

## **Colchester-East Hants Public Library Stewiacke Branch Library History (1951-2005)**

**There's no place like it** – that popular phrase is well suited to describing your public library, because no other place fosters the pursuit of literacy and lifelong learning for everyone, no matter age or background. It's a fun place too!

In 1950 the Towns of Stewiacke and Truro joined with the Municipalities of Colchester and East Hants and the provincial government to form the Colchester-East Hants Regional Library Board in order to develop public library services for the region. With operating funds from all partners, the library board “set up shop” in facilities provided and maintained by host municipalities. To its great credit, the Town of Stewiacke moved quickly and within a year, April 1951 to be precise, the Stewiacke Branch Library opened for business. Located in the Red Cross room on the second floor of the town hall, the new library was open 8 hours a week, registered 250 borrowers, boasted a collection of 500 books (which were exchanged with others in the region every six months) and reported a circulation of 4,008.

The years since then witnessed monumental changes and some recurring themes – from the Cold War and the fear that television would be the enemy of reading and libraries to a war on terrorism and the view (by some) that the Internet will supplant books and libraries. Throughout it all, the Stewiacke library has shown, and continues to show, growth in service, space, and use by the community:

- in 1967 the library moved to the ground floor in the town hall, taking over the larger and more accessible space vacated by Nova Scotia Light and Power
- in 1970 open hours increased to 10 per week with the addition of a second evening
- use of the library steadily increased and in 1971 the circulation of books and other materials was 14,950, more than tripling in the twenty years since opening
- in 1972 a small expansion brought the library space to 482 square feet
- the well-used library needed still more space and in 1979 the branch was relocated to the west side of the town hall in what had been the fire department's garage. The library now occupied 1,124 square feet and housed 5,000 books
- in 1982 COMCAT came to Nova Scotia's public libraries. Updated regularly, the Computer Output Microfiche Catalogue gave borrowers the opportunity to learn about the collections in other branches in the Colchester-East Hants region and throughout the province. The same year, open hours increased to 18 per week
- four years later, in 1986, the library started opening on Saturday afternoons to accommodate students and working persons who found it difficult to visit the library through the week. The library was now open 22 hours a week.

- in 1994 came the welcome news that the Department of Education was responding favourably to the town and library board's fifth request for funding to assist in adding 330 square feet, thus expanding the library space to 1,454 square feet. The new area was renovated for the children's collection and programs. New shelving, paint, and carpeting throughout gave the library a fresh new look.
- 1997-2000 saw the library's computer systems established – public access to the Internet arrived the first year with the installation of one computer; the next year, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation donated a second computer and a printer; a third computer was added the following year through Industry Canada's Community Access Program (CAP).

In 1999 COMCAT gave way to NcompasS, that is the catalogues of collections in Nova Scotia's public libraries moved from microfiche to online access via the Internet giving more, and more up to date, information. The same year manual circulation procedures (using cards and card pockets in books) changed to an automated system whereby barcodes on borrower cards and on each item in the library's collection allow online tracking of check-out and check-in of materials, overdues, fines, branch location of materials, etc.

With a library card and a visit to the library's web site, you can check your account, renew the loan period for materials you have borrowed, request books and other materials, as well as access special databases for general information, current events, health information, popular culture, the arts and sciences, sports, etc.

The library's web site is worth a visit, with or without your library card, for up to date information on your branch library and for useful links to weather forecasts, flight information, homework help pages, children's games, teen topics, etc.

- today, the Stewiacke library contains approximately 18,000 items, which include books, magazines, videos and DVDs, music CDs, audio books on cassette and CD, a digital camera, and five public access computers. It records around 40,000 loans in a year and also offers a wide variety of programs for young and old to enhance technology skills and for infants, pre-schoolers, and school-aged children to encourage reading and having fun at the library.

A salute to all who have contributed to the Stewiacke Library's success, including:

- successive Stewiacke Town Councils and their representatives on the library board, including the board's longest serving member, Mrs. Maria Cameron. A dedicated volunteer and advocate for libraries, she represented Stewiacke as citizen appointee for 25 years (1969-1994).
- those who have held the position of Stewiacke Branch Assistant:
  - 1951 - 1954      Mrs. Roy Meadow
  - 1954 - 1956      Mrs. Albert Helpard

1956 - 1967	Mrs. James Sanderson
1967 - 1969	Phyllis Wright
1969 - 1983	Marie Eaton
1983 - 1986	Wendy McMichael
1986 - 1988	Dorothy Long
1988 - present	Evelyn Caldwell

and all who served with them over the years. The library has been blessed with a skilled and dedicated staff.

The Stewiacke Library continues to be a dynamic and vital part of the community. To quote one of its many customers – *For me personally the library has always been a vital part of my community. I use it every week! We use it for our reading pleasure and to research various projects or problems or solve a curiosity.*

Indeed, **there's no place like it!**

Janet D. Pelley  
Library Director

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### **Addenda (March 2010)**

1. Title of *Stewiacke Branch Assistant* was changed to *Stewiacke Branch Manager* in 2005/06
2. In 2008, Evelyn Caldwell retired and was succeeded by Pam Eakin
3. Text was prepared for a Stewiacke centennial history project

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