

History of the Rotorua Public Library

27 August 2007 version

THE LIBRARY AT OHINEMUTU

21 March 1889

- Some 15 residents met in an old building, firstly the Comet store and later a school, next to Mrs Morrison's Hotel at Ohinemutu. They felt the need for a common meeting ground where they could exchange ideas without formality and it was proposed to establish a Public Reading Room.
- Committee of 12 chosen with Dr Ginders elected as president and Mr J C Blythe as secretary (he was president later).
- Name chosen: The Rotorua Public Library and Reading Room.
- All visitors to the district allowed to use the Reading Room free of charge but according to rules and bylaws to be made.
- A subscription list was opened and £25 (\$4214.88) and donations of books and periodicals were given by those present

The Chairman of the Town Board (Dr Ginders) lent the new institution the use of the old building and the District Superintendent of Native Schools let them use the desks and forms from the old schoolhouse. A kerosene lamp and a stove were also obtained.

April 1889 meeting

- Rules adopted
- Subscriptions set at £1 per annum (\$168.60)
- Object was provision of a reading room supplied with home and colonial newspapers, periodicals, review magazines, etc in which members could also play chess and draughts.
- Hours were set as 11am to 4pm and 6-10pm except that it would close at 9 pm on Sundays.
- Mr McFadgen offered his services as Honorary Librarian. He retired in February 1895.
- Books were only lent to subscribing members and notices were sent for overdues.

- Periodicals subscribed to were: Graphic, London Punch, NZ Referee, Field, Australian, HB Herald, NZ Times, Scientific American, 19th Century, Harpers Monthly, Chambers Journal and Queen.

10 April 1889

- Reading Room was ready and open to the public.
- A ladies' reading room with tables and couches was fitted up.
- The lending library totalled 335 volumes
- From December 1889 access was limited to subscription members only as many newspapers and periodicals had disappeared from the Reading Room. Was there any supervision?
- There were 23 members by May 17.

1890

- Charges made to visitors for use of the reading room beyond one month and deposits for borrowing of 2/6d (\$21).
- A cleaner to be employed at £1 per month (\$159.50) *see also 1891, 1898*
- 40 new novels and Stanley's "In Darkest Africa" to be bought
- Library was registered under the Public Library Powers Act of 1875
- Building was insured for £100 (\$15,950) and the stock for as much as possible. A room which was being used as a darkroom by a photographer had to be vacated and was renovated to be used for card games.
- Bay of Plenty Times 14 July 1890 – of 200 books issued only 3 have been lost.
- Revenue came from: library receipts, subscriptions, sale of waste paper and periodicals, visitors' contributions and proceeds of concerts and dances. At the end of 1890 they had a credit balance of £15 (\$2392.49), 42 subscribers and 565 books with 150 on order.
Account of a dance is in BPT 7 July 1890
- Advertising in the local paper, boarding houses and hotels had made the Library better known and many visitors were using it.
- The Librarian reported the need for a higher class of literature to increase the lending section.

1891

- Moves were made to acquire government documents and a shelf for reference books
- Copies of Chambers Journal were fastened down
- Two books only were issued to each borrower
- A service to members in Taupo was begun and books were sent on advance payment of a yearly subscription.
- Classification of books and a suitable book for a catalogue was approved.
- Mr F C Clarke was appointed Custodian of the Institute for £15 (\$2487.80)
- By the end of the year income had increased from £67 to £106 (\$11,112 to \$17,580) and there were 900 books in stock.

1892

- Efforts were made to obtain a site for a future Institute and Museum near to the Post Office in the town reserve.
- A position of Assistant Librarian and caretaker were combined to solve the long standing problem of cleaning and supervision. This position was first filled by a Mrs Andrews who carried out these duties for 6 months.
- At the 1892 AGM portraits of deceased founding members J C Blythe and C M Wilson were hung in the Reading Room. A photo of Mr Neighbour was added in 1896.
- 94 books were borrowed by visitors who donated £1 18s 6d (\$314.90) or about 5d (\$3.40) per volume.

1895

- The government agreed to assist the Committee to set aside ¼ acre of land in Arawa Street behind the Court and Police residence (formerly occupied by the Government Agents Office) for a library until funds were available for building. In the meantime this land was used as the Post Office paddock.
- A building fund was set up and added to by donations and receipts from concerts over the next few years.
- Hours were increased: 10am to 5pm and 6.30 to 10pm. Sundays until 9pm

- Visitors had to pay 5/- (\$39.53) or more as a deposit and buy a 1/- (\$7.90) coupon for every 4 books.
- The nucleus of a museum was being formed. *This together with the portraits would be a pain for later librarians.*
- Repairs and refurbishment were needed but money was short. The Government was asked for assistance and refused. However the roof was reshingled at a cost of £16 (\$2,530) and the Town Board made a contribution.
- At the AGM in October more was said about financial problems: no concerts or entertainments had been held in the past year, few publications had been sold and there was general financial depression.
- No new books had been ordered in the past year.
- 10 new periodicals had been ordered (The Sketch, Myra's Journal, Weldon's Ladies Journal, Leech's Children's Dressmaker, Truth, Puck, The Idler, Strand Magazine, Art Journal and English Mechanic) and 7 titles were being stopped

1896

- AGM reported 35 volumes had been bought and more donated, and
- They hope members in arrears will pay their subscriptions.

1897

- In May 1897 it was decided to apply for government assistance for building a new library and museum.
- A large public meeting was held in June and it was agreed that the committee, the Town Board and the general public should combine to facilitate this building to be called "The Victoria Institute"
- A subscription list was begun and a Building Committee set up. The foundation stone was laid on Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Day (22 June 1897). *Hot Lakes Chronicle 26 June 1897 reports the festivities, also in the Founding Years pp.392-393*
- Lack of activity and delay in obtaining government finance caused interest to wane.

THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE

1898

- Proposals were made to shift the present building from Ohinemutu to Arawa Street or to erect part of the new building. The second option was chosen.
- Plans were submitted in May and it was nearly completed by October.
- The AGM took place in the new Victoria Institute on 10 November and the reading room was opened to the public 9 days later.
- Shelving from the old building was used for the lending section.
- Miss Emma Coppell (or Coppel) was appointed caretaker and librarian at £10 per annum (\$1545.45) *Note this is £2 a year less than the cleaner was paid in 1890 and £5 less than the custodian in 1891*

1899-1901

- In 1899 a government grant of £255 (\$38,447) was received and used to extend the building which was completed by the beginning of 1900.
- During 1900 there was a lack of financial support: residents were not subscribing but much use was being made of the reading room.
- Restrictions were made for children under the age of 14 years and adult residents had to have a library card to use the library.
- In 1901 a meeting of the Library Committee and subscribers resolved that the Rotorua Town Council should take over the building and exercise full legal control in the hope that this might lead to a free public library and reading room.

Description of Victoria Institute in about 1907

- Set back from Arawa Street and next to the Maori Land Court.
- Approached by a path between grass plots and flanked by 2 silver birch trees.
- Wooden building in neo-Corinth style with high pillars on each side of the flight of steps supporting a high pediment (this style was fashionable for public buildings in the Victorian period but unique in Rotorua).

- The Library and museum was on one side of the building and on the other side was the Institute's reception and cloakroom and an office for the Town Clerk.
- The Library had about 1300 volumes at this time.
- The Council made provision for a new catalogue, obtained advice from other libraries about book selection, ordering and library furniture.
- In 1907 the Crown through the Dept. of Tourist and Health Resorts took control of Rotorua (and the Library) until 1922.
- During this period the bookstock gradually fell into a state of disrepair.

1923 and Miss Vera Benner appointed Librarian

- Library described by Miss Benner as "... a large room well stocked with newspapers, although all the books were old and lacked covers."
- Hours worked were 10am to 12, 2 to 5pm and 7-9pm during the week and 10.30am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday (presumably with a meal break).
- Much time was spent recovering old books and some were taken home to do at times.
- Money was short. Miss Benner sold plants from her home and raised money for a polished floor and the first counter.
- Mrs Seddon Johnston, who lived opposite the library, also gave plants to sell. When she died in 1936 she left her property to the library to be used for the building of a new library.

1930s

Rotorua Public Library Rules October 1930, as found in the front of a Greek-English dictionary include:

- Hours: Mon-Fri 10am to 12 noon, 2.30 to 5 pm, 7 to 9 pm; Sat 10am to 12 noon
- Staff: One. As was pointed out to a visitor who complained in 1931 about the Library being closed for 2½ hours at lunchtime.
- Subscriptions for residents: 5/- a quarter (\$20), 15/- a year (\$60)
- Visitors: 5/- (\$20) deposit per volume and reading fee of 3d (\$1) per volume.

- Each borrower may take out 2 volumes at a time only one of which may be a New Book.
- Lending period is 14 days but only 7 days for New Books.
- Overdue penalties of 1d (33c) per day
- Subscribers may take 2 magazines at a time for 7 days for free.
- 1931 newspaper report that 50 volumes of classics had been added.
- The 1934 Munn Barr Report on libraries in NZ created an upsurge of interest in library service.
- In 1936 the Borough suggested the County contribute towards library upkeep in return of extra books. On this being refused it was suggested County subscribers should pay an extra charge for privileges.
- 1938 Mr R Griffiths presented 24 volumes of Encyclopedia Britannica.

1940-1944

- Discussions started with Country Library Service which had extended its service to towns of up to 10,000 population provided certain conditions were met, one of which was that the Library become free. The loan collections brought round by van were a very important supplement to the book stock of smaller libraries.

MUNICIPAL BUILDING ON CORNER ARAWA AND FENTON STREETS

(now Convention Centre)

- New Library in Municipal Building was opened on 14 October 1940.
- The Country Library Service also provided advice regarding layout, staff training, cataloguing and suggested changing the classification system from Bliss to Dewey.
- The Library officially went free (except for light fiction and magazines) on the 17 February 1941 and CLS provided staff to assist with the changeover and loans of books.
- There was no policy for expansion for a children's library – the books were still kept in the old building but were shifted to the new library in February 1941.

- A pay collection was begun with books weeded from the fiction stock and some to be purchased.
- The Reading Room was more pleasantly situated than the Library and was well stocked but not supervised.
- Rules:
 - Ratepayers and householders over 14 years could obtain a Borrowers Ticket to borrow one book (not pay section) free of charge and a second Ticket to get a non-fiction only book free of charge.
 - Other residents could be nominated by ratepayers to obtain similar privileges.
 - Country readers could borrow books by paying a 15/- (\$57) subscription or by getting a rental card at 1/- (\$3.80) per a year and paying 2d (63c) for every book.
 - Children from 9-14 who were residents or attending school in the Borough could get a Junior Ticket allowing them to borrow 1 book free.
- A Junior Assistant was employed and in June 1942 Miss G Lilian Jeffries (the first qualified librarian) replaced Miss Benner who had been there for 18 years.
- Miss Jeffries only stayed 2 years but she had a big impact. When she left she wrote a detailed report for Council outlining what she had done and what remained to be done.
- When she arrived:
 - The new building leaked seriously in bad weather.
 - The Lending Dept was badly designed and poorly lighted
 - The newspaper room was attractive but the design meant it could not be supervised.
 - The only work or office space for staff was a small, dark, storeroom which was quite inadequate
 - There was no space for a Junior Library and children had "but one meagre section".
 - Furniture was inadequate or lacking and minor equipment was homemade.

-- Most of the non fiction was showing signs of wear and the fiction was almost dilapidated. The catalogue was quite out of date but she estimated there were about 10 thousand books and took about 20% off the shelves for withdrawing or mending.

- Miss Jeffries introduced a new books selection system in which the librarian made recommendations for purchase which were submitted to the Library Committee for approval. Books approved by two members were ordered. (Shock, horror)
- A dictionary catalogue was set up with entries for author, title and subject.
- She re-arranged the Library, bought essential furniture and equipment, introduced more effective procedures and made recommendations for changes that could not take place within constraints of budget and time.
- New services included a postal service to country members, Books sent each month to the Kaingaroa State Forest Camp and a Hospital Library Service in which trolleys of books were taken around the wards on Wednesday afternoons.
- War library service was given to the Physical Training Centre Military Camp, the US Military Camp, the military services hospital and RNZAF Training Squadron

Red Book started life as an acquisitions register in 1939 and then became a Borrower Register which continues up to 1944 in various sequences (no wasting paper during war time). The changeover from Miss Benner to Miss Jeffries is clearly shown in the handwriting.

- All these improvements resulted in a tremendous increase in registered readers and higher issues figures, especially for non-fiction which put pressure on the staff.

1945-1952

- Increasing stress laid on service and publicity and display increased.
- Hours of opening were reduced because of power restrictions.
- Stock was greatly increased by buying fiction from bookseller's libraries and increased Council grants improved reference stock.

- October 1947 Miss E M Holmes, Chief Librarian, was reported in the paper saying:

Application to Council for a telephone was refused “on the stated ground that the staff would spend all their time ringing up their friends, which is not only childish but insulting...When we want to type catalogue cards or official letters, we have to go to the borough office, presumably because if we possessed a typewriter of our own, we would not use it for ‘official business”.

She further commented on the appalling and out of date state of reference and non-fiction sections. “If a reader comes in for something other than fiction, we probably have to send away to the Country Library Service, which means a delay of about two weeks.”

A telephone was installed sometime in the next 10 years. (Rotorua had got its first public telephone in May 1894).

- Portraits of early founders and animal heads were banished into the Treasure Room. (Miss Jeffries would have been pleased).
- Young Adults section started in 1950.
- The pay section was further improved to meet competition from book clubs and a 6d (\$1.50) section was introduced.
- 1952 children were allowed to join at 7 years instead of 9. (2007 policy is they have to be born).
- New ceiling installed after years of reported leaks.

1953-73

- 1953 Mrs K Spencer (later Mrs Wright) was appointed Librarian. She retired in 1973 after 20 years.
- Staff = 3 in 1953
- Daily issues were approximately 450 (now about 2000-3000)
- Ceiling still leaking
- National Library helped draw up a 5 year plan for improving conditions and service. Many improvements were made at this time.
- Hospital Library Service introduced in 1956.

- Museum was closed in 1960 and half the space was given to the Library, most being used for a Children's section
- Rotorua became a city in 1962 and its population grew greatly in the early 1960s
- Issues increased from 96,473 in 1952/53 to 294,938 in 1962/63.
- Rotorua Boys High School Collection of older NZ history books was presented to the Library and forms the nucleus of our current NZ Collection.
- Branch Library in Brookland Road, Western Heights opened on 12 May 1969. It closed in July 1981

Space was becoming critical and in July 1970 the library moved for 6 months to temporary larger premises in the Masonic Building. It was there for 21 years.

MASONIC BUILDING, FENTON STREET

- Opened on 3 August 1970.
- Throughout the 1970s and 80s there was increased recognition that the Library was not adequate and needed expanding and upgrading.
- February 1972 the NZ Library Association Conference was held in Rotorua (and will be again in two weeks).
- 1973 Miss Lesley Armstrong (Miss A) took over as Librarian.
- In January 1974 the Library was closed for a week while new carpet was laid. It was very hot and the workmen opened the front doors putting barriers across to keep the public out. Some people climbed over them. When new carpet was laid in 2003 and 2004, the Library stayed open (except for the area being worked on) and much of the work was done at night.
- New hours in January 1974 were 10am to 8pm Monday to Thursday and 10 to 8.30 on Friday.
- A new issue system (Wayne County) was introduced in April 1974. Membership cards were phased out and borrowers filled in charge slips putting their name and address and details of the books. Staff then put a

transaction card in each book. The system was supposed to be easier and books were re-shelved much more quickly but it involved a lot of filing for staff and overdues were very laborious.

- Art prints for borrowing were introduced in September 1978.
- Issues in October 1978 were 27,857, down by almost 1500 from the previous year. Miss Armstrong said likely causes were reduced hours at the Western Heights Branch, increase in rental charges (Council puts charges up to make more money and fewer books are taken out) and the weather. October that year had had fewer rainy days and people are more likely to come into the Library when it is wet. When it is fine they find other things to do.
- In July 1980 open on Saturday mornings from 9.30 to 11.30.
- April 1981 Rotorua Newspapers Ltd, the publishers of the Daily Post, presented the Library with \$10,000 (\$35,967) to buy a microfiche reader printer and to start microfiching the Daily Post. It was big Kodak Starfiche machine which made an alarming series of loud noises when it printed.
- 1984. Miss Armstrong reported to Council that a Library serving a population of 50,000 should have about 3000m² and we only have 800m².
- January 1985: Mobile Library Service to the District begins
- 1985: Photocopying, black & white A4 only, was 20c (47c). It is still 20c.
- June 1985 – Get Well Bags for sick children were introduced.
- July 1985 Council approved a security system being installed. The issue system where borrowers filled in slips (introduced 11 years earlier) made it too easy for some people to give false details and steal books. Books were swiped over a pad at issues so they would not set off the alarms and were re-sensitised on return with “irons”, about 5 inches in diameter and quite heavy.
- 1 September 1986: Our first computer system called “Larri”, which was specially designed for Rotorua Library, went “live” giving a more secure issue system. Borrower cards were re-introduced. It seems very basic by today’s standards but was a great advance.
- Library Assistant Lisa Figgins was runner up in the Miss Rotorua Thermal Land Competition 1989

- Don Stafford presented his research notes to the Library
- Library Centennial 1989
- 13 April 1991 work began on gutting the old Government Building and converting it into a library.
- Change of computer systems from Larri to Dynix in June 1991
- Mr and Mrs Kawahata donated \$100,000 to assist with the development of the new library. They donated a further \$10,000 to buy children's books in March 1995
- "Masonic" Library closed on Friday 6 December for a week.
- Volunteers from Combined Service clubs helped move the books on an interesting selection of trolleys including some nice ones from the airport and some wheeled stretchers that looked "antique" from the hospital. As the two libraries were only one block apart there was no need to pack the books into boxes and truck them.

HAUPAPA STREET (old Government building)

- Officially opened by Governor General Dame Catherine Tizard on 16 December 1991 and opened to the public the following day.
- Issues in the year following the move to the new building increased by 34%.
- Lesley Armstrong retired as District Librarian after 21 years in December 1994 and was succeeded by Jane Gilbert (in January 1995).
- 17 May 1996: A pipe taking hot water from the Library boiler to the Courthouse broke and the space under the Lending Services workroom filled with very hot water. It was discovered on a Friday when it was only 10cm below the floor level.
- Feb 1997: Copies of the Te Rangikaheke manuscripts were given to Ngati Rangiwewehi by Auckland City Library and are kept at the Library.
- July 1999: The old mobile library was retired and replaced by a larger mobile.
- 10 December 2001 - Fletcher Tuatara, the Library Mascot, hatched from a very large egg
- May 2002 Change in computer systems from Dynix to Horizon

- 2006 Rotorua formed a consortium with Tauranga, Western Bay and Whakatane Libraries to share a library computer system. It is called InfoShare Bay of Plenty Libraries and the host computer is at Rotorua. This is why when you search on our catalogue you find titles that do not have any holdings – we don't have them but some of the other libraries do.
- 5 August 2006 started opening Saturday afternoons, new hours 9.30 to 4pm
- 2008 – Work started on renovating the building starting with the second floor which had previously been leased. Staff workrooms moved up to the second floor in early November and as work proceeded on the first floor the New Zealand Services section gradually moved up too. It opened to the public at the beginning of February 2009. Teens and adult non fiction moved up to the first floor. A new entrance on Haupapa Street opened on March 2nd.

SOURCES

Rotorua Library Service 1889-1973 by Opal Strickland 31 March 1973

Don Stafford File on Library

Library Archives and assorted clippings

Miss Jeffries report

Dollar amounts in brackets come from the Reserve Bank of NZ CPI Inflation Calculator <http://www.rbnz.govt.nz/inflationcalculator/showcalculator.do>, August 2007