

Brief History of Agitation for the Halifax
Memorial Library

by

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It is difficult either to trace beginnings or to place credit for the Halifax Memorial Library. Certainly Halifax citizens have been acutely conscious that their library has been really no library for a city, and publicly, privately, and in the press there have been complaints and outbursts over at least the last half century or more.

One of the few definite attempts to improve library service was in 1901 when Andrew Carnegie offered the funds for a building. However, the city was unready to meet his proposal and the opportunity passed by.

By 1943, the dissatisfaction with the existing facilities was showing signs of leading to some action. The director of the Regional Library Commission for Nova Scotia, Miss Nora Batson, was outspoken, and the Mayor, J. E. Lloyd was pressing for some commitment by the government on support for a Regional Library in Halifax. In 1943 too, brief meetings were held by a group headed by Dr. J. S. Martell, which mapped out the cultural and recreational needs of the city. Members of the group were later very active in campaigning for the Memorial Library.

In March 1944, Miss Nora Batson^e completed and submitted a brief for the post-war planning commission of Halifax which stressed the value of libraries and provided comparative data showing how far behind other Canadian cities Halifax was in this field. This report was made one of the recommendations of the Commission and the chairman, Mr. Ira P. MacNab, as well as members of the Commission, loyally supported the subsequent agitation for a library.

In 1945 several local groups had gone on record favoring a library as a memorial to those who served in the Second World War. In the spring of that year, a meeting was called at the Lord Nelson Hotel by

Mayor J. E. Lloyd to consider the matter of the Memorial, and the meeting showed some variety of opinion with Mayor Lloyd and Education Superintendent H. F. Munro speaking for those who favored a library. During the summer of 1945, the Citizens Forum Council, discussing plans for the forthcoming winter season, determined to crystalize the already existing opinion in favor of the library project, and to attempt its realization. At that time, any idea of the city simply going ahead and building it seemed so far-fetched as not to be considered, Mr. Frank Doyle of the Herald being the only supporter of that view who comes to mind now. The alternative was of course a campaign for funds.

Before such a campaign could be attempted, some sort of public approval was necessary both of the campaign itself and of the Library as a Memorial. In August, letters went out to the service clubs of Halifax asking them to send representatives to consider the matter, and to the Mayor asking for official approval and for the promise of adequate support of such a library within the Regional Library scheme.

The first meeting was held at the H.M.C.A. with representatives of the service clubs and the Citizens' Forum Council. At this meeting it was suggested that the service clubs cooperate in a financial campaign to make the library possible. Representatives agreed to consult their clubs and return to a later meeting. At this and subsequent meetings, D. K. Crowdis acted as chairman and Miss Marion Gilroy as secretary. A second meeting held in October 1945 with the Mayor, Canadian Legion, Gyro, Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, Progressive Clubs, and others. Discussion dealt with the city's responsibility, possibility of success in a financial campaign, whether the Legion would approve the library, the Legion's own proposed campaign for a memorial hall, the ambitious all-inclusive recreation project of Dr. W. C. Ross, Recreational Director of the

Provincial Government. The net result was Legion approval for the library as a memorial and general agreement that the library was an immediately practical part of the larger scheme that should not be made to wait. Following this meeting, a questionnaire was circulated to two dozen clubs and organizations with an almost unanimous reaction in favor of a campaign for a memorial library. Shortly after this meeting, the service clubs came together under the leadership of E. K. Ford of the Rotary club to discuss the formation of a service club council, and D. K. Crowdis was invited to place a formal proposal before the newly formed club. A meeting of a committee drew up plans for a publicity and financial campaign and at the first meeting of the new Community Service Council held at the Carleton Hotel, December 3rd, 1945, the first item on the agenda was Halifax Memorial Library. The result of this was that the service clubs approved the whole idea, but declined to take the initiative, suggesting that the already formed Memorial Library Committee enlarge itself and continue drawing support not only from the service clubs but from all city organizations. A meeting of the expanded committee was held in the Y.M.C.A. on January 15, 1946, and matters considered included names to be added to the committee, timing of campaign in relation to other campaigns, mechanics of organization including name, desirability of incorporation, honorary committee, professional organizer. Other sources of money were explored, such as the Wright fund and sums from the dissolution of the Salvage Committee and the Ajax Club. The next meeting was a supper meeting in the Lord Nelson Hotel, January 22, 1946. Represented were: Rotary, Kiwanis, Gyro, Lions, Kinsmen, Junior Board of Trade, Commercial, Wise Men, Home and School, Junior League, Regional Library Commission, Halifax Herald & Chronicle, Citizens' Forum. This Temporary Halifax Memorial Library Committee approved attentive plan of action, approved an approximate cost of \$500.00, approved the Memorial Nature of the library, approved the library as

part of the Regional Library scheme, added to the committee the I.O.D.E., Canadian Legion, Local Council of Women, and the Mayor, set up a sub-committee to interview prominent citizens with intimate knowledge of financial campaigns. This sub-committee met at the Lord Nelson Hotel, January 31, 194~~5~~⁶, and reported a variety of reactions ranging from complete confidence to complete pessimism as to the possibilities of raising one-half million dollars by subscription.