



History of St. Thomas Public Library

- 1873** The precursor of the Public Library was the Mechanics' Institute whose reading room was in the Heard Block above Caulfield's Drug Store. The purpose of the institute founded in 1849 was self education.
- 1884** The St. Thomas Free Library was formed, with Archibald McLachlin as chairman. The assets, liabilities, and books of the Mechanics' Institute were transferred to the new board.ⁱ It relocated to the second floor of the Imperial Bank building at 301 Talbot Street. In following years the bank was torn down and it is currently the site of the St. Thomas – Elgin Public Art Centre.ⁱⁱ
- 1885** The St. Thomas Free Library was officially opened. The first librarian was George W. Morgan. Space for the library was rented from J. S. Upper in a new building at 469 Talbot St.
- 1889** The St. Thomas Art School merged with the Library, an association that lasted until 1905.
- 1893** The rented premises at 469 Talbot St. had become inadequate. When the new City Hall was being built at 545 Talbot St., the Library was granted accommodation, and in 1899 both the Art School and the Library relocated into City Hall.
- 1896** The name of the Free Library was changed to Public Library.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 1904** The Carnegie Foundation provided funding for a new, larger building as the space had once again become inadequate. This building stands today on Mondamin St. attached to City Hall. Both City Hall and the Public Library were designed by local celebrated architect, Neil Darrach.^{iv}
- 1906** The new building was officially opened with a gallery and a wide central aisle lined with busts and statues on either side.
- 1973** The Library had endured lack of space since 1944 when plans for a renovation or a new library had been drawn up. In 1973, grant had become available to build a new Library. The Library Board and City applied to the Federal Provincial Winter Capital Projects Fund and were successful.
- 1974** The current building officially opened on October 4.^v

- 2011** In March, St. Thomas Public Library moved out of their building to a temporary location at the Elgin Mall, while the building underwent “revitalization” with major interior demolition, construction, and upgrades.^{vi} The renovation was greatly enhanced by a \$300,000 donation from the Estate of Dorothy Palmer for upgrades in the Children’s and Teens’ Department.^{vii}
- 2012** The St. Thomas Public Library re-opened its doors on Monday, January 16. The Children’s and Teens’ section was re-named the “John and Dorothy Palmer Youth Library” in honour of the Palmers and their generosity.^{viii} The Grand Re-opening of the building took place on Thursday, March 9, 2012.
- 2013** The St. Thomas Public received its first accreditation under the Ontario Public Library Guidelines Program in November.
- 2014** The St. Thomas Public Library celebrated its 130th Anniversary!
- 2017** The St. Thomas Public Library launched new lending services at the Elgin Mall, including a book vending machine and holds pick-up locker.
- 2018** The St. Thomas Public Library opens the new Reading Garden, located on the west side of the building.

References

- ⁱ [The St. Thomas –Elgin Library Official Opening Program.](#) Friday, October 4, 1974, p.7.
- ⁱⁱ [The St. Thomas –Elgin Library Official Opening Program.](#) Friday, October 4, 1974, p.2.
- ⁱⁱⁱ [St. Thomas: 100 Years a City, 1881 – 1981.](#) Paddon, Wayne, Thorman, George, et al. St. Thomas, ON: Phibbs Incorporated, 1981, p. 65.
- ^{iv} [The St. Thomas –Elgin Library Official Opening Program.](#) Friday, October 4, 1974, p.2.
- ^v [St. Thomas: 100 Years a City, 1881 – 1981.](#) Paddon, Wayne, Thorman, George, et al. St. Thomas, ON: Phibbs Incorporated, 1981, p. 65.
- ^{vi} [St. Thomas Public Library Self-guided Tour Booklet.](#) March 2012, p.2.
- ^{vii} [St. Thomas Public Library Self-guided Tour Booklet.](#) March 2012, p.29.
- ^{viii} [St. Thomas Public Library Self-guided Tour Booklet.](#) March 2012, p.2.