



Opening Doors to the Future: Canadian Library Month 2010

As librarians and libraries continue to be assaulted by new information technology, and as we take joy in sharing each development with our patrons, we often forget to remember and look back to where we've come from. The theme for Canadian Library Month in October 2010 is "Opening Doors to the Future." This year is an opportune time to reflect on the history of Canadian Library Month: when it started, challenges we've faced, and celebrations we've had along the way. A solid appreciation of the past is a great place to stand while opening doors to the future.

This year's theme is represented by a robot's hand holding a pile of books with a computer on top. On the computer screen are bookshelves and icons representing some of the many materials available at libraries across our nation. Behind it all is an open door with light shining through – the endless future possibilities that are waiting for us to discover.

The image is relevant to all types of libraries in Canada. Certainly one of our main doors to the future is technology, something we all work with and help our patrons with every day. Technology is a marvelous tool to move forward, but it can sometimes feel like too much. A robot hand holding books? Is this a glimpse of our future library patrons? How did we get to here this fast?

Canadian Library Week and Month timeline

1922

Publicity Committee of the American Library Association first recommends a "national library week" based on the success of various libraries throughout the United States.¹

1953

The National Library of Canada is established.

1954

The National Book Committee is formed in the United States with the goal "to encourage reading and keep books free and widely available."

1957

The National Book Committee develops a plan for National Library Week.

1958

First National Library Week is celebrated in the United States and Canada, March 16-22. Theme: "Wake up and read!"

1959

The Canadian Library Week Council is formed by libraries and publishers. Canadian Library Week is planned annually for April to coincide with National Library Week in the United States.

1966

For Canadian Library Week, TWX teletype equipment is used to demonstrate a hookup between Vancouver and Fredericton "showing how [the] nation's vast distance problems could be cut down to size and reference problems solved."²

1974

The National Book Committee is disbanded. ALA's National Library Week Committee takes over for the United States.

2005

The Canadian Library Association reintroduces Canadian Library Week.

2006

The Canadian Library Month group of CLA makes a decision to switch from "Week" to "Month" to facilitate a celebration of libraries for a longer time each year.

2008

Canada and the United States celebrate 50 years of library weeks/months.

2010

We remember and appreciate the past while opening doors to the future.

Where we've come from

With a quick look at where we've come from, we see a history of always looking toward the future and doing our best to prepare for it. National Library Week itself was first formed to promote libraries as a free resource in response to a drop in the purchase of books.³ The current poster's robot hand is perhaps a bit far-fetched, but it represents future possibilities we can only begin to imagine. What would our colleagues 50 years ago think about our workplace today?

In a 1967 *Library Journal* article by Karl Nyren, the latest technology is proudly displayed in a photo with the caption "Now a familiar sight in Indiana: the teletypewriter, installed in 21 public libraries and four academic libraries in a statewide... project." He details how libraries are using phone and radio systems to communicate reference and loan requests, and notes that "facsimile transmission is getting a thorough shakedown trial on both coasts."⁴ Libraries have always sought out technology to improve service for patrons. Although the complexity of the technology is different, in many ways we are doing nothing different today from what Nyren and colleagues were doing in 1967.

The rest of Nyren's article talks about funding for resources, communications and cooperation between libraries and between libraries and their patrons, and touches briefly on personnel and research. This again is not so different from many of the challenges we currently face. He ends his article with a section titled "computers dead ahead," and states that computers "are being edged into reference work despite all the dismayed statements of recent disillusion." He follows up with a very good description of a modern-day database and a keen observation: "this computer file will be about a million times as big, on the assumption, we suppose, that information is information, and if you're expected to handle it, you might as well do it right." Certainly, "handling information right" is something libraries have excelled at for years, and something we continue to find better and better ways to accomplish.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the other roles of libraries throughout Canada. They are not only doors to a technological future, but have been and continue to be resources for the public as "places" or "spaces." Libraries provide free access to meeting places, reading spaces, and room for learning and sitting, in addition to providing access to computers, and reading and research material. Although the content of libraries has changed in many ways – those entering are more likely to encounter rows of computers than rows of card catalogues – they continue to be the open door to information for our patrons.

And now to the future... while remembering the past

We hope that for Canadian Library Month this October you will look to your library's past and rediscover "new" ways to celebrate your library's role and importance within the community. After all, we just recently celebrated, in 2008, 50 years of library weeks and months in Canada.

OCTOBER 2010
CANADIAN
LIBRARY MONTH

OPENING
DOORS
TO THE
FUTURE

YOUR LIBRARY
YOUR WORLD

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You could host a celebration of your library's achievements from the past: What authors have you hosted? Is it time to invite them back again? Which library staff deserve awards for their contributions over the past 5, 10, 20... maybe even 50 years? Which patrons have had a lasting influence or effected change? What has your library accomplished since it first opened? Have your patrons fill out a survey: When did they first use a computer? When and where did they first check out a library book? Can they remember the name of the first book they checked out?

But while remembering the past, don't forget that this year Canadian Library Month is about doors to the future. Remember to appreciate the information tools we have access to today. Spend some time as well to highlight and promote the resources and programs – old and new – that will help your library with opening doors to the future.

For more ideas and information about Canadian Library Month, please visit www.cla.ca/clm10/. 🐾

Notes

1. Sources used for the timeline: Larry T. Nix, "National Library Week – A Philatelic Tribute," The Library History Buff website, 2010 (www.libraryhistorybuff.com/libraryweek.htm); and Cathay Kanady, "History of National Library Week," Northeast Regional Library website, 2008 www.nereg.lib.ms.us/national_library_week_history.htm
2. Karl Nymen, "A Reference Roundup," *Library Journal* 92(8) (1967), pp. 1582-85.
3. Kanady, "History" (www.nereg.lib.ms.us/national_library_week_history.htm).
4. Nymen, "A Reference Roundup."

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