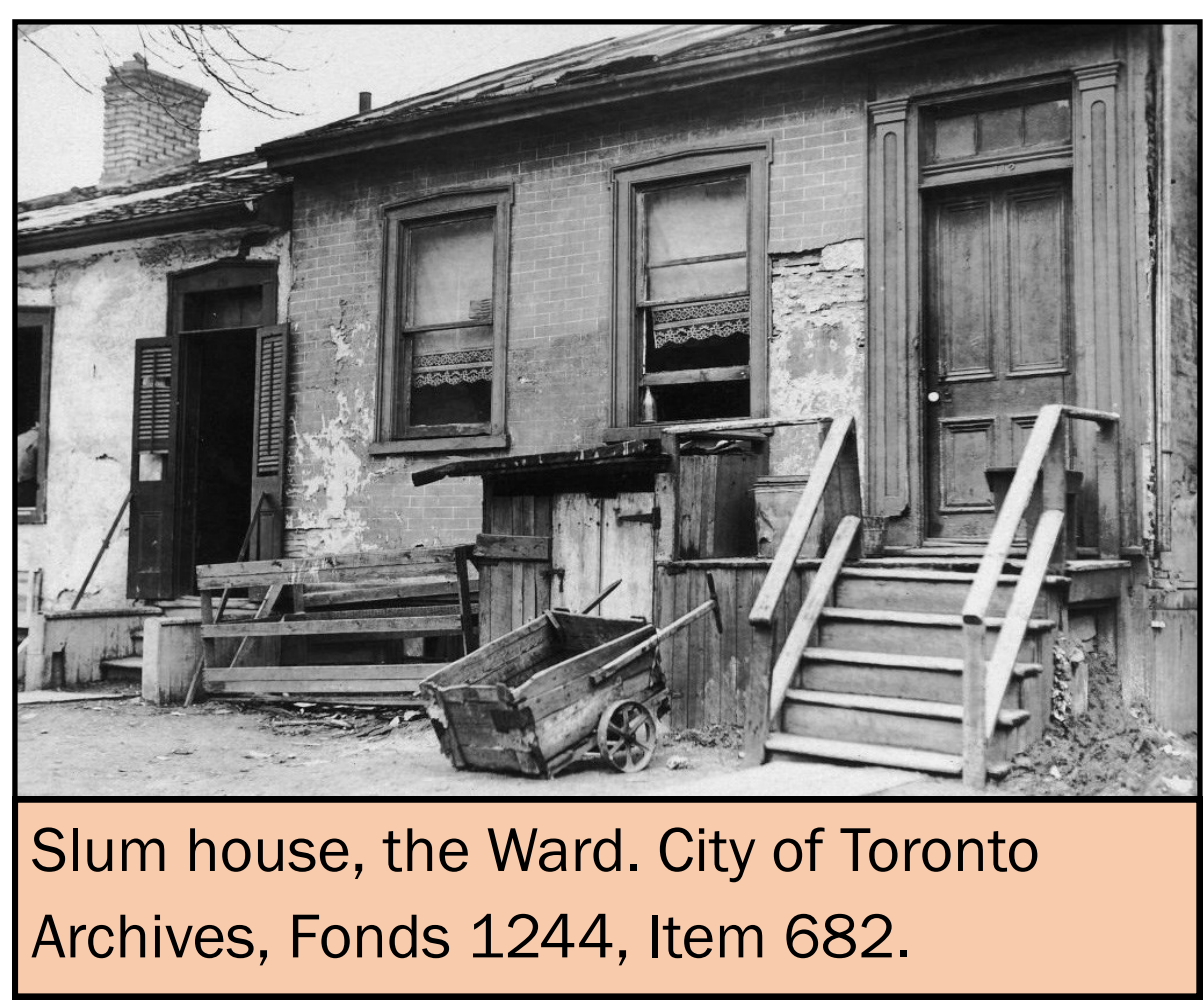


# The Toronto Public Library's Participation in the Settlement House Movement

*The TPL was influenced by settlement houses to do more for neighbourhoods in need, but conservatism delayed the promotion of this important work.*

## 1910s: Slums & settlement houses

In 1911, Toronto's chief medical officer Dr. Charles Hastings issued a report on the city's slum conditions, forcing politicians and affluent residents to confront the plight of those living in poverty. As more Central and Eastern European, Jewish, and Chinese immigrants began to settle in these areas, social reformers inevitably tied the desire to eradicate slums with the integration of newcomers into Canadian society. Inspired by the Progressive movement, the "social gospel", and the success of Jane Addams' **Hull House** in Chicago, reformers created settlement houses in Toronto's poor working class districts. Their goal was to solve the problems of industrialization

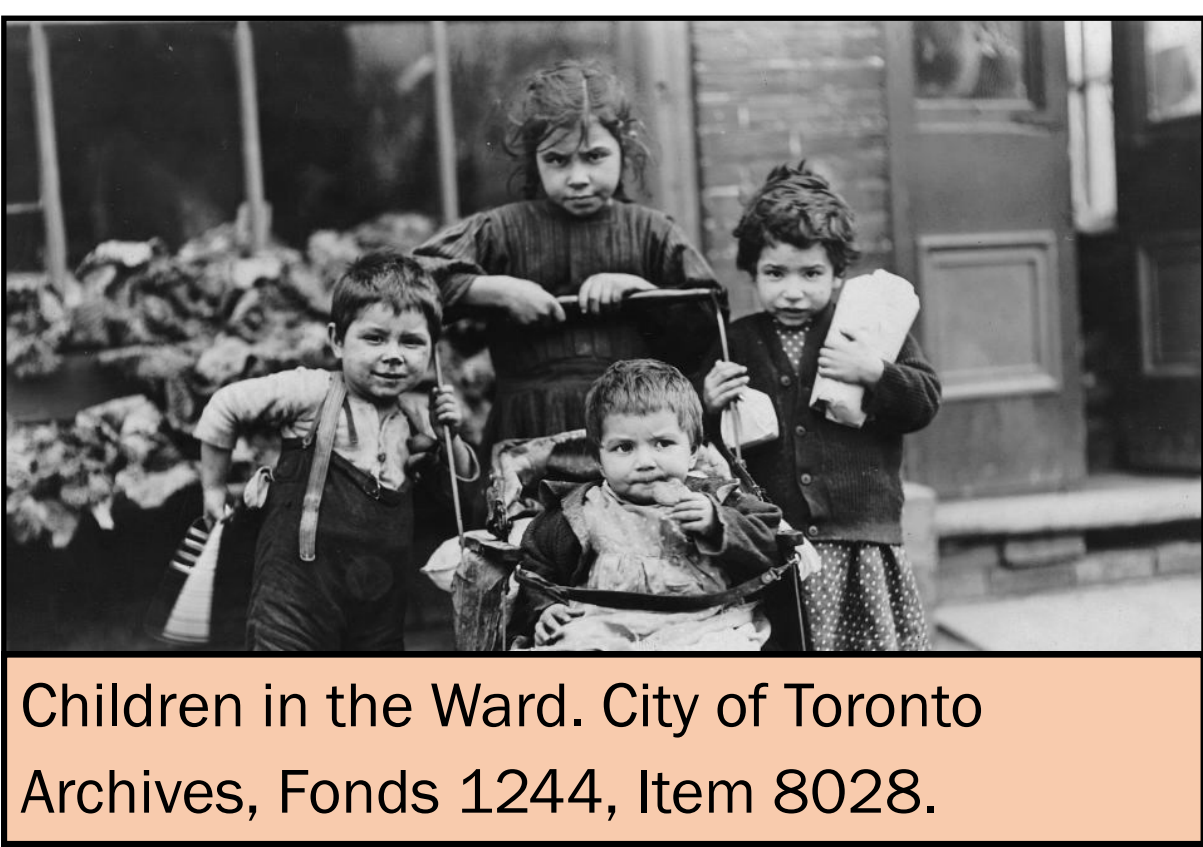


Slum house, the Ward. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 682.

and urbanization by learning firsthand of the needs of marginalized people, and offering friendship and non-denominational support. At a time when city leaders viewed social assistance with suspicion,<sup>1</sup> and anti-Semitism and xenophobia pervaded all levels of government policies,<sup>2</sup> settlement houses filled a crucial social role. They offered an alternative to workhouses, charities, and church missions, and rooted their practice in academic study and fieldwork.<sup>3</sup>

## Settlement house outreach

Settlement house workers — usually unmarried, university-educated women — saw outreach as necessary for social work. Connecting with local adults, children, and like-minded agencies, they wanted to improve the lives of the poor working class.



Children in the Ward. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 8028.

often saw grants reduced for political reasons. The viability of settlement houses thus depended on donors and volunteers.

### Cross-agency collaborations

Workers recruited subject experts to run specialized services: e.g., public health doctors and nurses to run baby clinics and first aid classes, university students to teach English, and librarians to manage book collections and story hours. Just as the Chicago Public Library had a satellite library at Hull House,<sup>5</sup> Toronto settlement house workers wanted the TPL to have a neighbourhood presence.

## Building the library & the profession

James Bain, the first Chief Librarian of the TPL (1883-1908), focused institutional building efforts on collection development and library construction. He struggled with city council over funding, and with conservatives over the value of circulating fiction, but he was also successful in earning the TPL two Carnegie grants. His successor, George Locke (Chief Librarian from 1908 to 1937), was equally determined to expand the TPL and the library profession. Locke used TPL annual reports to promote the library as a champion of education and civic values, while giving senior staff — mostly women — a platform



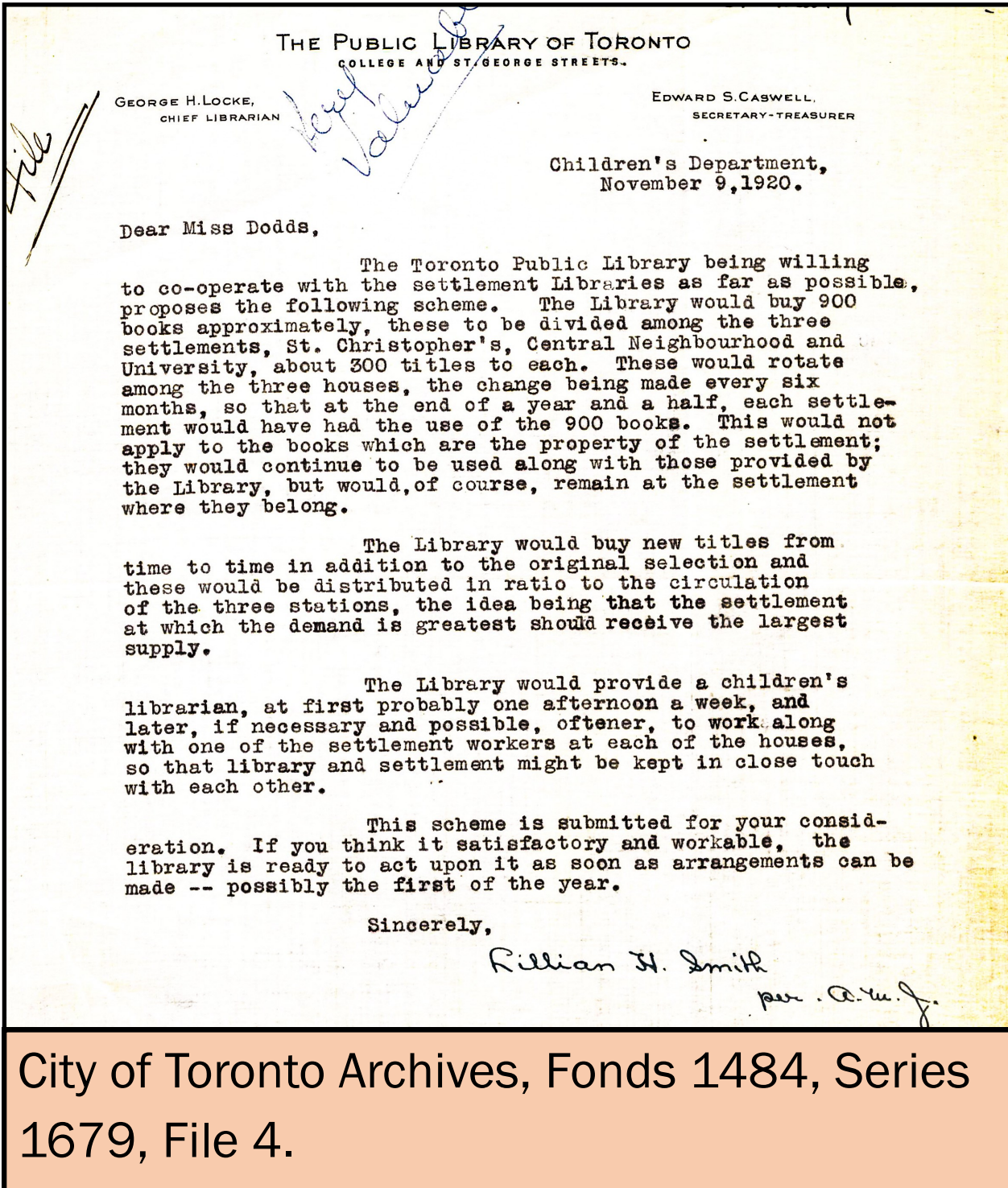
Library at University Settlement. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1024, Series 709, Item 67.

for disseminating their knowledge as managers and field experts. As a result, organizations approached the TPL for help running their libraries, including the public school board and settlement houses. The TPL initially turned down settlement work,<sup>6</sup> but changed its tune in 1920, after hosting the *Congress of Workers Among Boys & Girls* (a gathering of various social agencies) at the Reference Library.

## TPL partnership with settlements

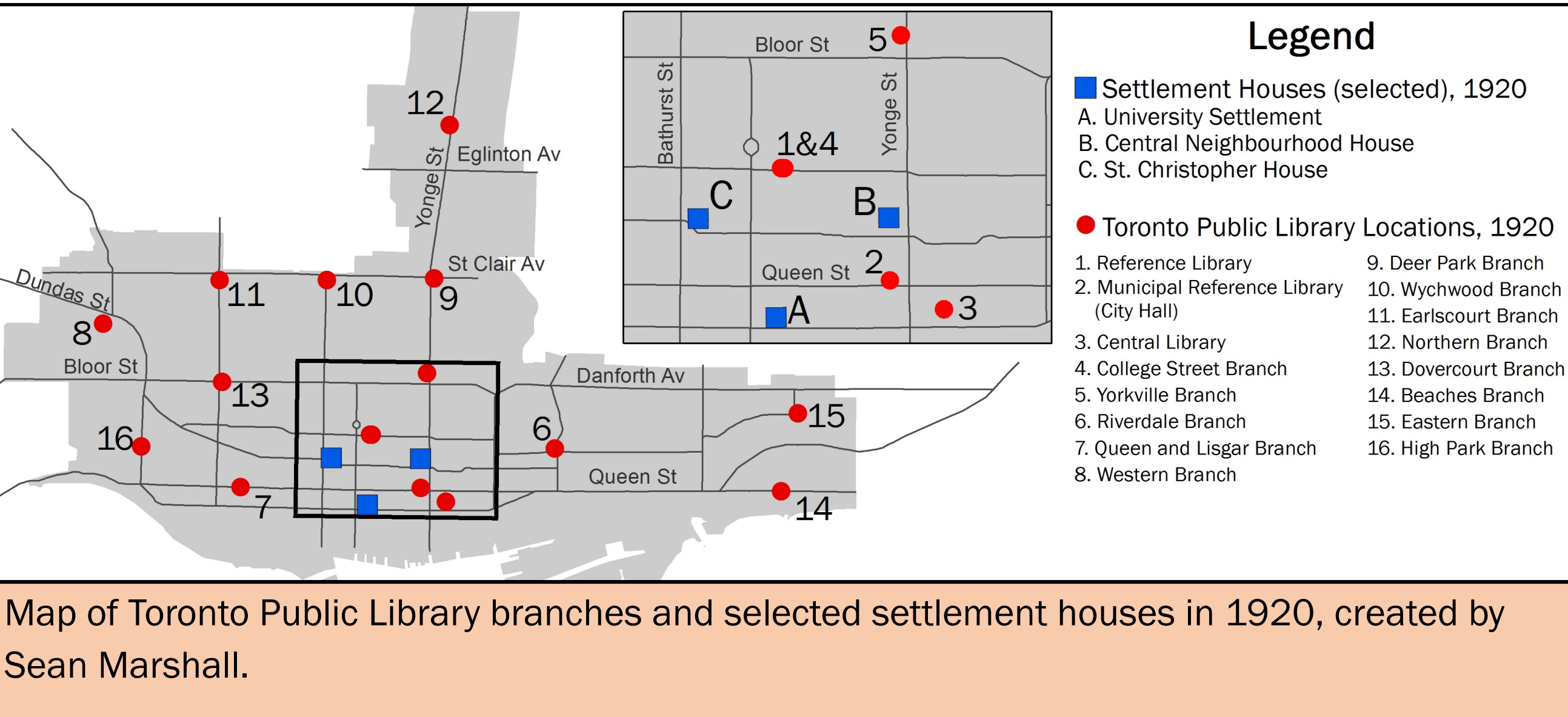
Lillian H. Smith, head of the Boys and Girls Division, persuaded Locke to assist **Central Neighbourhood House (CNH)**, **University Settlement**, and **St. Christopher House** by shifting the focus to children.

Even so, new books were hard to obtain, and TPL visits were infrequent and mostly for story hours. Settlement houses relied on donors to enrich the collections, and did not add the TPL to their budgets. Six years passed before the TPL ventured to write about its settlement work in the annual reports. Even then, the narrative fulfilled a specific agenda: to justify TPL's growth by demonstrating its societal



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1484, Series 1679, File 4.

value. The angle: to ensure that children grew up to be literate, civic-minded citizens. For the settlement houses, the TPL's presence was not a promotional vehicle so much as it was "an integral part of [the] work and meant so much to the quieter child who looks and needs solitude."<sup>7</sup>



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## Timeline

**1897:** Toronto hosts *National Conference of Charities and Corrections* (U.S.)

**1902:** Evangelia House opens.

**1910:** University Settlement opens. Jane Addams publishes *Twenty Years at Hull House*.

**1911:** Dr. Hastings publishes "slums report". CNH opens.

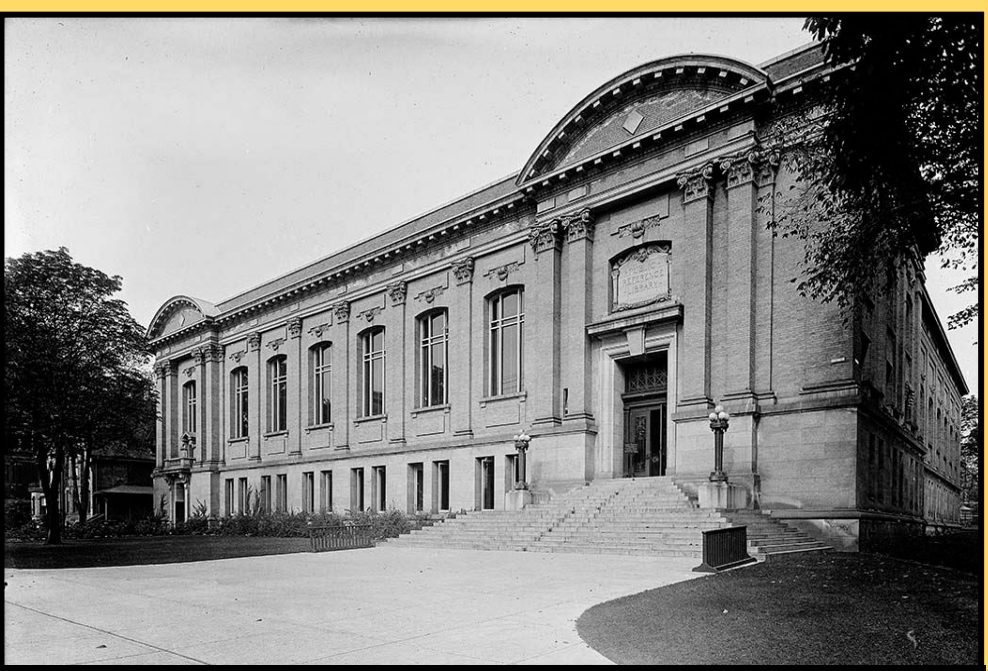
**1912:** St. Christopher House opens.



St. Christopher House. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1484, Series 331, File 13.

**1919:** St. Christopher House asks TPL for help, but George Locke declines.

**1920:** Reference Library hosts the Boys & Girls Congress. Lillian H. Smith agrees to help University Settlement, CNH, and St. Christopher House.



Reference Library, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 722.

**1923:** TPL moves its CNH services to Scott Institute. CNH runs its own library using volunteers.

**1926:** TPL returns to CNH. TPL writes about settlement house libraries in its annual reports.

**ca. 1945:** TPL leaves CNH for the last time.

**1957:** TPL leaves University Settlement.

**1959:** TPL leaves St. Christopher House.