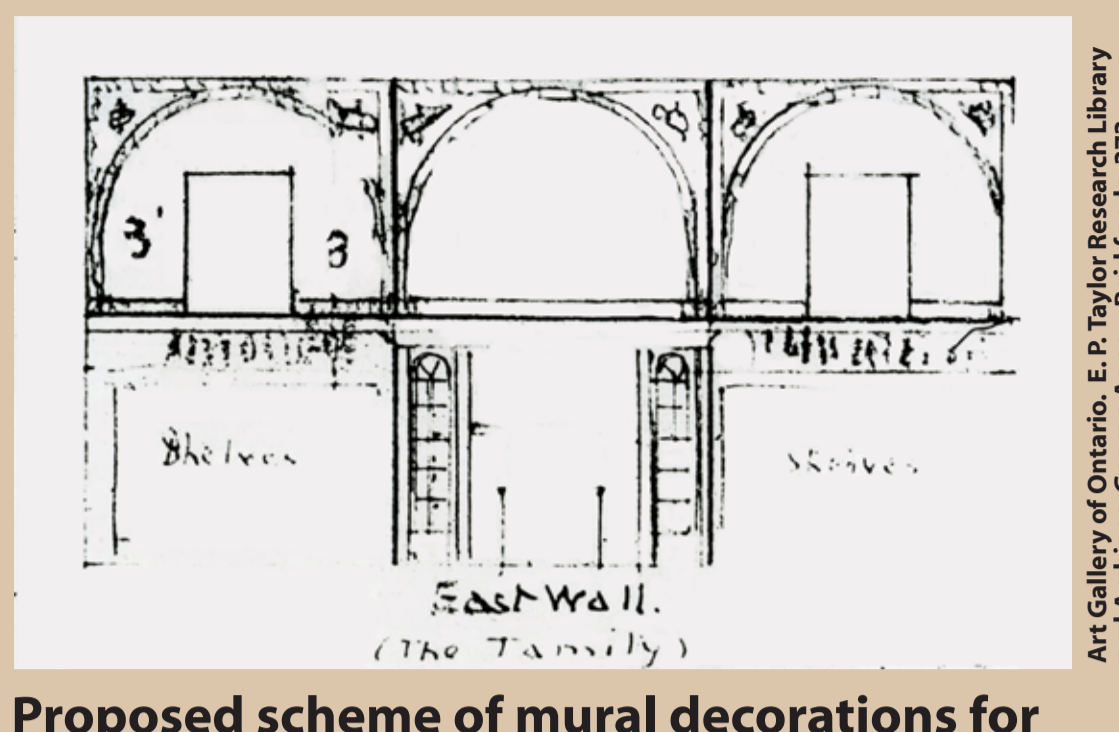


# Mural Decorations in the Earlscourt Branch

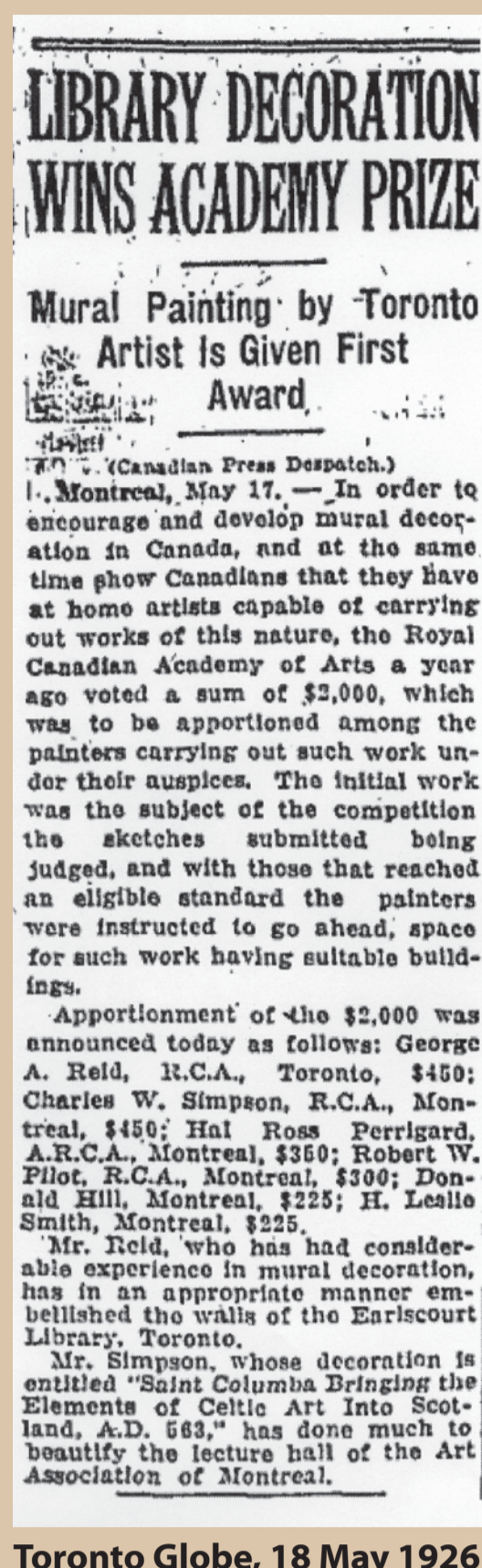
## George A. Reid Murals, The Community, Adult Reading Room, 1925-6



Proposed scheme of mural decorations for Earlscourt Library ... East Wall (The Family), 1926 (i.e., 1925)



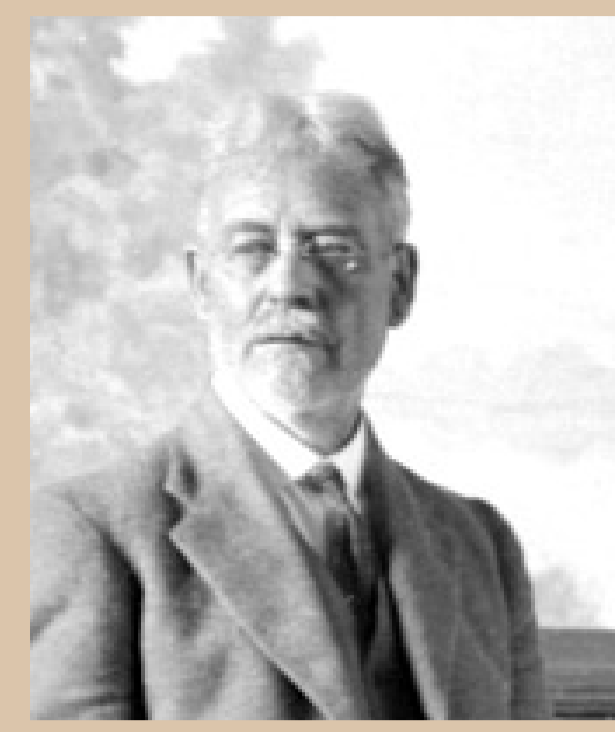
History. Charcoal sketch, 1925? Reid used a different design from this sketch to show eight "principal divisions of Literature" on the murals. History was twinned with Biography, Science with Art, Romance with Adventure, and Religion with Philosophy.



Toronto Globe, 18 May 1926

In November 1924, the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts announced its second open competition for mural decorations. It invited Canadian artists to submit sketches for interior walls of public buildings in Toronto and Montreal, and offered \$2,000 to be divided among the successful applicants to help cover the cost of materials and models.

The Academy also asked public institutions to offer suitable spaces, which, if selected, would be decorated with appropriate subjects painted at a high standard of excellence "free of cost to the owners". Unsatisfactory work would be wiped out and the wall restored to its original condition. George H. Locke, chief librarian of Toronto Public Library, suggested the Adult Reading Room of the Earlscourt Branch. A committee of the Academy approved this space "provided certain improvements were made ... in regard to the heating coils, etc.," and the library readily complied.

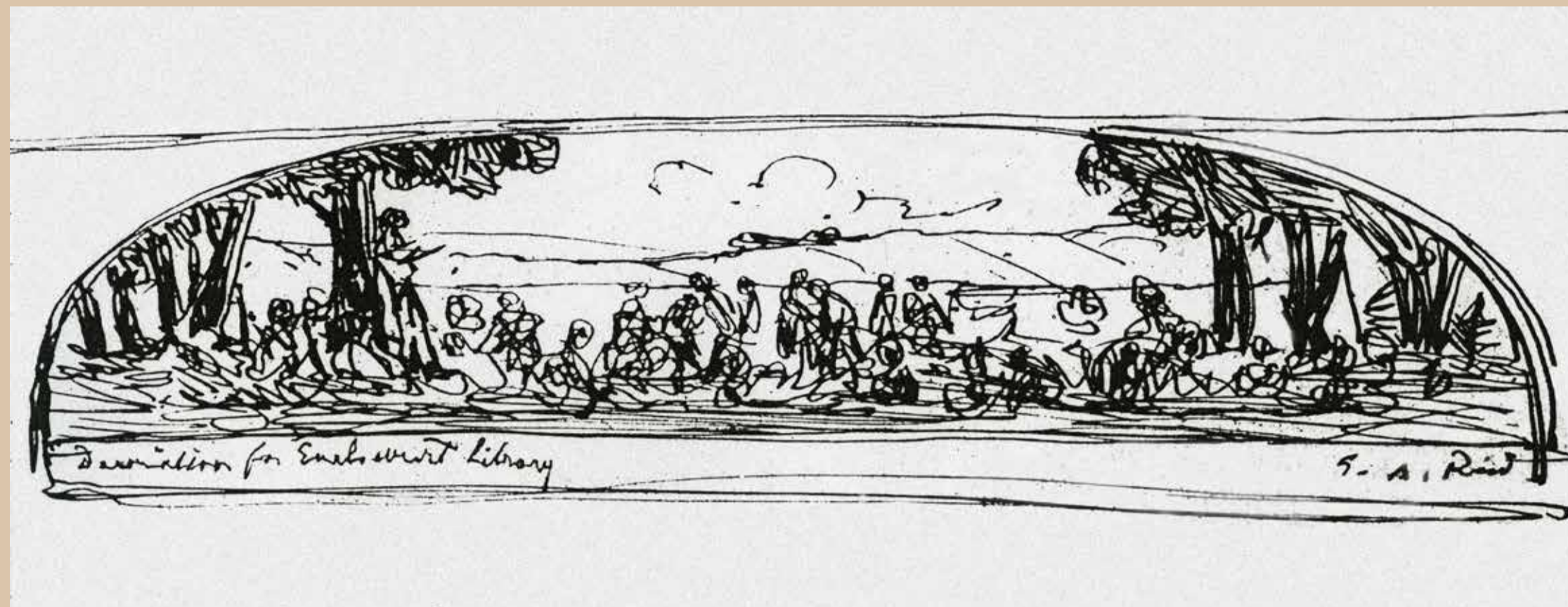


George A. Reid, 1930

The competition attracted 14 entries by May 1925, and six finalists were awarded commissions. George A. Reid (1860-1946), then one of Canada's most influential artists and the principal of the Ontario College of Art, created the design for the Earlscourt Branch, a short distance from his home in Wychwood Park. A long-time advocate of this art form, Reid's murals in Toronto include City Hall (1899), the Arts and Letters Club (1922), Jarvis Collegiate Auditorium (1928, with Lorna Claire), the Royal Ontario Museum of Palaeontology (1934-8, destroyed) and several private residences.

The Earlscourt murals represented five aspects of community life, linked with pastoral or woodland scenes, which carried the continuity. As the competition criteria mandated, they were painted (in oils) directly on the plaster walls of the library. This method, "after the style of the old masters of the time of Michael Angelo," Locke noted in 1926, was "a distinct departure from the custom of the present day," when most murals were done on canvas in a studio and subsequently pasted on the walls they were to decorate.

Given six months to do the work, Reid started his murals at the Earlscourt Branch in September 1925. In May 1926, the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts announced that Reid had captured first place in the competition and an award of \$450. The Academy formally presented his works to the Toronto Public Library Board on 10 November 1926, when the public was invited to view them and attend Reid's illustrated lecture about murals.



Decoration for Earlscourt Library. Ink sketch for The Community, 1925? This communal scene was the key panel in Reid's design.

**DESCRIPTIVE NOTE**  
OF THE MURAL DECORATIONS IN THE EARLSCOURT LIBRARY  
PAINTED BY G. A. REID, R.C.A.,  
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN  
ACADEMY OF ARTS

The Mural Decorations in the General Reading Room of the Earls court Public Library were painted in 1925 and 1926 in accordance with a scheme arranged by the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, which was intended to promote mural decoration of buildings of a public character. The Academy invited by circular various bodies to offer spaces suitable for decoration which, if selected, would be decorated free of cost to the owners and gave guarantees that the work should be satisfactory both as to appropriateness of subject and standard of excellence.

A number of spaces in Montreal buildings have been decorated and these along with the decorations by Mr. Reid were completed in May when Mr. Reid's decorations were awarded first place by the Council of the Academy.

The following is a description of the Earlscourt Library decorations:

The general subject is "Community Life", treated in an ideal manner using a sylvan and pastoral type of landscape as the setting for five groups of figures representing "The Family", "The Community", "The Story Hour", "Philosophy" and "Nature Study".

The Panel representing "The Family" occupies the space on the east end of the room over the fireplace and in this position fittingly typifies the centre and foundation of the community. The group of six figures is placed in a garden as signifying the culture of the soil for sustenance and the love of beauty.

The Panel representing "The Community" occupies the centre of the south wall. This is the largest group and is composed of the various kinds of persons forming the community. Children, youths and maidens are closely seated around a reader who stands leaning against the bole of a tree, while scattered out to the side and front are the more mature members, all listening to the reader with absorbed interest. At each end of this Panel are placed the Panels "Philosophy" at the east and "Nature Study" at the west. "Philosophy" shows the mature side of Community Life with the devotees of thought in profound discussion. "Nature Study" is represented by a group of boys and girls examining, with their teacher, the specimens they have gathered in woods and stream.

The west end is taken up entirely with a large group of children who listen intently to the teller of the story.

The north wall which is broken up by windows is entirely given up to a continuous stretch of sylvan woodland, into which the sunlight breaks in flickering spots.

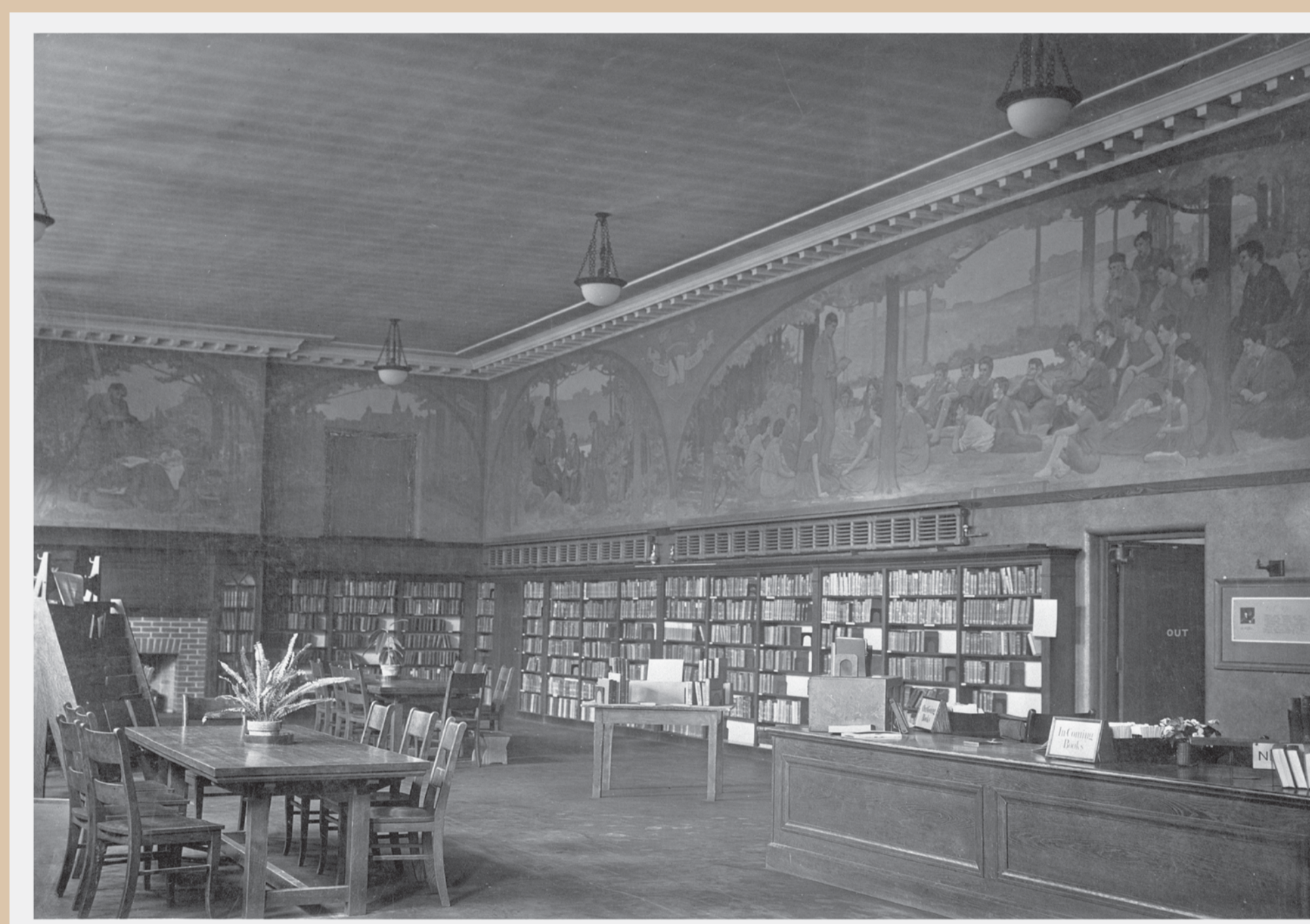
In the spandrels of the elliptically-arched border are various devices of a heraldic type, inscribed with the names of twelve British authors: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Burns, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Carlyle, Dickens, Scott, Kipling and Barrie.

The principal divisions of Literature are given on the scrolls of the four largest spandrels: Science, Art, History, Biography, Romance, Adventure, Religion, and Philosophy.

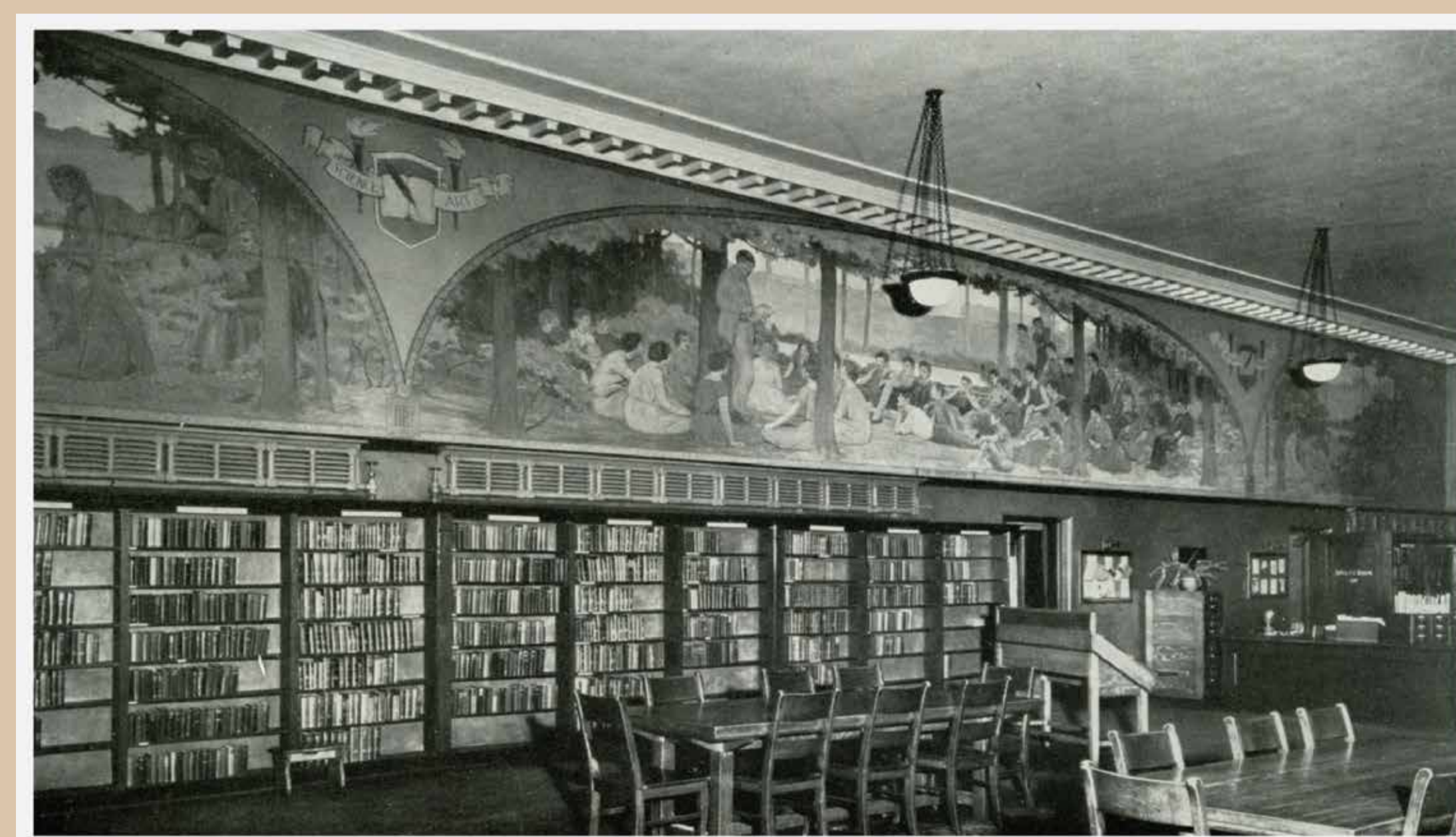
This Circular is distributed by the Public Library Board of the city of Toronto in appreciation of Mr. Reid's ambition toward the beautifying of the Earlscourt Branch of the Library and helping to make its end significant.



The Family, east wall over the fireplace, 1926  
Reid placed The Family mural in a prominent position to show its place as "the centre and foundation of the community." The garden setting signified "the culture of the soil for sustenance and the love of beauty." Names of four British authors are visible.



The Family (left), east wall over the fireplace; Philosophy (centre) and The Community (right), south wall, 1926  
The Community, the largest of the five panels, shows a young man reading to a group of people of various ages seated on the ground.



Philosophy (left), The Community (centre), Nature Study (right), south wall, 1932  
Philosophy shows older members of the community in serious conversation or intellectual discussion. In Nature Study, a female teacher and group of children are seated on the ground and examine plants. The scroll for Science and Art is discernable on the left spandrel of the elliptically-shaped borders.



The Story Hour, west wall, 1926  
A woman, probably a librarian, reads to large group of children. Although set outdoors, the scene resembles a library story hour.

## Lorna Claire Murals, Entrance Hall, 1928



East wall  
Lorna Claire (b. 1906) depicted Canada's Native Peoples, early European settlers and soldiers (the dying Montcalm may be depicted here) and provincial coats of arms with Saskatchewan and Ontario shown on this panel. The central text is by Frederick George Scott (1861-1944), known as "the poet of the Laurentians". He wrote this for the Boer War Memorial in Quebec City, unveiled in 1905: "Not by the power of Commerce, Art or Pen/ Shall our great Empire stand, nor has it stood, / But by the noble deeds of noble men - / Heroic lives and heroes' outpoured blood."



Section of the north wall  
Lorna Claire's work was sponsored by the Ontario College of Art, where she had been a prize-winning student under George A. Reid. The College presented the murals to the Toronto Public Library Board in June 1928. The murals were damaged during renovations and restoration was not possible.

## Doris McCarthy Murals, Children's Club Room, 1932



Doris McCarthy, 2002



Cinderella (right), west wall, Jack the Giant Killer (centre), south wall and Hansel and Gretel (left) east wall, 1932  
Doris McCarthy (b. 1910) was a recent graduate of the Ontario College of Art and a fledgling teacher at Central Technical School when the Toronto Public Library Board approved her sketch and paid her \$200, plus supplies, to paint scenes from children's stories.



Sections of Cinderella, west wall, December 1957  
McCarthy recalled in her autobiography: "I used fairy tales as my motifs, and the space was generous enough to allow the figures to be life-size, with the giant of Jack and the Beanstalk twice that."