the end of World War I, is told by Muriel Miller in her *George Reid: a Biography* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1987). See also Reid's own discussion of his painting in G.A. Reid, R.C.A., "The evolution of two of my pictures" *Massey's Magazine* 1 (January 1896), 10-15.

⁴⁴ TPL. "Board Minutes, vol. 3" (1902), 520.

to which ornithological questions are referred and its possession gives a high standing to any library which may have a copy.⁴⁵

On the heels of threatened cuts by the Board of Control to the library's funding, the entire budget in 1902 for books, newspapers and magazines for the Central Library and the branches was just over \$8,000. The realization that the purchase had thrust the library into the big leagues could not have escaped the library trustees, and indeed ownership of the Audubon is still a point of pride with library staff. The folios are exhibited at timely intervals with attendant publicity, and in the 1980s a large sum was raised to restore them.

Having put in years of service as a public building, the Central Library constructed for the Mechanics' Institute in 1854 was seriously deteriorating. That "the most important English library in Canada" was faced with the threat of fire was generally recognized. Library philanthropist Andrew Carnegie was the potential saviour to relieve everyone of their worst nightmares. Along with hundreds of library boards in the English-speaking world the Toronto Public Library, with James Bain taking the initiative, applied for funding to build a new central library and three branch libraries. Suffice to say that this proposal met with difficulties as an offer of \$350,000 by Carnegie in 1903 triggered debates on whether to accept

Carnegie "blood money." The "Terms of Competition" presented in 1904 to architects specified an art room on the main floor encompassing 2,250 square feet, and two large rooms above the reference reading room for exhibitions of historical pictures and maps. The cornerstone was laid in 1906, and when on 29 October 1909 the new Toronto Reference Library at College and St. George Streets was formally opened, James Bain had already died. His portrait by E. Wyly Grier, which was commissioned for \$250 after his death in May 1908, was hung in the entrance hall to the new library.⁴⁶ Sitting at his desk and leafing through an art book, Bain is backed by a thick array of framed pictures and shelves of books, the perfect backdrop for the librarian and art-lover who throughout his professional life in the library had loved books and art equally. In his plans for the new building, Bain had made special provision for artists. Under the heading "A Place for Artists," a newspaper article tells the reader:

adjoining the reference room, and overlooking it is a position set aside for local artists. It was done at their request, and there for some time to come the art societies will hold their exhibits. The room is well adapted for such purposes, and has been constructed with the one idea in view.⁴⁷

Before he died, James Bain had unleashed a chain of far-reaching events

⁴⁵ TPL, "Library Committee Minutes" vol. 3 (9 December 1902), 182.

⁴⁶ TPL, "Board Minutes," vol. 4 (29 January 1909), 276.

⁴⁷ TPL, "Scrapbooks relating to the Toronto Public Library," Reel 1, 113. Unsourced, but sometime in November 1909.

that led the library – its board and new chief librarian – to continue to court powerful spokesmen for art museums and galleries in the city, and art collectors who could be persuaded to donate paintings and prints to the library’s collections. The room set aside for local artists was soon to be usurped for loftier art exhibition purposes. Back in 1901, as the representative of the Public Library Board, James Bain Jr.’s name was one of the “influential signatures” listed on the prospectus for the incorporation of an Art Museum of Toronto.⁴⁸ Not having a building of its own, the committee was on the lookout for suitable premises. Available gallery rooms in the convocation building of the University of Toronto were simply too small, and in June 1909 the committee turned to “a gallery already built on the upper floor of the St. George Street wing of the Toronto Public Library” which could be obtained for “a term of five years without the payment of rent and with a share of the expense of maintenance agreed upon under a plan to be settled with the Library authorities.” But there was one stumbling block. The art museum people were determined that admission fees should be charged to exhibitions, and library officials were equally adamant that fees were legally unacceptable. A compromise was reached

through an amendment to the provincial public library legislation which, in return for free admission on Saturdays, permitted the museum to charge an admission fee of 25 cents from Monday to Friday.⁴⁹ The agreement reached with the library included empowering the art museum to arrange its own exhibitions and giving it full responsibility for management of the exhibition space. From then on, the library building hosted the annual exhibitions of the Ontario Society of Artists and the Canadian Art Club, and exhibitions of the Toronto Camera Club and the Toronto Society of Architects and other groups such as the Royal Canadian Academy. Occasionally the annual meetings of these societies were held in the galleries. But soon, however, questions were raised about how long it would be before the art museum would have its own permanent quarters. Museum staff were protesting library regulations which limited them to bringing canvases in and out and up the stairs during the couple of daytime hours when the reading room was closed to the public. By June 1913 when the art museum was formally opened in the former Goldwin Smith residence, the Grange, one newspaper columnist felt that if it hadn’t been for the exhibitions in the public library, the art museum until that date had been “a

⁴⁸ *Canadian Home Journal* 7 (Feb. 1901), 25.

⁴⁹ The details of the problem and its resolution are addressed in “Is Art Museum Legal?” *Toronto Telegram*, 13 November 1909; the arrangements decided between the Art Museum and the TPL are recorded in the “Minute Book” of the Art Museum of Toronto, Provisional Council, 2 June-19 November 1909, 26-36; the “Minute Book” of the Art Museum of Toronto, 7 January-18 May 1910, 27-36; and the “Minutes” of the TPL, vol. 4 (12 November 1909), 356-57.

dead number.”⁵⁰

In spite of the drawbacks associated with the three-year gallery experiment on the upper floor of the library, the art museum trustees and library staff must have been alert to its very positive results. In the *Sunday World* on 3 December 1911, regular columnist Margaret Bell had remarked on the numbers of visitors to the art gallery, especially school girls and boys. On 1 August 1912, the *Star Weekly* reported that at the Toronto Reference Library “the art books...are always in demand,” the happy result, no doubt, of exhibition visitors on the upper floor having ready access to the art books on the floor below. The library granted to its more valuable art books the protective status conferred on works of art, keeping them under lock and key where on one occasion security had been breached by a vandal who managed to extract an engraving.⁵¹ Vice-regal parties arriving for formal exhibition openings gently disturbed the otherwise tranquil air of the reference reading room, no doubt arousing the curiosity of readers. Some visitors to the library, who intended simply to use the reading room, would have taken advantage of the free Saturdays to mount the stairs leading to the gallery. In the normal course of their lives not all of these would have been tempted to visit an art museum, but drawn by the sight of paintings, drawings, prints,

photographs and architectural sketches by the finest artists in the land, a few would have followed the exhibitions to the new art museum at the Grange.

But the art museum did not entirely decamp in 1913 when it found a home – albeit limited – in the Grange. Until 1918, when the first galleries were constructed alongside The Grange, the art museum continued to manage the library’s gallery space as it had before. One newspaper commentator saw the public library and the art museum as functioning in tandem rather than separately under one roof. “Outside its primary functions as a reference and circulating library, the College Street Library has been utilized from time to time for the exhibition of the work of Canadian artists and in this department has served a public need.”⁵²

The Toronto Public Library’s own art collections had mushroomed since 1910, thanks to an art collector who earlier had fallen under James Bain’s sway, and eventually became a friend. On 13 May of that year, the Library Committee considered the “generous offer of Mr. John Ross Robertson, the proprietor of the Toronto Evening Telegram to donate his valuable collection of Canadian historical engravings to the Toronto Public Library.” Discussions with Robertson led to a first donation of 100 historical paintings and engravings, “with an intimation that eventually all of his

⁵⁰ *Toronto World* (5 June 1913), 7

⁵¹ TPL, “Scrapbooks, relating to the Toronto Public Library,” 327. Unsourced newspaper clipping, probably 1911.

⁵² *Globe* (26 January 1916), 6

Canadian collection, in portfolios embracing nearly 20,000 pictures, all relating to Toronto and Canada, will come into the possession of the Public Library.”⁵³ By 1913 there were 3,329 pictures “crowded into a room much too small for the purpose and poorly lighted.” The Library Committee and the board could have had only the smallest inkling of the flood that had been unleashed. While continuing the story is far beyond the chronological limits of this article, suffice to say that supplementary annual

donations from Robertson in a very few years put the library in the impossible position of trying to both house and exhibit the artworks, and provide room for the crowds of visitors. In 1913 it was reported that in total 36,000 people had visited the John Ross Robertson Historical Room, and 52,000 by 1915. The chief librarian and Robertson himself regularly berated the City’s intransigence in not providing the funding for additional space. However, it was not until 1928 – the year Robertson died – that the case was successfully made, long after the lower Historical Room



The John Ross Robertson Historical Collection on the lower floor of the Carnegie Library, reproduced from Globe, 10 February 1912.

and two upper galleries had been filled with pictures. Appeals for more room for the art collections were bolstered by statistics and stories about their importance. A frequent theme was that “No book dealing with Canadian life can be written to-day and properly illustrated without reference to the Robertson collection.”⁵⁴

That activities for children in the library could be enhanced by the presence of pictures or prints on the walls was being advocated as early as 1907. “If the picture is a work of art the educational effect is permanent,” wrote

⁵³ The various negotiations with Robertson are reported in the TPL, “Board Minutes,” vol. 5 (13 May 1910), 409-15, also “Report for 1910,” 453. On 12 May 1910, Robertson wrote to the board saying that for twenty-five years prior to Mr. Bain’s death he had discussed with the chief librarian the allocation of a room for an historical exhibit of Canadian pictures in the new library, stating his conditions and intentions.

⁵⁴ TPL, “Board Minutes,” vol. 5 (12 May 1915), 163, 165. For accounts of John Ross Robertson’s relations with the Toronto Public Library see Darrel R. Reid, “John Ross Robertson and the Toronto Public Library, 1885-1929” in *Readings in Canadian library history*, vol. 2, edited by Peter F. McNally (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1996), 305-18, and Ron Poulton, *The paper tyrant* (Toronto: Copp, Clark, 1971), 148-59.

Inspector Leavitt in his report to the Minister of Education. Surrounding children with works of art based on Canadian history, and appealing to their imagination and appreciation of history by linking works of art with stories, was the basis for the historical story hours for children that by 1913 were held in the Robertson gallery downstairs. Lillian Smith, the formidable head of the Toronto Public Library's children's department, reported that during the previous four months over 1,000 children attended story hours about Canadian explorers, and listened closely as their gaze was directed to over 1,400 pictures hanging on walls and screens.⁵⁵ That year the John Ross Robertson collection was already viewed as the largest such collection outside of the National Archives in Ottawa, and this was long before the regular donations had ceased.

The message that the public library is an appropriate home for art as well as for books was warmly received outside of Toronto, especially after Carnegie libraries began to pop up all over the province. The Sarnia Public Library in particular stands out, with pictures lining the walls of the

Children's Room soon after its building opened in 1903.⁵⁶ Some years later, beginning in 1919, Norman Gurd, a business man and president of the Ontario Library Association 1906-7, and a lover and promoter of Canadian art, in league with the Sarnia Women's Conservation Committee brought Canadian art and artists to Sarnia's public library. During the Great War the ladies had focussed



"The 'Story Hour' in the Public Library," Globe 12 April 1913. Photograph taken in the J. Ross Robertson Picture Gallery, lower level of the Toronto Public Library, College and St. George Streets.

their fundraising activities on Red Cross work, but after the war, having been inspired by the exhibitions of little pictures they had seen in the Toronto Reference Library, they turned to mounting exhibitions of Canadian paintings in the Sarnia library, purchasing works for

⁵⁵ Ontario Library Association. *Proceedings of the Thirteenth annual meeting at the Public Library, Toronto, March 24th and 25th, 1913* (Toronto: 1913), 69.

⁵⁶ Province of Ontario. Minister of Education. *Report*. (Toronto: 1906), 224.

the library and making sales to visitors. Beginning in 1920, annual exhibitions were mounted, and artists, including members of the Group of Seven, were invited to give lectures. The exhibitions were then circulated to the St. Thomas, Chatham and London public libraries. Norman Gurd's agent in the enterprise was Dr. James MacCallum whose cottage on Georgian Bay became a gathering place for members of the Group.⁵⁷

An art gallery had been installed on the second floor of the new 1895 pre-Carnegie London Public Library, and the second exhibition in its west room was devoted to the work of Frederic Bell-Smith. The artist donated his painting *The Wave* to the library in the expectation that it would mark the beginning of a civic art collection.⁵⁸

In 1919, far to the west in the town of Port Arthur, 440 visitors were attracted to the display in the public library of the fine and valuable collection of "Indian relics and handiwork" belonging to P.H. Godsell, a Hudson's Bay Company factor.⁵⁹ It was reported that in the same year the ladies of the local chapter of

the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire had purchased and donated three war pictures out of an exhibition then on view in the library. The pictures were by Lieutenant H. Wreford Clarke, an English-born commercial artist living in Toronto. The following year, in Port Arthur's sister city Fort William (the two cities amalgamated in 1970 as Thunder Bay), the library basked in widespread enthusiasm for a "Group of Seven" exhibition on loan from the National Gallery of Canada, and travelling to libraries throughout the province. James Bain would have been proud, given that many visitors who had never been inside the library looked at the pictures, and then remained to admire the library and its facilities.⁶⁰ At the annual meeting that year of the Ontario Library Association, artist Wylly Grier spoke to delegates on the theme of public libraries and Canadian art, and with reference to this particular exhibition insisted that "the public library is the best place for intellectual and cultivated people to see pictures."⁶¹

The educational and cultural im-

⁵⁷ George Leslie Smith, *Norman Gurd and the Group of 7: a history of the Sarnia Art Movement* (Bright's Cove: 1974). Details of the sales of paintings and gifts to the library are given in the *Ontario Library Review* 4 (November 1919), 37, and 5 (February 1921), 37. In 2000, on its eightieth anniversary, the 1920 exhibition in Sarnia was restaged at Gallery Lambton as *The Sarnia Arts Movement: an 80th Anniversary Recreation*, with most of the original paintings loaned from galleries across Canada (*Globe & Mail*, 28 February 2000, T10). I am grateful to Lorne Bruce for alerting me to sources for art exhibitions and collections in Ontario public libraries.

⁵⁸ Eleanor A.J. Shaw, *A history of the London Public Library 1841-1941* (London Public Library and Art Museum, 1941), 35. (Occasional Paper no. 4). Details of the 1920 exhibition, sales and lectures were published in the *Ontario Library Review* 5 (February 1921), 78.

⁵⁹ *Ontario Library Review* 4 (August 1919), 14-15. Philip Henry Godsell was Factor from 1916 to 1919 at Long Lake Hudson's Bay post in Ontario.

⁶⁰ *Ontario Library Review*, 5 (Feb. 1921), 74-75.

⁶¹ E. Wylly Grier, "Canadian art and its relationship to the library," *Proceedings of the 18th Annual*

portance of free libraries and art museums was rarely disputed in the last half of the nineteenth century, but whether these institutions shared the same values and objectives was seen by many as doubtful well before the century came to a close. It was partly that a series of economic depressions with monotonous regularity raised questions about funding. But far more decisive were momentous developments in the worlds of museums and art galleries. At least in Ontario it used to be that “museum” signified collections of copies of old masters, small works on paper, and local artifacts tucked away in odd corners of old buildings. Now the trustees and benefactors of the new museums harboured loftier ambitions: high-ceilinged galleries with walls clothed in silk brocade displaying original paintings and sculpture of acknowledged significance, and regular exhibitions featuring the work of the best known contemporary artists and artists’ societies. Typically the patrons of these museums sprang from the moneyed classes of citizens who could easily dominate their boards of trustees. Admission fees would be charged. The public library was a very different creature. As the “people’s college,” it was governed in the public interest by municipal officials, politicians and supportive citizens dependent upon municipal funding. Almost inevitably public libraries lacked the aura of elit-

ism and prestige that might attract the interest of wealthy benefactors. At the same time the world of art was dividing itself into various camps representing high art, popular art, industrial and commercial art, and pictorial images that were valued primarily for their subject matter. The public libraries found themselves to be the natural repositories and exhibition spaces for art which was appreciated not for inherent aesthetic qualities but rather for its power to educate and inform: topographic and historical subjects, wildlife art, graphic arts and photography.

As a man who mingled easily with artists and wealthy art collectors, and a member of the group that founded the Art Museum of Toronto, Chief Librarian James Bain would have revelled in the responsibilities of art ownership, and the implicit obligation bestowed on his library by donors and library patrons to exhibit prints, drawings and watercolours, and exploit them in scheduled library activities. Back in 1879, Maunde Thompson, a distinguished British palaeographer, questioned whether “modern” librarians in free public libraries welcomed such a role. “But is a librarian only a keeper of books? There were halcyon days when he was – days fled for ever.”⁶² For more than 100 years at the Toronto Reference Library committed library staff members have taken a particular satisfaction in not being just

Meeting of the Ontario Library Association, 1918, 45-51.

⁶² E. Maunde Thompson, “Some hints on the future of free libraries,” *The Library* 1 (1889), 409. Edward Maunde Thompson was later Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum, and as Sir Edward presided as President of the British Academy.



A couple enjoying the exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy in the Toronto Public Library. Drawing by Lillian Scott. Following the opening on 23 November 1911, a visit was made to the exhibition by His Royal Highness Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught and a son of Queen Victoria, together with his wife Louise Margaret, Duchess of Connaught. Toronto Sunday World, 3 December 1911 (from TPL Scrapbooks, reel 1, 308).

prints and illustrations.

keepers of books. This privileged few have seen in the works of art of which they have been the happy custodians, the opportunity to carry out the library's educational mission, and at the same time to introduce cultural experiences to library users in the form of paintings,

The Toronto Reference Library's art collections have been used to make Canadian history, geography and natural science come alive for young people. To adult readers who are unaccustomed to visiting art galleries, they have offered inviting glimpses of the country's past as seen through the eyes of artists. When imaginative librarian/curators are encouraged to bring together selections from the art collections and rare books in thematic exhibitions, visitors to the library are alerted – often to their astonishment – to the building's treasures that lie well hidden beyond the rows of computers. It is when the library itself takes exuberant pride in its role as one of the city's major cultural centres that it attracts the respect and admiration that is its due. James Bain would have demanded no less.