

# Research resources of the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, the Lillian H. Smith Collection and the Canadiana Collection of the Toronto Public Library

*Margaret Crawford Maloney*

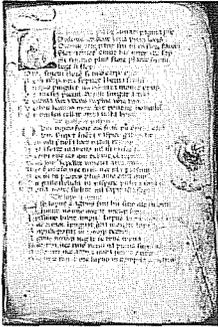
In 1934 Edgar Osborne (1890-1978), then County Librarian of Derbyshire, England, visited the Toronto Public Library's Boys and Girls House, a nineteenth-century house acquired in 1922 to be the first separate children's library in the British Commonwealth. He was deeply impressed by the quality and the breadth of children's services which had been established and were flourishing under the direction of Lillian H. Smith (1887-1983). He realized that in Canada it would be difficult to build a collection of the scope and substance of the early English children's books which he and his wife Mabel had assembled, beginning with the books of their own childhood and dating back to the sixteenth century.

In November 1949, Osborne presented about two thousand books to the Toronto Public Library Board in memory of his wife who had died in 1946 and as a tribute to the work and reputation of Lillian H. Smith. The Library agreed to house, staff and augment this gift, to provide research access to the public and to publish a printed catalogue. Sheila Egoff was the first curator, from 1949 through 1952. She was succeeded by Judith St. John, who for the next twenty-seven years (until July 1979) ably undertook the prodigious tasks of organization, acquisition, and cataloguing which culminated in the publication of *The Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books, a Catalogue*, Volume I (1958), reprinted in 1966 and again in 1975 to coincide with Volume II.

The Osborne Collection is broadly representative and has now grown to over fifteen thousand volumes, ranging from a fourteenth-century manuscript of Aesop's fables, through a fifteenth-century printing of a Venetian fairy tale, sixteenth-century school texts and courtesy books, godly Puritan works, eighteenth-century chapbooks, moral tales and rational recreations, Victorian classics of fantasy, adventure and school stories up to 1910 — the end of the Edwardian era.

Several sub-collections have been incorporated within the Osborne Collection: Florence Nightingale's childhood library; Queen Mary's Collection of Children's Books; books, manuscript material and art pertaining to members of the Taylor family of Ongar; the Pettingell Collection of periodicals and 'penny

dreadfuls'; and an extensive collection of G.A. Henty.



Aesop's Fables. A 14th-century vellum manuscript of a versified Latin version attributed to Henry II's chaplain.



Thomas Boreman's *Curiosities in the Tower of London*, 1741; ivory horn-book, ca. 1790; *The Twelfth-Day-Gift*, a 1788 edition of a John Newbery publication, with cuts by Bewick.

The Lillian H. Smith Collection was established in 1962 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the development of children's libraries in Toronto by this distinguished pioneer who had returned in 1912 from her training at the New York Public Library under Anne Carroll Moore. It is comprised of creative books published in English since 1910 — picture books, fables, fairy tales, fiction, poetry, etc. — selected on the basis of literary and artistic merit, and now numbers some forty-five hundred works.

In 1978 the Canadiana Room was opened; at present it houses between four and five thousand children's books in English — current and retrospective — by Canadians (authors and/or illustrators), about Canada or published in Canada.

All three Collections include manuscripts, letters and original artwork (this last has grown to over a thousand items which have been designated as the Jean Thomson Collection, named in memory of Lillian H. Smith's successor who retired in 1966). The Library also holds an extensive collection of important resource materials related to the many facets of historical children's literature.

These non-circulating research collections serve a broad and varied public not only through personal contact but also through extensive correspondence and telephone inquiries. Adult and juvenile clientele extend city wide, as well as nationally and internationally, encompassing scholars, educators, librarians, bibliophiles, casual tourists, people in business, the arts and media, and students of all levels from elementary through post doctoral. Academic fields of interest include the humanities, music, art and drama, and natural, applied and social sciences. Queries range through the mundane, puzzling, whimsical and bibliographically intriguing. The printed, book-form catalogues are supplemented by card files offering access from diverse perspectives including author, title, illustrator, engraver, publisher, printer, chronological and detailed main entries with notes.

Programmes and lectures are provided for educational institutions as well as special interest groups. Exhibitions are arranged within the library — usually six a year, occasionally with checklists — and for loan within the system and to outside institutions on a restricted basis.

In 1966 an organization of Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith Collections was formed and now, approaching its twentieth year, numbers approximately seven hundred members worldwide. A facsimile from the Osborne Collection or a book pertaining to it is published every year by the Friends as a gift-book for members. These have included several manuscripts such as Eleanor Mure's earliest extant version of *The three bears* (1831), Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon's *Illustrated comic alphabet* (1859), considered to be the first Canadian picture book, Walter Crane's delicate water-colour drawings done for his daughter's keepsake in 1879, and a collection of original picture-letters from Beatrix Potter written between 1924 and 1943. These facsimiles all bear commentaries researched by Osborne staff. The Friends hold meetings, sponsor lectures, issue newsletters and on occasion supply funds for books and materials that the Library could not otherwise afford. Their Patron is H.R.H. Princess Alexandra (the Hon. Mrs. Angus Ogilvy), a first cousin of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1969 an associate British Branch, now called the Children's Books History Society, was formed.

In addition to previous publications the Osborne Collection recently has engaged in two major Commercial projects with Holp Shuppan of Tokyo. For the International Year of the Child in 1979 this Japanese firm reproduced, in beautiful and faithful facsimile, thirty-five titles from the Collection emphasizing the development of illustration. Following phenomenal success on the Japanese market, an English edition was issued by Bodley Head, London, in 1981. A second series of thirty new reproductions on the theme of 'Instruction with Delight' was published in Japan in 1984. For each set the Library staff wrote a companion volume of bibliographical and historical articles.

The staff of the Collections (now a separate administrative unit within the Resource Division) includes three librarians, one full-time and two part-time clericals and several page positions. A separate conservation budget permits outside contracting as no centralized service is yet available.

Funding is from the City of Toronto as part of the annual Library budget. A modest Trust Fund provides that margin of excellence for special purchases. Regular budget acquisitions through antiquarian dealers or auctions are augmented by gratefully appreciated gifts of books and money for which tax benefits are available.

Participation in relevant conferences, professional organizations and international projects is enthusiastically undertaken and co-operation with other institutions — museums, galleries, historical boards, universities and other libraries — is actively supported.

In 1964 a new building opened on the site of the old Boys and Girls house.

Now, in 1985, as the Collections have again outgrown their premises, new and expanded facilities in conjunction with the proposed St. George Library are in the planning stages.

The Osborne Collection, with the extent and depth of its holdings and its accessibility through the dynamics of function and publication, is unique in Canada and renowned internationally.



for the Lillian H. Smith Collection  
- with great appreciation  
Gene Zion  
Margaret Bloy Graham

Illustrated inscription added to a copy  
of Gene Zion's *Harry the Dirty Dog*  
(1956) by the artist Margaret Bloy  
Graham.

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For further information and detailed list of publications, greeting cards  
etc. please contact:

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