



Heritage Notes

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The Louisbourg Library - 50 Years

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The Louisbourg Branch of the Cape Breton Regional Library opened on October 6, 1950. It was on the ground floor of the Navy League building on Main Street. Christine MacLean was the first librarian.¹

Deputy Mayor Charles Bagnell chaired the official opening. The guest speakers included Rev. J. T. Turner of St. Bartholomew's Church, Rev. C.C. Walls of First United Church, Rev. Michael J. MacSween of Stella Maris Church, William Hilchie, the school principal, and Miss Ruby Wallace. A month before, Miss Wallace had come to Sydney as the first Regional Librarian.²

A regional library service was not a new idea to the people of Louisbourg. In September 1937, Mayor Melvin Huntington chaired a meeting in the town office attended by Miss Nora Bateston who was carrying out a provincial survey of the feasibility of establishing regional library boards. There were twenty people at the meeting including: Rev. D. A. MacMillan, Rev. D. H. Doyle, Beecher Spencer, Mary Campbell who was the principal of Louisbourg school, Annie Pope, Mary Hiltz, Blanche Cross, Margaret Campbell, Donald Wilson, D. M. Johnston, Mrs. MacPhail, Mrs. A. W. Cameron, Mrs. Roy Ingraham, Mrs. George Lewis and Rev. Alexandre Poirier of Main-à-Dieu.

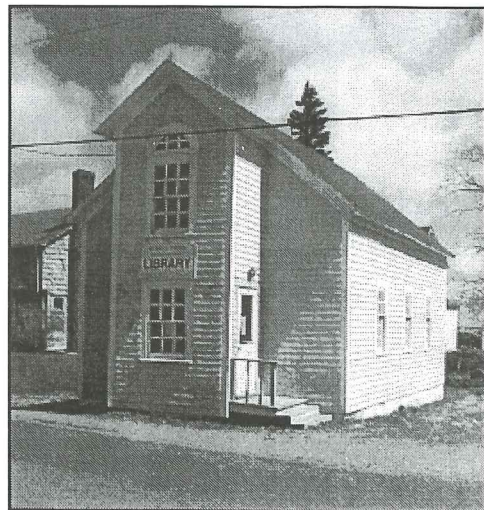
It was because of the encouragement of interested people in Cape Breton County that a provincial act was passed in 1937, giving municipal governments the power to tax to support regional library services.³ One of the forces behind the regional library movement was Rev. J. Tompkins who opened a "People's Library" at Reserve in the 1930s. Still, the establishment of a regional library was some way off. At a meeting of the mayors of the municipalities in 1939 it was decided that the idea was not financially viable.⁴

After World War II the cause was taken up again and the Cape Breton Regional Library Board was established in 1950 along with a number of branches.⁵ Mayor George Lewis of Louisbourg was present at the first meeting of the Library Board on March 14, 1950, as was Rev. J. T. Turner, of St. Bartholomew's, who was a member of the library campaign committee. Mayor Lewis and his local committee established the location of the Louisbourg library by August.

Placing the library in the Navy League was appropriate since the building was the centre of activity in the town. The library was in the room to the right as you entered through the front door. It was open 8 hours each week: Tuesdays and Saturdays from 3 to 5 P.M., and 7:30 to 9:30 P.M.⁶

On November 6, 1950 the *Post Record* reported that the Louisbourg branch "has started with gratifying success which is indicated by the membership and books read for the first month." There were 47 adult members and 50 junior members of the library, with 127 books taken out by adults and 159 taken out by juniors. By December 1950 there were 111 new adult members and 48 young members. Christine MacLean recalled that when the library opened that first year there were only 112 books in the library.⁷ A year later, according to the Board minutes for January 1952, there were 651 books in stock, 215 adult members and 181 children. The total circulation was 6402 books. So successful was the library that by May 1951 the hours had increased from 8 hours a week to 12 hours.

Gerry Gartland remembers the Navy League library. He says that when he moved to Louisbourg he was pleasantly surprised that there was a library with a good selection of books.⁸ Clara Beaton, who was the Assistant to the Branch Supervisor, recalled the first library. She said that "It was very small, tidy and right on the main street. . . One side was mainly children's books and the other side was a mixture of various adult books and magazines."⁹



W.W. Lewis Memorial Library