

## **A History of Onoway Public Library**

Onoway Community Library was opened in May 20, 1973 in a space less than 12 feet square, a small room in the old Village Office at the corner of 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 50<sup>th</sup> Street. The crowded shelves housed about 1,000 books, mainly donations from community members, some from Yellowhead Regional Library and some from the University's Extension Library. These books circulated about 3,000 times in that year. (In 1972 Onoway's population was 485.) The library was open eight hours a week and was operated by volunteers, each working two to four hours per month. The board responsible for launching Onoway's first library consisted of Jean Butler (Chair), Keith Clamp, Joan Koch, Elizabeth Rushton and Joy Thompson.

About 1975 the Village Council made more of their office available and more shelves were built to house the increasing bookstock. This situation was better, but Saturdays continued to be unpopular with volunteers because there was no access to a washroom.

In 1981 the library was able to take over the entire building when the new Village Office was built. The Village Council continued to "sponsor" the library by providing heat, light, rent, all repairs and a per capita grant. This grant, plus a per capita grant from Alberta Culture & Multiculturalism, enabled the board to hire a part-time librarian, Linda Strochinski. It was now possible to offer children's story hours and streamline the library operation. The library blossomed: it was open 17½ hours per week; membership rose to 275, bookstock to 4,000 and circulation to 4,500.

1983 was a turning point. OPL began receiving 'blocks' of books from YRL – the 20 or more titles in each block "belonged" to the library for five months. The library could choose the type of blocks that were popular with members: western, science fiction, romance, teen, mystery, etc. By 1985, OPL was receiving 10 blocks of books – what a tremendous boon this was. Imagine – even though the book budget was minimal, there was a constant supply of new books! In addition, patrons could borrow books from libraries across the province, the country and even the U.S.A. A request for a title or topic would be sent to YRL; this was forwarded to Alberta Culture, and then to the nearest source. In 1985, OPL borrowed 604 books on interlibrary loan. Quite amazingly, in that period, Onoway's tiny library supplied 42 books to other libraries!

In 1984 Edith McEwan took over as librarian. Once again, programs expanded (with the help of STEP employees), and membership and circulation increased.

Early in 1985 the library board learned that Village Council was going to sell the property and expand its office space. The OPL board, with the support of Mayor Slemko (who was the Village rep on the board), worked hard to be part of this new space. Negotiations with the Summer Villages (Ross Haven, Yellowstone, Sunset Point, Silver Sands and Nakamun) resulted in agreements to turn over the culture portion of their CRC grants to OPL to support the move of the library to the new Civic Centre. This brought \$4,282.99 to be used for books and shelving. But more funds were needed. On October 22, 29 volunteers phoned every name (1880 phone numbers) in the Onoway exchange asking for a donation of \$25.00 to buy a 'block' in the new library. Over \$8,700.00 was raised.

When the time came to move to the new building, OPL agreed to move into what had been the Village Office (the south end of the Civic Centre), rather than the larger portion that had been the basis of all grant applications and funding appeals. Extensive renovations, interior decoration, purchase of furniture and shelving were necessary to ready the building. On January 26, 1986, a large contingent of volunteers packed books, dismantled shelves and counters from the old library, moved these to the new site and put it all together again.

The new Onoway Public Library in the Onoway Civic Centre opened on February 4, 1986 – the result of countless volunteer hours spent fundraising, building and repairing, painting, moving and sorting books, etc. It was a big, modern space – a real library!

In 1987 Joan Koch replaced Edith McEwan as librarian, followed by Barb McIntyre in 1988.

These were turbulent times; funding was a major concern. The YRL Advisory Group (consisting of representatives of libraries in the County of Lac Ste. Anne) successfully lobbied the County to contribute financially to the operation of the libraries. The County paid \$1.00 per capita and, based on ‘map boundaries’, OPL received its first direct financial support (\$1,941.25) from the County in late 1990. About that time library board Chair Erna Bontus-Miller and Sharon Brent made a presentation to Onoway Village Council expressing a need for renovations to the library facility and setting a fundraising goal of \$10,000 to help with this project.

In October 1992, Councillor Len Kwasny reported to Village Council that the library was in dire straits. CRC funds were no longer available so new monies would be needed to fill the gap. With library automation on the horizon, new equipment (computers) would be necessary and conversion of the library’s records from the time-honoured card catalogue to barcode readable information meant big investments of time and money, in addition to basic acceptance of the new technology and how the library would change. For a while it looked as though the library would have to reduce hours, services and the librarian’s wage. “Ladies Night Out”, a one-off fundraiser in 1993 morphed into a highly anticipated annual event that helped keep the wolf from the door and, at the same time, raised the profile of the library in the community.

A new librarian, Kelly Huxley, came onstream in March 1998 just as the technology changeover began. The learning curve was huge, and moving to an automated library system was far from a simple process. Weeks and months went by as all the pieces (very few of them visible to the library user) gradually fell into place. The library manager’s role in 2010 is a far cry from that of OPL’s first librarian; she is a techno-pro whose daily tasks require ever-changing technological expertise.

Help arrived with the creation of The Friends of the Onoway Public Library. In return for providing manpower to work at a casino, The Friends received a portion of the casino’s earnings from Alberta Lotteries. This was donated to OPL and, in combination with the provincial operating grant, grants from the County and the Village and one-time federal government grants, the library has been able to stay abreast of advances in technology as well as enlarging the collection to move beyond the traditional books to videocassettes and then DVDs, to audiobooks and CDs as well as computer software.

In spring of 2004, OPL went “live”. All circulation activity was automated, running off YRL’s computer in Spruce Grove. Gone were the days of searching through the cards in the drawers of the card catalogue for materials available at Onoway, or through the microfiche catalogue for

materials at YRL libraries and then requesting interlibrary loans through a paper-pencil librarian-intermediated process. Library members were now able to search the on-line catalogue which showed the holdings of well over 100 libraries in Alberta. In the first stages of automation, searching the on-line catalogue could only be done in the library but, as technology changed, library members could search on-line from their home computers and request books directly. This instantaneous request process reduced the delivery time tremendously; what used to take weeks now took a few days.

The changed processes (manual vs. automated), the phenomenal increase in interlibrary loans and the high use of computers demanded better use of limited space. A renovation project completed in 2004 (thanks to various grants and especially to The Friends of the Onoway Public Library) resulted in a more efficient workspace and created a pod of four public access computers. OPL offered free Internet access to library visitors, whether they were library members or not. Fortuitously, just at this time, Alberta Human Resources and Employment provided funding to open a Career Corner to meet the needs of job-seekers in our community. The Minister of Community Development, Gene Zwozdesky, and MLA George VanderBurg attended the opening of the OPL's 'new look' on April 24, 2004.

From the beginning, membership in Yellowhead Regional Library has been the reason why OPL is able to offer the services it does. Initially the County of Lac Ste. Anne paid the per capita membership fee to provide service to public and school libraries. After Northern Gateway Regional Division was created, it took over the school library component. In 1998, following YRL's restructuring, the two municipalities, Onoway and County of Lac Ste. Anne, pay an annual per capita fee to maintain membership in YRL to provide service to public libraries. Professional and technical expertise, training opportunities, advantages due to bulk purchasing and processing, and on-call support at every level have ensured that OPL offers its users services that are not far removed from those offered at large urban libraries. In recent years the on-line catalogue, access to on-line databases and weekly deliveries of materials make locating and receiving information and recreational resources simple and swift. Through YRL, OPL can offer front edge technology such as downloadable audiobooks and searching/placing holds on your iPhone.

The support of the Village/Town of Onoway and Lac Ste. Anne County have been critical. Through grants and subsidizing (while the library was located in the Civic Centre, the Town of Onoway absorbed OPL's utilities, rent and maintenance expense), these municipalities have demonstrated their commitment to public library service. The Lac Ste. Anne County Library has played a major role in funding the library's operations. Library board members speak with pride about the support of their municipal authorities.

We have come a long way. Circulating books is still the main 'business' of the library but it is much more than that. Many people come to the library solely to access high speed Internet and free wireless. OPL's 2009 Annual Report shows that the collection consists of nearly 17,384 print and nonprint items (plus YRL's rotating book collections) and the circulation was about 18,570. Onoway's population has risen to over 1,000. Library membership and circulation continue to rise; programs offered to children and increasingly to adults have been successful in moving the library toward being a major information source in the community.

The visit of the COW (Classroom on Wheels) bus was a very special event for little people and their parents in 2005, 2007 and again in 2009. Early in 2010, the library opened a "branch" at

Chateau Lac Ste. Anne enabling resident seniors to borrow materials from their very own on-site location.

As early as 2001, the Town had expressed the need for the space that the library occupied in the Civic Centre. The search for an appropriate space was fruitless for many years but the long-held dream of a spacious library came true in summer 2010 when the library made its third move. This time OPL renovated three classrooms of the de-commissioned Onoway Elementary School. The increased space includes a program room as well as comfortable spaces for library users of all ages.

Despite the dire predictions of the decline of libraries due to computers, Onoway Public Library has proven that it is still a major source of information and recreational reading, an integral part of the community.

### Onoway Public Library Board members

(Please note that some records are incomplete; we apologize if names or dates are incorrect.)

#### 1973 founding members:

▪Jean Butler	1972 – 1974		
▪Keith Clamp	1972 – 1974		
▪Joan Koch	1972 – 1974, 1981 – 1987		
▪Elizabeth Rushton	1972		
▪Joy Thompson	1972 – 1975		
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Elizabeth Turnbull	1973 – 1988	Juanita Tyschuk	1995 – 1998
(advisory)	1989 – 1993	Sharon Allen	1996 – 1998
Dorothy Alderman	1974 – 1977	Shirley Dudla	1996 – 1998
Donna Jean Shields	1974 – 1979	Carolyn Dow	1996 – 2002
Gertie Meyer	1974	George Jendyk*	1997 – 2004, 2008 -
Tillie Schlichenmayer	1975	Elaine Dickie	1998
Jean Payne	1975 – 1989	Candy Cooper	1998
Isabelle Wheatley	1976 – 1985	Shelley McPherson	1998
Christina Erickson	1979 – 1985	Janice McLean	1998
Kathy Upton	1984	Pam Smith	1998 – 1999
Lillian Tabak	1984 – 1987	Robin Youell	1999
Yvonne Slemko	1985 – 1988,	Carmen Brent	1999
	1991 – 1994, 1999 –	Maxine Rice	1999
Terry Slemko*	1984 – 1986	Michele Hetherington	1999 – 2003
Catherine Wynnyck	1986 – 1987	Lucy Strobl	2000 – 2009
Fred Wheatley	1986 – 1988	Phil Brooks	2001
Yvonne Johnson	1986 – 1989	Fred Savoie*	2002 – 2003
Sharon Brent	1986 – 1993	Joan Grierson	2002 – 2006
Nat Lewandowski*	1987	Wanda Pederson	2003 – 2009
Bea Eagleson-Rosiewich	1988	Lou Hansen	2003 - 2007
Linda Stochinski	1988	Shirley Breikreuz	2004 – 2011
Gwynn Alcorn-Kincayd*	1988 – 1991	Arlene Storie	2004 – 2005
Erna Bontus-Miller	1988 – 1995, 2001	Tony Williams *	2004 – 2006
Ivor Hughes	1989	Carla Berry	2006 – 2008
Mat Manchur	1989 – 1990	Vivian McDonald	2006 – 2009
Alfred Willie	1989 – 1991	Don Harrison*	2006 – 2008
Romona Singh	1989 – 1992	Belinda Roth	2006 - 2009
Nellie Thompson	1990 – 1991	Tracy Smotra	2006 - 2009
Joy Pardo	1990 – 1993	Rhea Jorgensen	2007 - 2009
Sandra Jones	1990 – 1993	Eva Stelter	2009 – 2011
Brenda Fegyverneki	1990 – 1993	Helen Thornitt	2009 – 2011
Joan Boustead	1990, 1992 – 1993,	Sandra Schneider	2009 – 2010
	1997 – 2000	Rachel Harrison	2010 – 2011
Len Kwasny*	1992 – 1993	Bernard Methot	2010
Lou Parker	1992 – 1995	Julieta Crumbaugh	2010
Carolyn Rosichuk	1993 – 1996	Derril Butler	2010 –
Geraldine Schulte	1994	Teri Miller-Ryan	2010 – 2011
Susan Thomas	1994 – 1995	Corinne Feth *	2010 –
Janet Smith	1994 – 1996, 2010 -	Kandace Kopf	2013 –
Donna Dow	1994 – 1996	Sylvia Hafermehl	2014 -
Jennifer Watson	1994 – 1996	Meredith Hazen	2014 -
Lisa Schulte	1994 – 1999	Sheila Albertson	2014 -
Sheila Doka	1995	*Council rep	

Chairperson

1972 – 1974	Jean Butler	2002 – 2003	Michele Hetherington
1975 – 1989	Elizabeth Turnbull	2004	George Jendyk
1989 – 1995	Erna Bontus-Miller	2005 – 2009	Lucy Strobl
1996	Jennifer Watson		
1997	George Jendyk	2012-2013	Janet Smith
1998	Shirley Dudla		
1999	Joan Boustead	2014 -	Lorrie Hafermehl
2000 – 2001, 2010- 2011	Yvonne Slemko		

Librarians

Linda Stochinski	1982 – 1984	Barb McIntyre	1988 – 1998
Edith McEwan	1984 – 1987	Kelly Huxley	1998 –
Joan Koch	1987 – 1988		

**Oneway Public Library Operations Then and Now**

	<b>1973</b>	<b>2009</b>
Registered members	150	1,000
Collection	1,000	17,384
Circulation	3,000	17,820
Interlibrary loans		
Borrowed	609 (1985)	3,855
Loaned	43 (1985)	5,135
Program attendance	0	725
Volunteer hours	8/week	725
Hours of operation (weekly)	8	30
Average number of people visiting the library weekly	n/a	262
Membership fees per year		
Family	n/a	\$15.00
Adult	\$1.00	\$8.00
Children	.25	\$5.00
Students	.50	\$5.00