



# Legislative Library of British Columbia

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## **Provincial Library Directors: A History and Timeline**

This paper provides biographical information on former Provincial Library directors.

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# Provincial Library Directors: A History and Timeline

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## Introduction

For much of its history the Legislative Library operated as a provincial library, serving not only Members of the Legislative Assembly and their staff but also the public at large. Up until 1974 the Library was known as the Provincial Library and it operated in conjunction with the Provincial Archives, often sharing the same director. This paper provides biographical information about former directors of the Provincial Library starting from its modest beginnings in 1863 up to 1974, when the Library permanently separated from the Archives and reverted back to its statutory name, the Legislative Library of British Columbia.

## Early Years

In 1863 the Legislative Assembly of Vancouver Island approved a \$1,000 grant to establish a parliamentary library for its members. A few books were purchased and housed in a small room by the chamber in the old “Bird Cages” Parliament Buildings. It was not until 1886 that someone was appointed to mind the collection on a temporary, sessional basis. William Atkins was assigned the task for the 1886 session. N.E. Graves succeeded him, followed by Joseph Bridgman. Despite these appointments, it seems that no substantial effort was made to develop the Library until R.E. Gosnell took over in 1893.

## R.E. (Richard Edward) Gosnell (b. 1860 d. 1931)



Provincial Librarian: 1893-1898  
Provincial Archivist: 1908-1909

Originally from Quebec, R.E. Gosnell came to British Columbia in 1888. He worked in Vancouver as a journalist and then held a variety of civil service positions before his appointment as Librarian in 1893 (Gosnell was the first person to hold this position permanently). In his reminiscences, Gosnell described being confronted with an incomplete and disorganized library collection: a “mass of precious junk”. Gosnell was hired to organize and develop the collection but he also had more ambitious plans. In one of the Library's first annual reports Gosnell envisioned a library that would “anticipate not only the requirements of the Legislative Assembly” but also a library that would serve “the enquiries of the Province at large” and include “a special department relating to British Columbia”. Although Gosnell left the Library’s service in 1898, he did return to serve as British Columbia’s first Provincial Archivist in 1908.

Gosnell acquired for the collection many historical publications relating to the history of British Columbia. After Amor De Cosmos's death, Gosnell bought at auction De Cosmos's personal library of books and pamphlets on Western Canada. He also acquired records from the governors of the colonies that had been housed at the Lieutenant Governor's residence. In addition, he set up exchange programs to acquire documents from libraries and governments in other jurisdictions.

Gosnell was an avid historian and an author. He contributed history-themed articles to the local newspapers and self-published the *Year Book of British Columbia and Manual of Provincial Information*. Gosnell was well-known for his political connections

and after leaving the Library he was secretary to Premier James Dunsmuir and then later to Premier Richard McBride. In the intervening years he worked for the BC government in other capacities. He also left the government for a short time to serve as editor of the *Victoria Daily Colonist*. As a tribute to Gosnell, an area near the North Thompson and Albreda rivers in British Columbia was named after him.

### **E.O.S. (Ethelbert Olaf Stuart) Scholefield (b. 1875 d. 1919)**



Provincial Librarian: 1898-1919  
Provincial Archivist: 1910-1919

E.O.S. Scholefield was born on the Isle of Wight and immigrated to British Columbia with his family in 1887. After graduating from high school, Scholefield worked briefly for the Legislative Assembly as a messenger. He entered the Library's service when Gosnell hired him to work as his assistant in 1894. Scholefield eventually succeeded Gosnell when he was put in charge of the Library in 1898. This appointment would become permanent in 1899. He also took over the Provincial Archives in 1910 and served as both Provincial Librarian and Provincial Archivist until his death on Christmas Day, 1919.

Scholefield showed great enthusiasm for collecting books and documents. Increased grants from the Legislature allowed him to greatly expand the collection; approximately 50,000 volumes were added during Scholefield's tenure. The Library's newspaper index was also established, a service that continued until 2007. Although the Library moved into the newly-built Parliament Buildings in 1897, shelf room was at a premium within a year. Both Gosnell and Scholefield had long advocated for additional space to house the growing library and archive. This wish was finally realized in 1912 when Scholefield joined architect Francis Rattenbury and the Duke of Connaught, Governor-General of Canada, to lay the foundation stone for the construction of the present library addition to the Parliament Buildings. The building opened to the public in 1915 and for the first time the Library's holdings were readily accessible.

It was during this decade that library services began to expand to the BC public. Under Scholefield's supervision, the Provincial Library's Traveling Libraries service sent collections of books to remote communities across BC. It was believed to be the only service of its kind at the time in Canada. It continued as a service of the Provincial Library until the newly created Public Libraries Commission took it over in 1919 and later renamed it the Open Shelf Library Service.

Scholefield was an active member of the professional library community. He was a founding member of the British Columbia Library Association. The association was established in 1911 when a group of librarians gathered in Scholefield's office to discuss library legislation and the extension of library work in the province. Scholefield later served as the association's president from 1914-1917. Scholefield was also Pacific Northwest Library Association president from 1911-1913.

Like Gosnell, Scholefield is remembered for his keen interest in Pacific Northwest history. He regularly lectured on the subject and co-authored a number of books, including *A History of British Columbia* with his predecessor R.E. Gosnell and *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present* with noted historian Frederic William Howay.

After Scholefield's death, the Library Club of Victoria arranged for a copper beech tree to be planted on the grounds of the Legislature. Premier John Oliver performed the planting ceremony outside the Library in spring 1921 and to this day, the tree stands in honour of Scholefield's contributions. Schofield Point (a misspelling) on the BC coast, north of Bella Bella, is also named for him.

### John Forsyth (b. 1881 d. 1955)



Provincial Librarian and Archivist: 1920-1926

John Forsyth served as acting Provincial Librarian and Archivist and after E.O.S. Scholefield's death he was put in charge on a permanent basis. Forsyth trained and worked as a librarian in his birthplace of Edinburgh, Scotland before moving to Canada in 1912. After a brief period of employment in Toronto, Forsyth arrived in Victoria in 1913 and was hired by Scholefield. Before his promotion, Forsyth worked in both the cataloguing and reference divisions. He also supervised the move of books and documents during the Library's relocation to new quarters in summer 1915.

Like his predecessors, Forsyth lectured and wrote articles on local history. In 1922 he contributed a series of articles on early colonial schools to the *Victoria Daily Times*. Forsyth was also a founding member of the British Columbia Historical Association (later renamed the British Columbia Historical Federation); he helped to organize the group's first meeting which was held at the Provincial Library. In 1926 Forsyth left the Library and opened his own bookstore which he operated until his death in 1955.

### John Hosie (b. 1880 d. 1934)



Provincial Librarian and Archivist: 1926-1934

A native of Scotland, John Hosie was employed at various public libraries in England and Scotland before he immigrated to British Columbia in 1912. Scholefield hired him to work in the Library later that same year. Hosie rose through the ranks; he selected and acquired books for the Library and was then put in charge of the Library's Legislative Reference department. (Legislative Reference prepared memoranda used by the government and Legislative Council for the preparation of government reports, legislation and other documents. It operated separately from the Library's General Reference division and was believed to be the only service of its kind

in Canada at the time.) After John Forsyth's departure in 1926, Hosie was promoted to Provincial Librarian and Archivist. He held this position until his death in 1934.

Hosie and his staff had to meet with the challenges brought on by the Great Depression. Appropriations were reduced, forcing the Library to economize. The loss of funds had to be balanced with greater use of the Provincial Library by the public. In particular there was reported to be an increased demand for information on social and economic problems.

Hosie was an avid historian. He travelled the province to collect historical records and to interview surviving pioneers. He encouraged students to do research at the Archives and welcomed visits from school groups and distinguished guests. Hosie supported local historical preservation projects and used his influence to assist Major J.S. Matthews to establish an archive for the city of Vancouver.

Hosie was connected with many organizations. He was named president of the British Columbia Historical Association in 1927. He also served as British Columbia Library Association president in 1927/28 and was a two-term member of the BC Public Library Commission.

In addition to librarian and historian, Hosie was a poet. In 1929 he published *The Arbutus Tree and Other Poems*. The Hosie Islands on the west side of Vancouver Island are named after him.

### **Alma M. (Marjorie) Russell (b. 1873 d. 1964)**



Provincial Librarian  
and Archivist: 1934

In 1897 Alma Russell completed her library training at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York and then returned to Victoria to be with her family. R.E. Gosnell hired her that same year (the position becoming permanent in 1900) and she is widely believed to be the first professionally trained librarian to be employed in Western Canada.

Russell was chief cataloguer as well as Assistant Librarian and Archivist. She was first hired to catalogue and classify the Library's collection—a daunting task as there were already thousands of books. The idea for the Travelling Libraries service has been attributed to her and in the early years she administered the service, which supplied reading material to remote areas of the province. Russell also initiated an early version of the Library's newspaper index.

According to her reminiscences, "so many questions were asked by the members during debates, which required exhaustive and frantic search through files of newspapers". To make the search easier, Russell started a card index of stories from BC newspapers that she thought would be important. The newspaper index continued at the Legislative Library until 2007.

Russell was a founding member of the British Columbia Library Association, serving as the association's first vice president in 1911 then later as president in 1924 and 1935/36. She was made an honorary life member of the association. Russell was in charge of the Library's Pacific Northwest History collection and through this work she became a recognized authority on the history of British Columbia. She regularly wrote and presented papers on the topic. An early member of the British Columbia Historical Association, she was elected president in 1931, becoming the first woman to occupy this office.

Russell retired in 1933 but she returned to take charge of the Provincial Library and Archives for a few months during the summer of 1934 when director John Hosie became critically ill and unable to perform his duties and before the appointment of W. Kaye Lamb. Russell first arrived just as the new Parliament Buildings were completed and over the years she contributed much to the evolution of the Library. In her honour,

two islands on the west-side of Vancouver Island by Ucluelet were named the Alma Russell Islands in 1935.

### **W. (William) Kaye Lamb (b. 1904 d. 1999)**



Provincial Librarian and  
Archivist: 1934-1940

W. Kaye Lamb was born in New Westminster and with his appointment in 1934 he was the first native British Columbian to serve as Provincial Librarian and Archivist. Lamb was also the first person since R.E. Gosnell to be appointed to the position rather than promoted. During his tenure Lamb made many significant changes. To enhance accessibility, the Library's layout was reorganized and the collection reclassified and reshelved. For the first time special attention was devoted to binding volumes of newspapers and reports in order to better ensure the documents' long-term preservation. A significant development in 1935 was the designation of the Provincial Library by Order in Council as a full depository for British Columbia government publications. Lastly, in 1936 Lamb took on the added responsibilities of Superintendent, Public

Library Commission.

Despite his numerous administrative duties, Lamb was able to pursue his interest in Pacific Northwest history. He continued the tradition of historians directing the Provincial Library and Archives but because he attended the University of British Columbia, the Sorbonne and the London School of Economics, Lamb was the first with an advanced education in the field. In 1936 Lamb was named president of the British Columbia Historical Association and the next year he established the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* which he edited for ten years. Up until his death in 1999, Lamb published many volumes relating to British Columbia's history and its explorers.

W. Kaye Lamb's time at the Provincial Library and Archives marked the beginning of a prolific career. In 1940 he left Victoria to head the University of British Columbia Library. In 1948 he was appointed Dominion Archivist at the National Archives in Ottawa and from 1953 he was also in charge of the newly established National Library of Canada. Lamb was involved with many library and historical associations; he presided over the British Columbia Library Association (1939/40), the Canadian Library Association (1948) and the Canadian Historical Association (1957/58).

Lamb retired in 1969 and that same year his remarkable achievements were recognized when he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada. He also received many honorary doctorates. In the book *The Essentials: 150 Great BC Books and Authors*, author Alan Twigg describes Lamb as "BC's greatest librarian".

## **C.K. (Charles Keith) Morison (b. 1891 d. 1977)**

In 1940 the responsibilities of Provincial Librarian and Archivist were divided up; C.K. Morison was named Provincial Librarian and W.E. Ireland took on the role of Provincial Archivist. Born and raised in Quebec, Morison earned an undergraduate degree from McGill University and then entered library school at the University of Wisconsin. Morison enrolled in 1914, just as World War I was breaking out and one year later he left library school to serve overseas with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. After the war Morison worked in oil fields in the U.S. and Mexico but eventually he returned to his library studies, earning a library sciences degree from McGill in 1934.

Much of Morison's term at the Provincial Library took place during World War II and as director he faced some unique wartime challenges. Men and women left the Library to enlist for military service and remaining staff were required to pick up extra responsibilities. Precautions were taken to protect the Library's collection in case of enemy action. Copies of the *BC Gazette*, *Sessional Papers* and statutes as well as some newspapers were stored in an off-site vault. The newspaper and government publications card indexes were moved to the basement and a duplicate of the main card catalogue was sent to the University of Saskatchewan for safekeeping. Staff of the Provincial Library and Public Library Commission also did their part to support the war effort by volunteering their own time to operate the War Services Libraries program for armed forces personnel stationed on Vancouver Island. In 1943 they distributed about 10,000 books in total.

In addition to his responsibilities as Provincial Librarian, C.K. Morison was also Superintendent of the Public Library Commission. Due to increased demands, however, the two positions were separated in 1946 with W.E. Ireland assuming the roles of both Provincial Librarian and Archivist and Morison remaining as Superintendent. Morison was a vocal advocate for the expansion of public library service in British Columbia and it is for his work for the Commission that Morison is particularly remembered. According to Margaret Jean Clay, former head of the Victoria Public Library and one of Morison's contemporaries, "no one [had] done as much to get books to the people of the hinterland of this province as C.K. Morison".

In 1956 Morison retired from the Public Service at the age of 65 but then found employment at the Vancouver Island Regional Library and later at the Victoria College Library (now the University of Victoria). In 1969 he published *A Book Pedlar in British Columbia*. Part memoir and part history, the book chronicled Morison's travels across the province as Public Library Commission Superintendent. C.K. Morison passed away in 1977.

## **W.E. (Willard Ernest) Ireland (b. 1914 d. 1979)**



Provincial Archivist:  
1940-1942  
Provincial Librarian and  
Archivist: 1946-1974

W.E. Ireland's father was an itinerant minister so while Ireland was born in Vancouver, his family moved frequently about the province. Ireland graduated from the University of British Columbia with an undergraduate degree in history. He went on to receive teacher training and then a master's degree in history from the University of Toronto. While in Toronto, Ireland won a scholarship and spent time doing archival research in London and Washington, D.C. Ireland was appointed Provincial

Archivist in 1940 but left the Provincial Archives in July 1942 to serve with the Royal Canadian Air Force. After his return, the Provincial Library and Archives were again combined under one director with Ireland assuming the dual role of Provincial Librarian and Archivist in 1946. Ireland served in this role until his retirement in 1974. His 34 years is the longest tenure of any BC Provincial Librarian or Archivist. After Ireland's retirement the role of director was split in two. The Archives and the Library had already physically separated their space with the opening of the museum precinct next door in 1970. In 1974 the Provincial Library also reverted back to its statutory name, the Legislative Library of British Columbia.

Like his predecessors, Willard Ireland was very active in the wider community. Known for his keen sense of humour, Ireland was a popular public speaker on BC's past. Ireland was president of the BC Library Association (1948/49), the Canadian Library Association (1956) and the Pacific Northwest Library Association (1953/54). In 1961 Ireland was given a leave of absence to serve on the Royal Commission on Government Organization (the Glassco Commission). He also served as Honorary Secretary of the Canadian Confederation Centennial Committee of British Columbia. Ireland was involved with the many centennials that occurred in the 1960s- to the point that the *Vancouver Province* newspaper dubbed him "Mr. Centennial". The Newsman's Club of BC named him Man of the Year in 1966 and the next year he was awarded the Canadian Centennial Medal.

## **Madge Wolfenden (Hamilton) (b. 1893 d. 1992)**

Madge Wolfenden was born and educated in Victoria. Her father, Colonel Richard Wolfenden, was the King's (later Queen's) Printer for British Columbia. In 1913 Wolfenden enrolled in a library training program operated by the Victoria Public Library. The program was in its inaugural year and she was the third student to apply.

Madge Wolfenden joined the Provincial Library in 1914. She worked as a cataloguer until 1935 when W. Kaye Lamb promoted her to Assistant Provincial Archivist. From 1942 to 1945 she served as acting Provincial Archivist when W.E. Ireland left to serve in the war. Wolfenden retired in 1953 and she was the last staff member to have been employed at the Library when it opened at its current location in 1915.

An active member of the BC Historical Association, Wolfenden was Associate Editor and a contributor to the journal *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*. Of

particular note is her article “Books and Libraries in Fur Trading and Colonial Days”, an account of the first libraries in British Columbia. She also contributed a number of entries to the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

## **Notable Mention**

### **Marjorie C. (Colquhoun) Holmes (b. 1894 d. 1990)**

Marjorie Holmes was born in Ilkley, Yorkshire but at a young age moved to Victoria with her family. Already a teacher, Holmes received her library training at the Victoria Public Library. She was hired in 1920 to work at the Provincial Library as a Reference Clerk. She was promoted to Legislative Reference Librarian in 1926 and in 1935 she was appointed Assistant Provincial Librarian.

Holmes compiled bibliographies of BC government publications which are consulted to this day. In 1935 the Provincial Library received designation by Order in Council to be a depository for all British Columbia government publications. Prior to the designation, collecting government documents was a challenge because library staff had no way to track what was being published. This designation paved the way for the *BC Government Publications Checklist*. First compiled by Marjorie Holmes in 1936, the list continues to be published by the Library. In 1950 Holmes published *Publications of the Government of British Columbia, 1871-1947*, a revised and expanded update to Sydney Weston’s checklist of the same name. Holmes was also responsible for the volume *Royal Commissions and Commissions of Inquiry under the "Public Inquiries Act" in British Columbia, 1872-1947*, a book that required much research on Holmes's part. Before she could list the commission reports, Holmes first had to locate them. She told the *Victoria Daily Colonist*: "They were scattered to the four winds... I chased Royal Commission reports into attics, basements, and the vaults of the provincial secretary's office." Holmes then took over a committee room for two months to write summaries and put all the commissions in order. Lastly, in 1959 Holmes published the book *Library Service in British Columbia: A Brief History of its Development*.

Holmes also volunteered her time. She helped supervise the operation of the War Services Libraries for Vancouver Island, a service that sent thousands of books to naval and military personnel stationed across the Island during World War II. Holmes served as British Columbia Library Association president in 1933/34.

When Marjorie Holmes retired in 1954, *Victoria Daily Colonist* columnist Jim Nesbitt wrote that she had "no politics but she [knew] more about politics than most people in the province". He added that her work would “remain to guide future members of the Legislature”. Holmes passed away in 1990.

## Timeline of Library Directors

<b>1893-1898</b>	R.E. Gosnell	Provincial Librarian
<b>1898-1910</b>	E.O.S. Scholefield	Provincial Librarian
<b>1908-1909</b>	R.E. Gosnell	Provincial Archivist
<b>1910-1919</b>	E.O.S. Scholefield	Provincial Librarian and Archivist (titles merged)
<b>1920-1926</b>	John Forsyth	Provincial Librarian and Archivist
<b>1926-1934</b>	John Hosie	Provincial Librarian and Archivist
<b>1934</b>	Alma Russell	Provincial Librarian and Archivist (acting— during interim before Lamb's appointment)
<b>1934-1940</b>	W. Kaye Lamb	Provincial Librarian and Archivist
<b>1940-1946</b>	C.K. Morison	Provincial Librarian
<b>1940-1942</b>	W.E. Ireland	Provincial Archivist
<b>1942-1945</b>	Madge Wolfenden	Provincial Archivist (acting— while Ireland served in WWII)
<b>1946-1974</b>	W.E. Ireland	Provincial Librarian and Archivist (titles merged)
<b>1974-1982</b>	James G. Mitchell	Legislative Librarian
<b>1982-1985</b>	Margaret E. Hastings	Assistant Legislative Librarian (acting head)
<b>1985-2003</b>	Joan A. Barton	Legislative Librarian; later Director
<b>1990-1991</b>	Sheila Gann	Director (acting)
<b>2003-2009</b>	Jane Taylor	Director
<b>2009-</b>	Peter Gourlay	Director (acting)

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Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, Dominion Archivist and National Librarian, Ottawa, ON, ca 1950s  
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