

# An Inspector Calls

## Angus Mowat and Ontario's Rural Libraries, 1937-40

Lorne Bruce

Volume 106, numéro 1, spring 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050722ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050722ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Bruce, L. (2014). An Inspector Calls: Angus Mowat and Ontario's Rural Libraries, 1937-40. *Ontario History*, 106(1), 77-99.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1050722ar>

Résumé de l'article

Angus McGill Mowat milita en faveur de l'oeuvre des bibliothèques publiques pendant la grande dépression. En 1937, devenu Inspecteur des Bibliothèques Publiques dans le ministère de l'éducation, il contribua à remonter le moral et à agrandir les services des petites bibliothèques des régions rurales. Se basant sur la conception de la « bibliothèque moderne » devenue populaire après la Première Guerre mondiale, il inspira administrateurs, bibliothécaires, et assistants pendant les centaines de visites qu'il effectua dans toutes les régions avant 1939. Pendant ses inspections, il conseillait les administrateurs concernant la gérance et les finances; préconisait une meilleure formation des bibliothécaires et des employés, l'amélioration des collections et des services aux adultes et aux enfants, et le soutien des réformes récentes du curriculum de lecture des écoles publiques. Quoiqu'il ait été interrompu par la guerre, l'ambitieux programme d'inspection de Mowat a établi les bases d'un réel progrès dans le système provincial de bibliothèques publiques après 1945.

# AN INSPECTOR CALLS

## Angus Mowat and Ontario's Rural Libraries, 1937-40

By Lorne Bruce

An introductory editorial in the August 1937 issue of the *Ontario Library Review* was the first realization for many people that the Department of Education had appointed a new Inspector of Public Libraries, Angus McGill Mowat (fig. 1). Local trustees and workers had expected a decision for almost a year, yet few could have anticipated the accompanying announcement by Mowat, who promised to visit every library personally, a bold step in a province with almost 500 community libraries.<sup>1</sup> In the subsequent three years, librarians and trustees would discover their new provincial supervisor to be a man of his word and they would learn that Mowat embraced their problems in a sympathetic, forthright, and honest style. His inspections, reaching more than 300 places in rural and northern areas, would be cut short by Canada's entry into the Second World War, not by fatigue or administrative ennui.

Informed Ontario trustees and librarians knew "Angus" well. The grand-



Fig. 1 Angus McGill Mowat, c.1930 (UWO Libraries)

nephew of the Ontario Premier, Sir Oliver Mowat, was a war veteran who had been wounded in the arm at Vimy Ridge. After the war, he became chief librarian in his hometown Trenton (1922-28) then Belleville (1928-30) and Windsor (1930-32) where he carried on publication of the *Canadian Periodical Index*. Mowat was an active member in the Ontario Library Association (OLA) who spoke at annual meetings in 1923 and 1928. During the Depression, when he directed Saskatoon Public Library (1932-37), he instigated schemes to distribute donated books to struggling rural western libraries. He was a passionate sailor and a writer, too.<sup>2</sup> Mowat was develop-

<sup>1</sup> Angus Mowat, "A Note of Greeting from the Inspector of Public Libraries," *Ontario Library Review* 21:3 (Aug. 1937), 98-99 [hereafter cited as *OLR*]. A brief notice in *OLR* 21:2 (May 1937), 58 as it went to press first reported his appointment.

<sup>2</sup> See Stephen F. Cummings, "Angus McGill Mowat and the Development of Ontario Public Librar-

## *Abstract*

*Angus McGill Mowat was an inspirational voice for public library work during the Great Depression. In 1937, after he became Inspector of Public Libraries in the Ontario Department of Education, he helped revive spirits and raise service ambitions in smaller rural libraries. Building on the "modern library" concept popularized after the First World War, he re-energized trustees, librarians, and library workers with hundreds of visits to promote local efforts before 1939. His inspections encompassed the advisement of trustees on management and financial processes; the promotion of librarianship and staff training; the improvement of collections and services for adults and children; the reorganization of functional building space; the formation of county systems; and support for new public school curriculum reading reforms. Although warfare interrupted his work, Mowat's wide-ranging inspection method brought renewed optimism and laid the groundwork for genuine progress in the provincial public library system after 1945.*

**Résumé:** *Angus McGill Mowat milita en faveur de l'oeuvre des bibliothèques publiques pendant la grande dépression. En 1937, devenu Inspecteur des Bibliothèques Publiques dans le ministère de l'éducation, il contribua à remonter le moral et à agrandir les services des petites bibliothèques des régions rurales. Se basant sur la conception de la "bibliothèque moderne" devenue populaire après la Première Guerre mondiale, il inspira administrateurs, bibliothécaires, et assistants pendant les centaines de visites qu'il effectua dans toutes les régions avant 1939. Pendant ses inspections, il conseillait les administrateurs concernant la gérance et les finances; préconisait une meilleure formation des bibliothécaires et des employés, l'amélioration des collections et des services aux adultes et aux enfants, et le soutien des réformes récentes du curriculum de lecture des écoles publiques. Quoiqu'il ait été interrompu par la guerre, l'ambitieux programme d'inspection de Mowat a établi les bases d'un réel progrès dans le système provincial de bibliothèques publiques après 1945.*

ing a national presence. In 1934, he had joined other prominent librarians in the newly formed Canadian Library Council to advance library progress.<sup>3</sup> Doubtless, all these experiences gave him a taste for greater challenges. When Ontario's provincial library inspector, F.C. Jennings, resigned in October 1936, Mowat was ready to return to his home province and

assume this post in the Department of Education.

Provincial library inspections by the Public Libraries Branch, modelled on conventional school practices in the 1930s, were official visits to examine records, resolve problems, improve finances, and establish personal contacts. The Inspector's knowledge and counsel

ies, 1920-1960," (Ph.D. diss., School of Library and Information Science, University of Western Ontario, 1986), 181-223. For his personal side, see S.F. Cummings, "On the Compass of Angus Mowat: Books, Boats, Soldiers and Indians," in Peter F. McNally, ed. *Readings in Canadian Library History* (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1986), 245-58. For his novels, see Beatrice M.B. Corbett, "Lord of the Inland Seas: The Regional Fiction of Angus Mowat," (M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> "Canadian Library Council Formed," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 28:8 (Aug. 1934), 461-462; and "Association Administrative Reports," *A.L.A. Bulletin* 30:5, Part I: Annual Reports (May 1936), 352.

could be a persuasive catalyst for improvement because he reported to the Deputy Minister of Education. Generally, formal inspections, which were geared towards smaller libraries, were an opportunity to engage in discussions about fundamentals, *i.e.* management and finances, buildings, collections, librarianship, and cooperative efforts. Although Inspector William O. Carson had expanded activities greatly from 1916-29, the Toronto office was relatively modest operation by educational standards in the mid-1930s.<sup>4</sup>

In a typical year, Mowat's first from April 1937 through March 1938, the Branch spent almost \$85,000.<sup>5</sup> A small amount, \$9,196 for salaries, was expended to perform essential work by Mowat, his two experienced assistants, Samuel B. Herbert (principal clerk) and Patricia Spereman (senior library assistant), and two other clerks. A multiplicity of public library grants accounted for almost \$43,000 and various grants directed to the Ontario College of Art, the Ontario Historical Society, and others, comprised \$28,700. Only \$2,500 was spent on travelling libraries, ostensibly an important adjunct to local services throughout rural and northern areas.<sup>6</sup> The Department had a number of powers, such as supervising the disbursement of grants; oversight

of legislation; issuance of certificates to librarians; and operation of travelling libraries, library institutes, and courses in librarianship. In all these matters, the inspector was an influential participant. The busy minister, Leonard J. Simpson (1935-40), only dealt with the library portfolio on sporadic occasions, such as a "library night" in his own home riding at Barrie.<sup>7</sup>

### *Depression Era Public Library Service*

Ontario's libraries, like all public services, spent the Depression years in survival mode. Provincial library legislation encouraged two classes of library service, "Free" and "Association." The tax-supported Free Libraries were financed by larger urban municipalities at a statutory half-dollar per capita minimum rate. Most Free Libraries were relatively healthy compared to the struggling Association Libraries, which existed on meager government grants, membership subscriptions, and occasional entertainments. In hamlets, villages, and small towns, Association status was considered the first step towards creation of a free library. The 1937 annual report filed by the Minister of Education recorded 274 Association libraries across rural parts of the province. They had just over 22,000

<sup>4</sup> "William O. Carson," in *Canadian Dictionary of National Biography: Volume XV, 1921-1930*, edited by Ramsay Cook (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 189-190.

<sup>5</sup> *Public Accounts of the Province of Ontario for the Year Ended 31st March 1938* (Toronto: T.E. Bowman, 1938), C-39.

<sup>6</sup> The best outline of this service is provided by C.E. Freeman, "Travelling Libraries," (B.A. thesis, Ontario Agricultural College, 1925).

<sup>7</sup> "Dr. L.J. Simpson is Speaker at Library Night," *OLR* 22:4 (Nov. 1938), 300-01. Simpson presided over major curriculum reforms in 1937-39.

registered patrons from a potential rural population of 200,000—a membership of approximately ten percent of the people residing in their respective catchment areas. Collectively, these Associations expended \$47,952, held 617,566 volumes, and circulated 857,565 books. Compared to 1930 data, Associations were spending almost \$17,000 less and circulating 35,000 fewer books in 1937. Book purchases had dropped by more than half, to \$17,771. More than twenty-five Associations had ceased operation since 1930. For most localities, the potential transition to free status was a vain hope.

While economic misfortune certainly afflicted the Association Libraries, two Depression era national library surveys identified a serious structural problem and suggested a new remedy. According to the three-person Commission of Enquiry report released in 1933, *Libraries in Canada*, many smaller libraries were financially unviable.

This Commission has found that many of these libraries are used by very few of the people, because public opinion is that there are but few new books purchased, and the important books seem to be too expensive for the small library to buy. The result is that the book stock in nearly all these libraries is so nearly alike, so very ordinary, and so very limited in amount, that the library really fails almost entirely in its mission.<sup>8</sup>

As an antidote, the commissioners suggested countywide groupings in the south combined with a larger regional demonstration in northern Ontario. Later, in 1939, a second study recorded that 266 of Canada's 394 Association Libraries were located in Ontario—two thirds of the total. This American work reiterated the need for efficient administrative bodies, such as counties:

Since the possibilities for larger units include extension of service to rural districts, as well as groupings of existing units, and; because small villages, and scattered rural districts cannot maintain an adequate service independently, the problem of enlarging library units becomes urgent.<sup>9</sup>

Mowat realized the necessity to address the situation in smaller libraries. Like many librarians with professional training, the new Inspector endorsed the contemporary concept of modern methods in public library service which had emerged after the First World War.<sup>10</sup> No longer was the library considered a passive agency that simply arranged and stored books. Now it was to become a community service with trained staff to link books with readers, to promote children's services, and to work with local schools and adult education organizations.<sup>11</sup> These ideas received support at annual meetings of the OLA, and in-

<sup>8</sup> John Ridington, Mary J. L. Black, and George H. Locke, *Libraries in Canada; a Study of Library Conditions and Needs* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1933), 53. The Commission was financed by the Carnegie Corporation.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Eileen Stewart, *The Public Library in Canada in Relation to the Government* (Chicago: American Library Association and University of Chicago Graduate Library School, 1939), 43 and 66.

<sup>10</sup> See Lorne Bruce, *Places to Grow: Public Libraries and Communities in Ontario, 1930-2000* (Guelph: self-published, 2011), 24-32 for the progress of modern methods.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Lillian H. Smith, "The Future of Library Work with Children," *Library Journal* 62:1

deed, were generally accepted by educated librarians and trustees who frequently cited the motto, “the right book for the right reader,” to epitomize their work. Mowat acknowledged it was difficult to satisfy this ideal on a daily basis:

A fairly stiff task, of course, and one in which no library will ever be completely successful. But it is the degree of success, and even more important than that, the degree of effort that is made towards the end, which counts. It means, not only specialization in books, but in readers as well; it means ‘getting at’ the reader and prospective patron, gaining his confidence and setting him on the way to digging into the answers the library has for his particular interest.<sup>12</sup>

In eighteen cities across Ontario (especially the largest five—Windsor, London,

Library School or its predecessor in the Department of Education.<sup>13</sup> In smaller communities, however, trustees and staff were hard pressed to learn or implement modern notions.

Promotion of the modern public library by the Department of Education, the OLA, and larger city libraries was first heralded in 1919. The modern library contrasted sharply with the old library.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, a period of relative economic prosperity, these ideas percolated across Ontario. But the Great Depression stalled progress and, in many instances, reversed hard-won advances.

Nonetheless, Angus Mowat understood a reasonable foundation existed

| <b>Old Library</b>   | <b>Modern Library</b>  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guarded and preserved books</li> <li>• served the few—bookworms and scholars</li> <li>• age limits denied children access</li> <li>• librarian was a bookish policeman</li> <li>• restricted access to shelves</li> <li>• lack of method and organization</li> <li>• financed by subscriptions</li> <li>• library was passive social agent</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• makes the best books useful</li> <li>• patrons eagerly sought</li> <li>• books and services for children</li> <li>• librarian is a helpful guide and friend</li> <li>• open access to shelves</li> <li>• better organization due to library science</li> <li>• tax-supported institution</li> <li>• library was an active force in society</li> </ul> |

Hamilton, Toronto, and Ottawa) there were fewer constraints on implementing modern ideals because many staff were graduates from the University of Toronto

to develop public libraries. Ontario’s statutory annual 50-cent per capita rate, adopted in 1920 legislation, shielded Free Libraries from drastic budget reductions.

(1 Jan. 1937), 20-21; and Gordon Gourlay, “The Role of Canadian Public Libraries in Adult Education,” (M.L.S. thesis, University of Michigan, Department of Library Science, 1942).

<sup>12</sup> University of Western Ontario, Angus Mowat fonds, “Notes on Lectures in Library Administration, Ontario Library School, 1939-1940,” box 1877, 6.

<sup>13</sup> See Elaine A. Boone, “‘Holding the Key to the Hall of Democracy’: Professional Education for Librarianship in Toronto, 1882-1936,” (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 1997); and Elizabeth Hanson, “Early Canadian Library Education: the McGill and Ontario Experience, 1904-1927,” in Peter F. McNally, ed., *Readings in Canadian Library History* 2 (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1996), 57-89.

<sup>14</sup> “The Old Library; the Modern Library,” *OLR* 3:3 (Feb. 1919), 53

More than a hundred Carnegie library buildings provided accommodation for resources and staff. The *Ontario Library Review* reached every library. Graduates from the University of Toronto library school infused large urban libraries with new ideas on an annual basis. Open access to shelves, children's services, better public relations, and systematic methodology based on the principles of Library Science were becoming accepted organizational practices.<sup>15</sup> An active core engaged in library extension work with adult community groups and book service to schools.<sup>16</sup> In 1936, the Public Libraries Act had been amended to permit county library associations to enter agreements with library boards (free or association)<sup>17</sup> and there were four county associations in operation. Finally, there were recognized guidelines after the American Library Association issued *Standards for Public Libraries* in 1933—"Remember them but don't worship them," Mowat characteristically advised his students.<sup>18</sup>

The new Inspector energetically embraced the task of encouraging local development and acting as a liaison between his department and 500 boards. Fortunately, Mowat's handwritten notes and typewritten inspection diaries (housed at the University of Western Ontario) composed over the course of three years, July 1937 to June 1940, provide remarkably detailed profiles of individuals, li-

brary operations, and the general state of Ontario's rural and northern libraries that lagged behind their major urban counterparts. The Great Depression had caused hardship and heartbreak. Parsimonious library boards were reluctant to squander money on modern methods or to request additional revenue from municipal councils. Even so, Mowat's travel accounts in prewar Ontario indicate many community libraries were receptive to changes stemming from the new library initiatives. Together with other sources and published accounts, Mowat's "Inspection Diaries" offer a fascinating insight into the state of library service at the close of the Depression.

Mowat's notes repeatedly express the need for board officers and librarians to improve financial record keeping, develop better trustee-council relationships, engage in public relations, and be familiar with provincial library legislation, especially the statutory 50-cent per capita library rate. He spoke to the benefits of county library associations at meetings for their formation. Cooperation with elementary schools, with particular attention to the Department's recently adopted programme of studies, was an important issue. Recommendations about the currency of reference works, non-fiction for adults, better quality novels, and adequate children's collections were raised. Problems stemming

<sup>15</sup> Catherine Campbell and Beatrice W. Welling, *Library Science for Canadians* (Toronto: Pitman, 1936). Both authors, from the University of Western Ontario, were active in library association work.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce, *Places to Grow*, Table 3 (adult education) and Table 4 (school cooperation).

<sup>17</sup> School Law Amendment Act, 1936, chap.55, sec.19.

<sup>18</sup> Mowat fonds, "Notes on Lectures," 13.

from inadequate quarters and outdated Carnegie floor plans frequently absorbed his time; he did not hesitate to suggest different arrangements for resources and staff, for attractive display work, and for a coat of paint or a scrubbing down. Mowat knew educated staff members were essential: better staffing, reasonable salaries, improved book selection, competent cataloguing and classification were key components to the program of modern methods.

### *Summer 1937: Inspections Begin*

The new Inspector set off on his task by driving west in early July 1937. He met Dorothy Carlisle, chief librarian at Sarnia, the current President of the OLA, and the acknowledged leader behind the successful Lambton County Library Association. Carlisle was a well-spring for mutual ventures: during her presidency OLA held its first annual conference outside Toronto with three other Canadian library associations at Ottawa. Lambton's small operation, which included association and free libraries, schools, and community groups, impressed Mowat: its book truck was "cheap and effective."<sup>19</sup> He made a short stop at Windsor, to reconnect with former colleagues, Anne Hume, the chief librarian, and Eleanor Barteaux, head of the central library. Both would play an important role in supporting the formation of the Essex

County Association in 1940.<sup>20</sup>

Afterwards, Mowat drove across the border to Cleveland to witness operations at the Cuyahoga County Public Library. He judged Cuyahoga's system to be "highly organized" but he felt that "the Lambton little \$25 scheme is doing more proportionately for the people it serves." Further, with respect to cooperative systems, he declared his clear preference for less centralized, bureaucratic operations.

Frankly, it is not an ideal that we would gain much by approaching in Ontario. The principle, yes; but the inflexibility, the high speed organization, the lack of personal touch, no. Maybe these things can't be helped in such a large job, but damn it give me the smaller units that can get close to the people who are using them.<sup>21</sup>

The first pages of Mowat's Inspection Diaries reveal an affinity for personal contact, small organizations, and administrative flexibility in cooperative activities that would guide his lifelong philosophy and help determine the type of legislative provisions for Ontario's emerging county libraries after World War II.

Mowat's next journey was an extended tour of eastern county libraries. Using Ottawa as a base, he met with former inspector F.C. Jennings and talked about county work, Ottawa's branches, and the "old Ontario trouble—old people" [8] who did not possess newer library training or put stock in modern methods.

<sup>19</sup> University of Western Ontario, Angus Mowat fonds, "Inspection Diaries," box 1875, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5. Anne Hume became President of the Canadian Library Association in 1955-56. Eleanor (Barteaux) Haddow moved to Ottawa then returned to work at Assumption and St. Clair Colleges.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. Hereafter, most references to Mowat's "Inspection Diaries" appear as parentheses in text.



On 27 July, he began exploring counties surrounding the capital. He quickly discovered confusion regarding the concept of county cooperation: "Must get out some simple story about county [work] to send such people as these." [10] His first impressions were mostly bleak. He suggested many libraries could be amalgamated, placed on a scow, and towed into Lake Ontario to be drowned. "Most of the librarians and boards could be permitted to accompany it." [14] Of course, there were exceptions. Carleton Place had an author and title catalogue with classed books. Smith's Falls, a Carnegie library, was deemed an efficient operation. Renfrew, another Carnegie building with good circulation, passed muster. Prescott, located in a small room in the town hall, had a good non-fiction section and active board which was preparing to celebrate a half-century of service.<sup>22</sup> Association libraries at Osgood and Hyndford, and two free libraries, Lanark and Gananoque, were doing good work on limited budgets. Lanark was a "Seven Pillars library," a reference to the popular T.E. Lawrence autobiography that Mowat, with his military penchant, often used to evaluate nonfiction sections. Gananoque supported a county scheme for Leeds and Grenville.<sup>23</sup> Hyndford, the "log cabin library" on a backstretch of road, was a pleasure to assist.<sup>24</sup> On his way back to Toronto, on 14 August, Mo-

wat visited Aimée Kennedy, Kingston's chief librarian and former OLA president. The Inspector genuinely valued her observations and exertions. "I wonder if K[ingston] has any idea what it owes to the initiative, the breath of view and the tirelessness of that lady." [46]

At one point on his eastern swing, Mowat, discouraged by the fleeting nature of his visitations, concluded in his diary "It'll take years of persistence to get anywhere and I shall have to make up my mind to that." [15] In the latter part of his journey, his resolve was severely tested at Cornwall, which he deemed "the most hopeless proposition in Ontario." Cornwall was ripe for improvement. This "completely inadequate" building, one of the first Carnegies opened in 1903, was still using a closed-shelf system. To reach books on the top shelves staff needed the "fire department's highest ladder." The Inspector judged, "A bloody dog kennel would be more suitable" than the combined space for public reference, board meetings, office, and work room. The library board "does not, I gather, approve [sic] of public libraries. It doesn't know what they are and if it did it would approve even less." The city's municipal levy was less than half the annual minimum free library rate. Mowat compiled a list of recommendations but left Cornwall "feeling my insignificance in the face of such terrific inertia." [26-27] The inspection

<sup>22</sup> "Over Half a Century," *OLR* 22:3 (Aug. 1938), 174.

<sup>23</sup> Agnes LaQue, "A County Library Association for Leeds and Grenville," *OLR* 21:3 (Aug. 1937), 136.

<sup>24</sup> "Inspection Diaries," 10. Mary Dipsom, "The Log Cabin Library," *OLR* 20:4 (Nov. 1936), 144-46; and "Sunday Afternoon in the Log Cabin Library," *OLR* 21:4 (Nov. 1937), 172.

diaries do not record a subsequent visit.

After Labour Day, Mowat spent most of September being better acquainted with county library work in southwestern Ontario. He returned to Petrolia to address a well-attended meeting of the Lambton County Association. Then he visited B. Mabel Dunham, Kitchener's chief librarian and prominent figure in Ontario libraries, to talk about forming a Waterloo County Association. She reported plans but no progress. Mowat found it difficult to forge a working relationship with Dunham—he considered her “very impatient” with people who disagreed with her own views and reported a “hard atmosphere” in the library.<sup>25</sup> He went on to St. Thomas to see Florence Cameron, the chief librarian, who was “doing very well with the county idea” in Elgin after a year.<sup>26</sup> Regrettably, he found a “hell of a looking lot of junk” [53] in the West Lorne library. A week later, Mowat spoke to the Middlesex County Association and spent time discussing affairs with its lead organizer, Edmund Wark. “I feel sure this association will develop well” he remarked.<sup>27</sup> Mowat finished the month by resolving a lingering dispute between the Pembroke board and a locally appointed provincial

supervisor, who had arbitrarily slashed the library's per capita rate to 26-cents. Although the town was under supervision by the Department of Municipal Affairs due to financial insolvency, Mowat arranged with a Toronto official to set 40-cents as the negotiated rate for the board, which “seemed fair enough.” [63-64]

After three months travel, the Inspector was getting to know the lay of the land. He was developing a certain amount of disquiet about the general state of affairs, a condition he shared in a library editorial.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, there was room for optimism. He was establishing personal contacts and examining different county arrangements. The pattern of regional road trips to encourage good library work was proving useful. It was obvious that most libraries required added revenues to be successful. The need for staff training was all too evident. Extension of county library cooperation in formal groupings to areas such as Essex would help cash-strapped rural libraries. Mowat had pitched the idea of using travelling libraries to a number of local boards and observed how the small book boxes were being utilized.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the rest of autumn and into December,

<sup>25</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 52. B. Mabel Dunham, “Co-Operation in the Libraries of Waterloo County,” *OLR* 21:3 (Aug. 1937), 120-22. A county library cooperative would not be formed in Waterloo until 1956.

<sup>26</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 53. Cameron served two terms as OLA President, 1943-45. See Florence L. Cameron, “Elgin County Organizes Library Association,” *OLR* 20:4 (Nov. 1936), 148-49; and “The Elgin County Library Association,” *OLR* 21:3 (Aug. 1937), 122-23.

<sup>27</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 55. He penned its anniversary publication in 1959. See Edmund T. Wark, *Middlesex County Library Co-Operative: the First Twenty-Five Years, 1934-1959* (London: Hunter Printing, 1959).

<sup>28</sup> A. Mowat, “Dead, but Not Yet Taken Away,” *OLR* 22:1 (Feb. 1938), 2-5.

<sup>29</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 24 [Maxville].

he continued his inspections to the east of Toronto along Lake Ontario where Belleville and Trenton were the only major centres.

At the end of the year, Mowat noted visits to 111 libraries in his annual report and proposed four general improvements.<sup>30</sup> Regarding revenue, he suggested putting the legislative grant more on an earned basis and raising the Province's share by as much as twenty percent. To promote cooperation, Mowat recommended the Department hire a county or regional supervisor for his Branch. This new supervisor might also be in charge of a travelling library school to offer short-term instruction in rural areas, although Mowat preferred a separate officer for this function. Finally, the travelling libraries for schools, small libraries, Women's Institutes and other organizations could be improved by using printed catalogues to enable receiving libraries to make book selections and by offering a limited reference service. These enhancements would facilitate adult reading and provide support for the recently introduced curriculum of studies involving schoolchildren. Realizing the Department was cautious about library expenditures and new hires, Mowat could not expect immediate action; in fact, it would be several years—after World War II—before he could act on these ideas.

In the course of the next two and-

a-half years, the inspections Mowat undertook fortified his initial observations made in the last half of 1937. He firmly believed in the efficacy of local self-help and local autonomy.

We [the Department of Education] are anxious to see it [public library service]. We will help with money and advice. But it is a community problem and the solution is up to the community for its own cultural development.<sup>31</sup>

Taken to an extreme, this concept stymied progress. Mowat plied the middle ground between self-help (building from below) and provincial aid (organizing from above). Incremental change was not only possible; it was needed. For 1938, he persuaded the Deputy Minister to authorize two university chief librarians, Fred Landon, University of Western Ontario, and Hugh Gourlay, McMaster University, to offer short summer training sessions for rural librarians and to examine the issue of certification for librarians.<sup>32</sup> By May 1938, aided by University of Toronto chief librarian, W.S. Wallace, he had arranged to reconstitute the *Canadian Periodical Index* by bundling it with the *Ontario Library Review*.<sup>33</sup> A quarterly national index to periodical literature was a boon to libraries across Canada. Unfortunately, the onset of war in 1939 cut short his hopes for general progress. His thoughts and preferences about details for improvement were necessarily

<sup>30</sup> Ontario Department of Education, *Annual Report of the Minister, 1937*, Report of the Inspector of Public Libraries, 54-57.

<sup>31</sup> "Inspection Diaries," 362 [Port Dalhousie].

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 143; and Hugh C. Gourlay, "Certification for Ontario Librarians [plus discussion]," *OLR* 22:3 (Aug. 1938), 191-93.

<sup>33</sup> A. Mowat, "Canadian Periodical Index [editorial]," *OLR* 22:2 (May 1938), 74.

deferred; instead, Mowat channelled his energy towards assisting local efforts.

### *Library Boards and Trusteeship*

Perhaps Mowat's greatest test was his interaction with trustees on library boards. Too often, in smaller communities, daily management rested primarily in their hands. Over the years, Mowat came to recognize two types of boards: (1) "the keen board, usually young men and women, who want to get on with the job" and (2) "the board that aims to keep taxes down."<sup>34</sup> To succeed in his dealings the Inspector required tact, persuasion, and sincerity. Adherence to modern methods was a good principle; yet, progressive ideas needed nurturing before they could be instituted. Social gatherings could be helpful in forging relationships. In early 1938, Mowat got the ear of the Windsor mayor for better financing when he helped open a refurbished branch.<sup>35</sup> On Vimy Day 1940, he enjoyed an afternoon tea given by the Red Cross in the Highgate library while he discussed county matters with trustees.<sup>36</sup> A Scottish concert at the Woodville town hall in aid of the library led to a recommendation for a special grant. [169] A new association library in Port Dalhousie became an opportunity to address partygoers at a Burns Day concert: he noted the village reeve, town clerk, and trustees were all

doing fine work, but wartime financial restraint hampered their efforts. [161]

The general character of boards and initiative (or inertia) of individual trustees often came to the fore on local visits. Some boards, like Lancaster, were "no good" [22-23] and Mowat could only try to find a root cause, not offer solutions. Other boards, like Dutton, did "splendid" work [321] by supporting the librarian to make the town library a "going concern." Between extremes, a range of individual personalities and experiences influenced board matters. In fortunate cases, a trustee had worked previously as a librarian and brought a keen interest to their duties.<sup>37</sup> Occasionally, a long-serving chairperson was the heart and soul of the organization: at Stirling, "Mrs. Potts has made the library." [81] But lengthy tenures could cut both ways. When Mowat returned to Belleville, he became disheartened.

The difficulty is that there are a number of members who are (they think) heavy taxpayers; they have been on the board since the days when the library could be run for nothing because it was not to give any service. They are (with the exception of the secretary) deadwood and they won't ask even for the minimum appropriation. [70]

He realized it was unusual to find a completely engaged board, like Marmora, that knew "what it was all about and where they were headed and why." [77]

<sup>34</sup> A. Mowat, "Conversations with Young Librarians, Notes for the Students at [University of Toronto] Library School, Class of 1945-1946," (np: typescript, c.1945), 35.

<sup>35</sup> "Mr. Mowat to Preside," *Windsor Daily Star*, 12 Jan. 1938, 16; and "Inspection Diaries," 121-22.

<sup>36</sup> "Inspection Diaries," 394-95. He recommended a special one-time \$50 grant for Highgate.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 112. Mrs. Skidmore had been a high school librarian before moving to Cobourg.

Many problems confronted trustees, notably cost-cutting on the part of municipal councils. Considerable work on book committees that vetted library selections was not an uncommon duty.<sup>38</sup> For reasonably sized libraries, such as Burk's Falls, the Inspector explained the librarian should do book selection and discard outdated and worn-out books.

It is most important for Library Boards to realize that the public library is no longer a place for the storing of books. It is a place for the using of books only, and only material which is or which can be used should have a place on the shelves. [305]

At Collingwood, Mowat found trustees willing to "pitch in" when he suggested a project to discard worn-out books; the Inspector remarked pointedly, "Buying and discarding is not a job for library board members. It is a job for the librarian." [220] He was delighted to find smaller libraries, like Harrow, following this rule: "in successful libraries the Board, being comparable in its position to the board of directors of a commercial business, sets out the policy of the business and then engages a manager as executive of that policy." [264] Unfortunately, in some places there was no paid librarian. At Depot Harbour (Parry Sound District) the board members took turns opening the library one night a week, did all the chores, and organized an annual euchre fundraiser.

"The ladies who compose the Board have my sincere admiration," Mowat wrote.<sup>39</sup>

Financial circumstances often hindered service considerations. In smaller village free libraries, such as Little Britain [166], demographics denied any chance of success. Here, the free library rate of 50-cents produced a mere \$65 and the board paid the town \$125/year in rental fees. Reluctance by many trustees to demand the statutory rate was widespread, *e.g.* at Acton and South River [247, 301] which were about a third less than the legal appropriation. Low wages were commonplace for all staff. Mowat wrote to Port Rowan to say the librarian's salary was "extremely low—even as library salaries go, and Heaven knows they go pretty close to the bottom." [347] Very few libraries could rely on an experienced, underpaid librarian such as Eleanor Holmes, who circulated 40,000 books "almost single-handed" [94] to 3,500 people in Picton. Ultimately, the issue was beyond the Inspector's power: "If a library board, like any other employer, finds that it can obtain good services for low pay, and is content therefore to pay low salaries, I don't know what I or anybody else can do about it."<sup>40</sup>

Mowat was eager to assist boards with the selection of new hires, *e.g.* at Brampton where the librarian was resigning [131] due to marriage, the norm in Canadian employment before the mid-1950s.<sup>41</sup> At times, he waxed eloquent

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 45 [Gananoque] and 297 [Powassan].

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 309. However, after a fireworks explosion in 1945 Depot Harbour became a ghost town.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 160 [Preston].

<sup>41</sup> In 1955 the federal government removed its restrictions on employment of married women in the

about the potential benefits of training for talented women, *e.g.* for Miss Andrews “who is young, energetic, full of enthusiasm for her work, and [p]ossessed of excellent reading background.”<sup>42</sup> In other cases, he could suggest training opportunities for current staff and suggest the possibility of financial assistance by the board itself or his own branch.<sup>43</sup> Some libraries required serious attention to alleviate staff problems. At Orillia, the board had designated three people to manage separate areas with the result that “nobody [is] responsible for anything. . . .The only intelligent thing is to put one person in charge and make her responsible and give her her head.” [405] Sometimes librarians had long passed the age of retirement, a consequence of inadequate or non-existent pension plans and the economic slump.<sup>44</sup> One board employed an elderly 84-year old man; Mowat wrote the secretary urging trustees to face the issue by employing a person who was “young, energetic, ambitious, trained (if possible)” and deal delicately with situation.<sup>45</sup> Often, Mowat relied on his experienced assistant, Patricia Spere-man, to lend a hand where he felt an opportunity warranted short-term training for promising staff. His notes make frequent reference to her worth in book

selection, cataloguing and classification, and general organization.<sup>46</sup>

### *Librarianship and Collections*

The ongoing management of library service frequently rested on the shoulders of staff members who were ill-suited or uncomfortable with the role. When he first visited Fenelon Falls, a young staffer exclaimed “Oh! you are the Inspector,” and fled. After surveying the situation, and talking with board members, he decided to dispatch Miss Spere-man [172-74] to help classify and catalogue their collection. After Mowat learned one librarian had suffered a stroke and that her daughter had stepped in to carry on her mother’s work, he advised she take short course training as soon as possible because he felt confident she could succeed.<sup>47</sup> Again, when he found Penetanguishene was in the hands of the widow and daughter of the late librarian [227], he suggested training for the younger assistant. The most fundamental advice the Inspector could impart always revolved around the person in charge: “you must have librarianship or you can never give service to your people.”

If the modern library concept was to succeed, three things were required in librarianship: (1) energy and hard work;

civil service.

<sup>42</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 251. Marjorie Andrews was town librarian at Aurora for 38 years, 1934-72.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 185 [Burlington], 202 [Kenora], and 346 [Port Rowan].

<sup>44</sup> Canada’s Old Age Pensions Act (1927) required recipients 70 years or older to qualify through a means test to receive a maximum \$20 a month.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 378 [Kingsville].

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 110 [Warkworth], 133 [Millwood], 138 [Brooklin], 171 [Bobcaygeon], and 190 [Sunderland].

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 265 [Aylmer].

(2) knowledge and interest of books; and (3) knowledge and interest in people so “they will naturally turn to her for help and guidance among her books.” [318-19] Mowat respected librarians who he knew possessed these qualities, leaders such as North Bay’s Mrs. E.L. Raney, a Queen’s University graduate who had taken training at the old Ontario Library School in 1919; Miss Gladys Blythe Terryberry at Woodstock; Miss Louise Schryver, who was starting her career at Midland; Miss Kathleen Moyer at Galt; Miss Ruby Wallace at Niagara Falls; and Miss Olive Delaney, a mainstay at Belleville from 1934-79.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, they, along with other recent University of Toronto graduates, formed a small cadre to work with.

On balance, there were only a handful of librarians with graduate training in library science outside major cities. It was not unusual to discover that the “librarian is a young woman who receives \$40 a year, and does not strike me as know[ing] what she is trying to do, or why, or caring very much.”<sup>49</sup> The Inspector became accustomed to transacting business with individuals of varied backgrounds. When Riverside, population 5000, started up a new library with 300 books, it employed a high school girl who had experience at nearby Windsor as a page. [363] The Ignace municipal clerk took care of the town’s free library. [195] A school janitor ran the library, located in the school

basement, at Bronte. [184] There were occasional instances where men served as librarians: at Omemee, Mr. Hill, a painter by trade, devoted a good portion of his week to library work and posted book circulation graphs on library walls. [165] At St. Catharines, Mowat granted that Mr. W.E. Elliott, a well-connected retired businessman, usually got what he wanted from council for the library and liked to have tea with his staff at four o’clock in the afternoon. [260-61] Nonetheless, the huge preponderance of Mowat’s local contacts were female.

When it came to the technical aspects of library organization, Mowat could not be overly demanding. Proficiency with the Dewey Decimal Classification and cataloguing rules was not advanced outside the major cities. The members of the Ontario Regional Group of Cataloguers, affiliated with the American Library Association, worked in major cities and met in Toronto each year. He noted that Marmora was one of three or four small places using DDC and an author-title card catalogue. [265] Book charging systems usually consisted of the card-pocket system that the Department had promoted in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>50</sup> Collection development was one of the main tasks of librarianship that particularly concerned Mowat. Without good books the Inspector believed little could be accomplished. He always stressed the

<sup>48</sup> Wallace was Canadian Library Association President, 1963; Schryver was OLA President, 1961; Moyer served two terms as OLA President, 1938-40.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 167 [Cambray].

<sup>50</sup> Ontario Public Libraries Branch, *Loan System for Rural, Village and School Libraries* (Toronto: King’s Printer, 1930).

fundamental importance of suitable circulating adult and children's books to boards. Discarding and replacing books followed closely behind this priority. For current information purposes, periodicals and reference tools were important, but took up additional space which was at a premium or completely lacking.

Adult non-fiction collections were essential because the library was, after all, an educational enterprise. Recreational fiction was popular, but tax-supported free library service normally was justified on the value of its educational contributions. "The library in our modern civilization is a necessity, not a luxury, since education is accepted as the second line of defence of democracy and the public library is almost the sole and only source for the continuance of education after school." [255] Mowat relied on standard criteria to evaluate non-fiction, such as recognized authors in *Book Review Digest*. Finding T.E. Lawrence's best-seller, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, became a favourite habit: smaller communities, Lanark, Bancroft, and Frankford [16, 72, 89], got special mention on this score. Finding outdated books was another key task. On all his trips, Mowat went to great lengths to stress the need for discarding and book renewal. He was keen to root out obsolescent titles, such as the "Useful Arts" section in Beeton which still held a 1913 book on gasoline automobiles and a 1910 book, *Aerial Navigation*. [163] He advised Kingsville that books such as *Science Lectures for People* (1891); *Electric*

*Motors* (1891); or *Modern Physics* (1882) were unlikely to circulate and that only 3,000 out of 7,000 books were worth retaining. [376] It was always easy to find "deadwood" even in good libraries like Dundas. [244]

On the positive side, Mowat touted the helpfulness of book lists in the quarterly *Ontario Library Review* and assisted with local selections. For example, he decided to send the Campbellford librarian lists of books [108] on refrigeration, electricity, machine shop practice, readings, and recitations. On the other hand, he was not always ready to intervene. Niagara-on-the-Lake, a recent convert to the free ranks, struck him as "a queer old place." It held 8,500 books, many of historical significance, perhaps to Canadian history collectors, but he judged it was unlikely to become a popular lending library right away. [183]

On fiction shelves, the Inspector was quick to raise objections about "run of the mill" works. While acknowledging that "Any library could build up a top heavy collection of mysteries, commercial romances and westerns, and run its circulation up to twenty books per capita," [351] Mowat never advised this course. Books authored by Grace Livingston Hill, Ruby Ayres, and Zane Grey [22, 71, 84] were candidates for discard, especially if worn. The Inspector likened popular commercial fiction to "paper aspirin," a reference to drug store rental books.<sup>51</sup> There more serious concerns about novels. Indecent books and immoral authors could touch

<sup>51</sup> "Inspection Diaries," 367 [Leamington] and 393 [Ridgetown].



off controversy. Most people expected the library to protect moral values. Customs officials helped forestall problems by seizing banned books before they entered the country.<sup>52</sup> Even so, Mowat was called on to delve into potential trouble on occasion. He carefully checked fiction shelves in Oshawa [135] but did not find anything “pornographic;” in fact, he found novels of “advanced thought” commonly purchased in other Ontario cities, absent due to conservative inclinations. He considered *Anthony Adverse*, which had “lurid passages” [176] in this category, as well as *O Absalom* and *Turning Wheels*, both books that begin “a long way on the innocent side (although outspoken) of many of the suggestive movies to which people go with equanimity.” [385-86] Mowat was eager to allow controversial books, legally published, into libraries and agreed with William Deacon’s 1940 assessment that libraries could not be expected to campaign against censorship.<sup>53</sup>

Juvenile sections came under scrutiny as well. Establishing the “library habit” in children was an important part of the modern library idea. Story hours, summer book reading projects, easy readers, and library clubs were an integral part of library work with children. Mowat heartily approved of “the principle of catching them young, placing before them the right kind of offering, and developing

in them a strong library habit.” [197] Conversely, series books were strongly discouraged—they were “mental dope.” [312] But encounters with the Bobbsey Twins, Elsie Dinsmore, Horatio Alger, Laura Lee Hope, Tom Swift, the Aeroplane Boys, Speedwell Boys, Ruth Fielding, the Saddle Boys, and Molly Brown series were all too frequent.<sup>54</sup> Mention of Toronto Public Library lists for children and reviews in the *Ontario Library Review* was a standard remedy. The Inspector advised Tilbury trustees [385] to abolish their restriction on younger children and start purchasing “easy books” recommended by TPL’s Lillian Smith to attract children at an earlier age. More importantly, he informed Harrow’s association board [365] that there should be no charge for child membership because it was counterproductive. The modern library had a responsibility to encourage children’s reading and Mowat did not hesitate to repeat this tenet.

### *Library Accommodation*

**D**uring the course of his travels, Mowat was amazed by the variety of buildings used for library purposes, which ranged from separate purpose-built Carnegies to a librarian’s home (Kintore). For many smaller libraries, shared accommodation was normal. He inspected library collections housed in an

<sup>52</sup> For library responses to censorship in the 1930s, see Bruce, *Places to Grow*, 37-39.

<sup>53</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 390; and William Arthur Deacon, *Sh-h-h . . . Here Comes the Censor! An Address to the Ontario Library Association March 26, 1940* (Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1940). Deacon was the *Toronto Globe’s* literary critic from 1936-61.

<sup>54</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 37 [Morrisburg], 78 [Madoc], 105 [Brighton], 214 [Alliston], 240 [Pickering], 317 [West Lorne], 395 [Highgate], and 398 [Dresden].

Fig. 2 Colwater Public Library, 1980 (Author photo)



Odd Fellows Hall (Manotick); an Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire hall (Cobourg); small store fronts (Oakville); quarters within a Y.M.C.A. (Acton); rooms above a fire-hall (Orono), a stable (Solina), a print shop (Minden), and CPR office (Sudbury); areas in basements of public schools (Ignace and Bronte) and community halls (Sunderland and Marmora); an insurance agent's office (Bala); school rooms (Burk's Falls and Thornhill); a hydro building (Riverside); and farm houses (Ivanhoe and Romney). Knowing that finances precluded better accommodation, Mowat seldom made negative comments about these arrangements; however, after wading past a lawnmower, lingerie, and litter, he christened Tottenham's quarters to be the "Old Curiosity Shop." [206-07] He also speculated that the upkeep for Petrolia's newly converted railway station might prove to be too expensive.<sup>55</sup> There was one constant: he was always annoyed to find "no talking" signs. [188]

Space in municipal town halls was useful for library purposes: this was the case in Brooklin, Aurora, Bowmanville, Lakefield, Port Carling, Kearney, and Bothwell. Memorial halls were another civic place of note. Mowat was elated about the Massey Memorial Hall

in Newcastle: "The proportions of the room are beautiful. It is splendidly kept up."<sup>56</sup> He rated Warkworth "attractive" [110] but regretted the fireplace did not work. Dutton's ample space and arrangement of stacks impressed the Inspector [320] but Blenheim drew his criticism. "A memorial hall to the fallen of the last war. It is no secret that such memories are short, and the fact is again attested in the forlorn condition of this building." [391] A few lucky communities had received a donated building: Coldwater (fig. 2) was "a gem," one of his favourites [126]; Wellington was "a beautiful little job" [91]; and Port Rowan [345] led him to say, "Well, here's a place where they've got some use for culture." Numerous Women's Institutes often provided space (and staff) in small communities.<sup>57</sup> Alliston [213] was an outstanding example—the local branch had raised money to construct a 1-1/2 story building after WWI and thereafter helped keep it operating along with the Legion Hall in the base-

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. The library continues to be housed in this designated heritage building.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 126 and Cora Butler, "Newcastle Memorial Library," *OLR* 16:3 (Aug. 1932), 87-88.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 93 [Bloomfield]; 30 [Chesterville], and 74 [Havelock] are good examples.



Fig. 3 *Simcoe Carnegie library, c.1913*  
(*Rpt. of Min. of Education*)

ment. The Stayner Institute branch [218] set aside two rooms for a library in its own frame building.

Carnegie buildings were a particular concern. Most were three decades old and were in need of interior renovation and reorganization. Many were originally designed as closed-stack libraries before open access became established. Separate areas for children were negligible because many buildings were erected before Ontario abolished age limits in 1909. Many were built at less than one sq. ft. per capita and by the 1930s were badly overcrowded.<sup>58</sup> Mowat noted there was “nothing to do about it” when confronted with Cornwall’s antiquated closed-stack system.<sup>59</sup> Port Hope trustees [123] sent Mowat a floor plan to help open their floor area. Converting to open access presented the usual trouble, the Inspector explained to them: “This means that a large part of the book collection is housed in stacks at the rear of the circu-

lation desk, and that those on duty at the desk are, therefore, facing the wrong way and do not have the whole movement of the Library under observation.” [337] Paris presented a special challenge because it still retained its partitioned closed-stack layout in 1940 with an added “protection” of wire

screening at the central circulation desk. Its reference collection was locked in a separate glass enclosed room. [408a]

Mowat felt staff had to engage the public efficiently to be helpful; being overly attached to a central desk did not suit his purposes. There were instances of better designed smaller Carnegie buildings that facilitated staff efforts. Essex, opened in 1917, Norwood, opened in 1922, and Simcoe (fig. 3), opened in 1912, were attractive, welcoming, well lighted, and planned for open access to books. [371, 109, 343] But parts of Carnegies were given over to non-library functions and hampered work. There were museums occupying floors at Perth and Collingwood; historical societies (Simcoe); nurses and the V.O.N. (Wallaceburg and Perth); or police and tax collectors (Penetang). Mowat found Palmerston (fig. 4) unique—it was a large building with an immense entrance, five rooms on the main floor, dance hall

<sup>58</sup> For internal Carnegie space planning and sizes, see Bruce, *Free Books for All: The Public Library Movement in Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1994), 184-203 and Tables 13-15.

<sup>59</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 26. Cornwall was one of the first cities to abandon its Carnegie library in 1956.

Fig. 4 (top) Palmerston Carnegie library, n.d. (Archives of Ontario)

Fig. 5 Waterloo interior, n.d. (Waterloo P.L.)

in the basement, and auditorium for 350 people in the attic.<sup>60</sup>

Arrangements may have been wanting in older Carnegies, however, they were places of activity, thoughtful interaction with books, and civic engagement despite the stereotype that libraries were mostly just a spot to find a book. Gravenhurst was “one of the most distinctive buildings in the town” [276-77] and well-patronized with a circulation of 14,000 for 2,000 people. Waterloo’s [153] building and grounds were beautifully maintained and glass partitions for its reading and reference areas shielded users from noise in the main hall (fig.5). The interior of Owen Sound was open and airy, a credit to its forward thinking architect.<sup>61</sup> Some, e.g. Elmira, Amherstburg, and Port Hope, had an auditorium for community functions and adult groups. A number held collections of local history.<sup>62</sup> There were small, busy, separate sections for teenage readers, an emerging library service in the late 1930s, at Oshawa and Niagara



Falls. [136, 263] Tiny children’s sections were standard and programs were usually limited to story hours or summer book clubs. Some librarians were too busy to assume additional labour, such as readers advisory work which focused on individual preferences.<sup>63</sup> Provision of reading

<sup>60</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 141, “the oddest library building situation in the Province.” The library was better known as the “town hall” because it also housed council chambers, police, and a post office.

<sup>61</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 406A; and Matthew Griffis, “Living History: The Carnegie Library As Place in Ontario,” *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 34:2 (June 2010), 185-211.

<sup>62</sup> Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Libraries in Canada, 1938-40* (Ottawa: DBS, 1940), 10-13 lists more than 125 Ontario libraries collecting local history, including Brampton, Brantford, Chatham, etc.

<sup>63</sup> “Inspection Diaries,” 273, [Ingersoll]. Mowat suggested the need for an additional assistant.

material for immigrants was in its infancy. Fort William was notable in this regard but Finnish and French books were available for readers in separate areas at Sault Ste. Marie. [332] Notwithstanding space restrictions, the energetic modern library concept had infused thinking in most Carnegie communities.

### *Library Cooperation*

A practical Depression consideration, cooperative action, was grafted onto the modern library ethic in the 1930s.<sup>64</sup> There were two main themes for the Inspector to promote: the advisability of forming county library associations to share resources and the need to work with public schools to assist student reading programs. Despite ingrained local autonomy in rural southern Ontario, library planners and knowledgeable commentators viewed county library cooperation as a priority and pointed to successes in England and the United States.<sup>65</sup> When Mowat came to office in 1937, four county associations already existed in Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford, and Lambton.<sup>66</sup> Although he travelled extensively and talked up the county idea, it was a hard sell. No new county associations were formed before he stepped aside in 1940 to rejoin the Army. Mowat quickly found in rural Ontario “where a dollar is concerned you’ve got to go

slowly.” [103] Equally frustrating, he didn’t find Ottawa receptive to the idea of becoming a “regional centre” [32] for Eastern Ontario.

Enthusiasm for mutual aid outside professional circles popped up sporadically. When Mowat broached the idea to trustees at Hillsdale, they replied, “Gosh, we thought you would just come here to give us Hell about our bum library, but instead of that you have given us an idea that we may yet do something with it.” [220] More often, a negative attitude prevailed. New Dundee’s librarian [156] said he could not participate in a Waterloo County scheme because it involved extra work. Springfield was reluctant to contribute \$25 to join Elgin Co. because it would lose \$10 from its own legislative grant. [264] Mowat talked himself “hoarse” [93] about the county idea for Prince Edward County, without any results. A trip to Napanee [129] to see the Lennox and Addington county council provide fruitless. Similar problems in Simcoe County prompted him to question a fundamental idea underlying county work.

I cannot help asking myself now whether it is true that the present adult generation in rural Ontario, generally, do want book service, whether they know what to do with it, whether the radio and *Maclean’s* magazine are not as much as they can as-

<sup>64</sup> A. Mowat, “Co-Operative Libraries,” *OLR* 23:1 (Feb. 1939), 2-5 [radio address on CBL, 26 Nov. 1938].

<sup>65</sup> For example, *Libraries in Canada*, 53-54; Donald M. Solandt, “County Libraries,” *Canadian School Journal* 10 (Feb. 1932), 50-54; and Charles Sanderson, “The Extension of Library Privileges to the Rural Parts of England and Scotland through the County Library System,” *Proceedings of the Ontario Library Association* (Toronto: n.p., 1930): 9-10.

<sup>66</sup> For county association developments in the early 1930s, see Bruce, *Places to Grow*, 41-50.

similate? [209]

Nonetheless, Simcoe did form an association in 1940, as did Essex. In both cases, Mowat had vigorously endorsed the idea from 1937-40. But the strenuous work of developing legislation and forming more cooperative systems would have to wait until after 1945.

Another cooperative venture, one the Department strongly sanctioned, was public library-school cooperation. In the mid-1930s departmental officials offered nominal support for public school libraries; as a result, collections remained small and trained teacher-librarians few in number.<sup>67</sup> When the Department introduced the New Programme of Studies in 1937, students were encouraged to read additional, approved books to augment their classroom textual studies.<sup>68</sup> This important change, however, did not include forewarning that the Programme was being implemented or any additional funds for public libraries. As a result, many libraries found school children registering in great numbers but did not have adequate book stock on hand for their new readers.<sup>69</sup> It is not likely Mowat had any significant input into the new policy framework, yet he accepted the new role.

The Inspector frequently stressed the notion that the new school curriculum presented an opportunity to attract a future generation of readers to the library.

Under the new programme of studies, we are going to develop, whether the libraries like it or not, a generation of people ... who have been thoroughly exposed to books, who have, in fact, been introduce[d] at the most impressionable age to a reading background.

This is our chance, if we ever had one, to serve our communities. We co-operate with the schools. . . . Thus, provided we keep up our adult book collection, we have solved the problem of all our future service to our communities. [317]

Assistance to schools could be developed in any community and local schools could offer financial support. There were excellent instances of library-school collaboration, for example, at Orillia, which provided boxes of books for rural schools.<sup>70</sup> Mowat belaboured the matter of working out the mechanics—exchanging book lists, encouraging visits to the library, communicating with teachers, requesting schools to finance book expenditures—for three years.<sup>71</sup> By early 1940, the Inspector could report general provincial progress—county associations, urban libraries, and some rural counterparts were offering approved

<sup>67</sup> J.D. Campbell, "The Elementary School Library of Ontario," *Canadian School Journal* 12 (April 1934), 131-34, 148.

<sup>68</sup> For further information on the libraries and this program, see Bruce, *Places to Grow*, 50-54.

<sup>69</sup> "The Challenge of the New Course of Studies to the Children's Librarians," *OLR* 22:3 (Aug. 1938), 209-11 [St. Thomas, Hamilton, and Toronto].

<sup>70</sup> Kathleen M. Crosby, "The School and Library Boards Co-Operate," *Canadian School Journal* 16 (July-Aug. 1938), 244-45. Mowat, "Inspection Diaries," 230.

<sup>71</sup> "Inspection Diaries," 84 [Sydenham], 108 [Campbellford], 196 [Dryden], 245 [Dundas], 248 [Acton], 304 [Burk's Falls], and Rodney [312].

books to children and increasing their circulation for the first time since the early 1930s.<sup>72</sup>

### *Summer 1940: Inspections*

#### *End*

When Mowat's efforts to rejoin the Canadian Army for the Second World War succeeded in June 1940, three years of inspections abruptly ended. He had covered the province as no Inspector had before. Hundreds of pages in his "Inspection Diaries" disclose that the Depression years had not been kind ones for smaller public libraries—maintenance had been neglected in many buildings, book acquisitions had languished, budgets and staffing depleted. Many Association libraries were in financial straits and managed ineffectively. The erosion of gains made in the progressive 1920s was evident. In a personal context, Mowat's inspection notes reveal that his motivational qualities were his best means to achieve success. Before a recovery could take place, spirits needed uplifting and service ambitions raised. The Inspector was up to the task on both scores; he had abundant zeal for library work and seldom hesitated to make candid appraisals. His prewar inspections laid the groundwork for future progress upon his return as Inspector in 1944.

By stressing the fundamentals underpinning the modern library concept,

the Inspector raised awareness on many fronts with trustees and staff. Mowat served as spokesman for issues that were often confined to library journals and professional publications. He expressed a desire for better adult and children's collections; for more professional graduates from the University of Toronto Library School and library training for clerical staff; for more attentive trusteeship; for shared county-wide services; for enhanced book service with schools; for improved finances and management; for suitable buildings and accommodation.<sup>73</sup> Admittedly, brief inspections had drawbacks in terms of sustaining local work, but Mowat made the best of his short stopovers and financial resources. Like many offices of the public service, the Public Libraries Branch had reduced its activities during the first part of 1930s and he had to persuade his Department to strengthen his branch first.

Unquestionably, the Inspector stimulated thought and action about enhanced services and helped libraries cope at a critical time during the waning Depression years. As soon as his army duty ended in 1944, Mowat resumed inspections with his usual enthusiasm. He also issued a short pamphlet promoting public libraries.<sup>74</sup> This influential booklet would go through four editions and circulate modern ideas to a new generation of Ontario library workers and trus-

<sup>72</sup> A. Mowat, "School and Library Co-Operative Schemes in Ontario," *OLR* 24:1 (Feb. 1940), 17-23.

<sup>73</sup> OLA Reconstruction Committee, *Library Needs of the Province of Ontario: a Brief Submitted to the Minister of Education, Province of Ontario, March 30, 1944* (Toronto, 1944) succinctly expressed these professional concerns to the Premier, George Drew.

<sup>74</sup> A. Mowat, *The Public Library, Why You Need It, How to Start It, How to Keep It Going* (Toronto: T. E. Bowman, 1944).

tees into the 1950s. After the war ended in August 1945, Mowat sought to implement new legislation and regulations in the immediate postwar years.<sup>75</sup> From this time onward, he would oversee many library improvements he had emphasized years before. Subsequently, his term as Inspector ended when the Department designated him as Director of Public Libraries in 1948. The era of inspections for Ontario libraries was giving way

to better reporting and central regulations. The regime of library inspections lingered into the 1950s, but Mowat's new title signified his expanded role in advancing provincial policies, financing, and legislation for Ontario's public library system. By the time he retired in 1960, a colourful, personal period in Ontario's public library organization had yielded to more systematic, modern administration.

---

<sup>75</sup> For this period see Bruce, *Places to Grow*, 123-37.