

# Lillian H. Smith (1887-1983)

In 1912, responding to an increasing demand for children's services, Toronto Public Library's Chief Librarian George Locke recruited Lillian H. Smith to head a new Children's Department.

Born in London, Ontario, Smith was the first professionally-trained children's librarian in the British Empire. At the time, she had worked for about a year in the Washington Heights Branch of the New York Public Library.

Smith was 25 when she came to Toronto Public Library. With boundless energy and enthusiasm, she immediately started to improve collections, train staff and expand programs. By the end of her 40 years of innovative leadership, children's services were available in 16 branch libraries, 30 schools and two settlement houses, as well as at the flagship Boys and Girls House, opened on St. George Street in 1922.



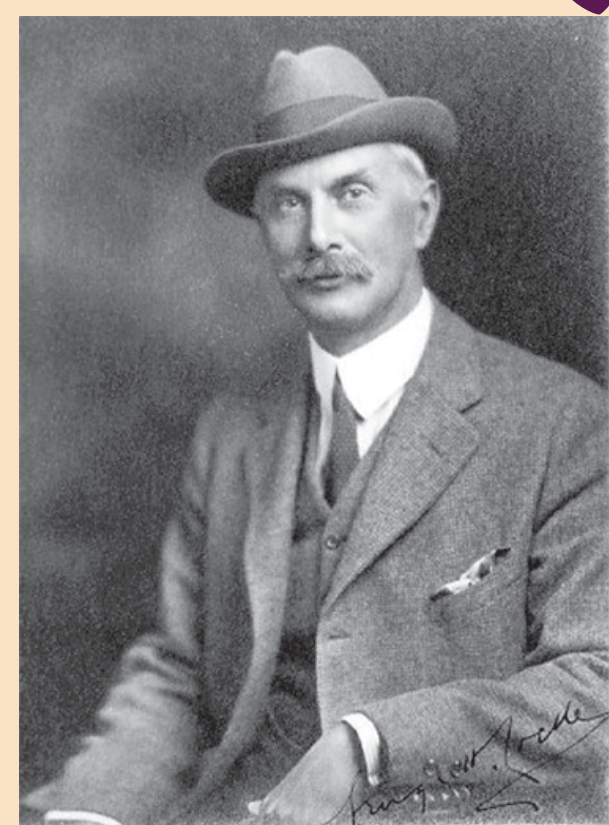
*The love for a good story,  
well told, lies deep in every  
human heart.*

- Lillian H. Smith

She also introduced story hours which, in the 1920s and 1930s, frequently attracted audiences of more than 100 children. Under Smith's guidance, reading clubs were organized for older children, and children staged plays and puppet shows, held debates, and discussed literary and historical subjects.

Lillian H. Smith believed that the role of the children's librarian was to deliver "the right book, to the right child, at the right time". She edited *Books for Boys and Girls*, first issued by Toronto Public Library in 1927, which became an indispensable guide for libraries across Canada and beyond. In 1953, the American Library Association published her seminal book, *The Unreluctant Years: A Critical Approach to Children's Literature*. She lectured at the University of Toronto from 1913 to 1952. She was instrumental in forming the Canadian Association of Children's Librarians (which predated the Canadian Library Association).

## History of the Lillian H. Smith Branch



George H. Locke



Lillian H. Smith at Dovercourt

**1912**

Chief Librarian George Locke recruits Lillian H. Smith, a professionally-trained children's librarian then working at the New York Public Library, to head Toronto Public Library's newly-established Children's Department.

**1913**

The Dovercourt Branch opens on October 23, featuring the first children's room planned by Lillian H. Smith. Today, this library is called the Bloor/Gladstone branch.

**1922**

On September 27, Toronto Public Library opens a children's library in a renovated Victorian house at 40 St. George Street, just north of the Central Library. Called the *Boys and Girls House*, it is the first separate children's library in the British Commonwealth.

**1928**

A "Little Theatre" and story hour room is added to the back of Boys and Girls House. Children perform plays ranging from *The Three Little Kittens* to scenes from *Julius Caesar*.

**1949**

In recognition of outstanding children's services provided under the direction of Lillian H. Smith, Edgar Osborne donates his collection of over 2,000 historical British children's books to the Toronto Public Library.

**1951**

A new addition for the Boys and Girls House library and the Little Theatre is built behind the Central library. It opens May 30.

**1963**

The original Boys and Girls House is demolished.

**1964**

Boys and Girls House rebuilt, 1951 addition retained. Murray & Fliess, Architects.

**1970**

Judith Merrill donates her collection of science fiction and fantasy to the Toronto Public Library. It is originally known as *The Spaced Out Library* and is located in a house at 566 Palmerston Avenue.

**1975**

The Spaced Out Library moves into 40 St. George Street, on the second floor of Boys and Girls House.

**1992**

The Spaced Out Library changes its name to *The Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy*. Land is acquired on the southwest corner of College and Huron, for a new branch building designed by Phillip H. Carter, Architect.

**1993**

Construction of new facility begins.

**1995**

Boys and Girls House is closed on April 1. Its collections and services are relocated to a new Toronto Public Library branch for all ages, opened at 239 College Street and named in honour of Lillian Helena Smith (1887-1983). She had been the head of children's services at the Toronto Public Library for 40 years, from 1912 to 1952. Lillian H. Smith Branch, including the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, and the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, opens October 16. Phillip H. Carter Architect.

**2003**

Better Buildings Partnership (BBP) Award — Outstanding Achievement in Building Award.



Dovercourt Branch



Original Boys and Girls House



Boys and Girls House, rebuilt



Rita Cox storytelling



Kids lining up to sign out books at Boys and Girls House



Storytime at the new Boys and Girls House



Lillian H. Smith branch houses the Merrill and Osborne collections