

S. Walter Stewart

District Branch



~A Space Odyssey~



S. Walter Stewart District Branch

Opened 1960 ~ Renovated 2008

~ Explore All Its Spaces ~

S. Walter Stewart (1897-1969) was a pioneer of library service in East York, serving on the East York Public Library Board, many years as Chair, from its establishment in 1946 until his death.

Front Entrance

The glassed-in front entrance is a 1,065 square foot addition to the original building. It welcomes people approaching the building from north, south, east and west and incorporates an accessible ramp inside the building.

Inside the north entrance doors is a plaque commemorating the official opening on October 3, 1960. The building was designed by Parrott, Tambling & Witmer, Architects.

Interior Entranceway

Display cases feature library and community exhibits throughout the year.

East York Public Library's logo is mounted under one of the display cases. Prior to the amalgamation of seven separate public library systems into Toronto Public Library in 1998, the S. Walter Stewart Building was the main branch of East York Public Library. The logo was designed by Canadian artist, Thoreau MacDonald. He incorporated the cardinal in recognition of the tremendous number inhabiting the Don Valley. The cardinal logo is in terrazzo that was in the floor of the main entrance of the S. Walter Stewart Branch until the current renovation. The former main entrance is now the reading lounge.

Teens

Wander to the right to see the graffiti-like sign leading you into the Teens' area where there are computers, loads of books and space for teens to get together and chill.

Check-out and Returns

Customers quickly return items through the returns slots at the front desk or through the outside return slots, open 24/7, near the north entrance doors.

Self-check-out computers are available at the main service desk and in the alcove to the right of the exit. A staff member is always available in this area to welcome newcomers and to assist customers with their returns and check-outs.

The striking translucent green ice counter tops are made of Meganite.

Displays of books and DVDs surround the main service desk and nearby there is a wall of community and library information brochures and flyers.

Central Area

Walk toward the curved counters with the many computers in the centre of the building and...

Look up.

S. Walter Stewart Branch was built in the era of early space exploration and discovery, when Sputnik and the space race fired imaginations. Phillip H. Carter, lead architect in the 2008 renovation, captured that early spirit by raising the roof and imagining a space ship opening up for more exploration and discovery. The raised roof serves a practical purpose providing space for ductwork out to the perimeter of the building for better climate control.

The fabulous Douglas fir suspended ceiling is a minor miracle of gluelam beams for strength and cables connected back to the round steel columns all around.

The round columns, in turn, are borne by half the number of original brick columns on the main floor. During the renovation, every other column was removed in order to create more physical space for people and library collections and to provide vistas to the neighbourhood and natural surroundings outside. Refinished original wood beams radiating from the central area of the building sit on the brick columns. When every other of the original columns was removed, steel beams were installed between the remaining columns, perpendicular to the wood beams, in order to support the load.

A compass rose on the periwinkle overhang, designed by Phillip Carter and executed by Toronto sculptor Ludzer Vandermolten, orients customers in this round building. The compass rose's coordinates are precise.

Reading Lounge

Travel now to the southeast, past the CD browsers to the reading lounge. Originally this was the branch's main entrance. The view from the lounge is of the East York Civic Centre and grounds.

S. Walter Stewart donated ten oil paintings by Group of Seven artist A. Y. Jackson to the library. Another was donated by Dorothy Ashbridge, East York Public Library's first librarian, and two more by Reeve R. M. Leslie. Twelve of the paintings hang above the magazine shelves and the larger Gatineau Hills hangs in the alcove to the left. A plaque commemorating Stewart's donation is on the column to the right of the lounge.

S. Walter Stewart Branch History

Walk along the windows with their study tables or through the adult book collections to the Information Desk. On the columns on each side of the desk are panels showing the history of the branch through photos, newspaper articles and other memorabilia. Note the 1960 Toronto Telegram article, "Flying Saucer". This early view of the building's round flat shape inspired architect Phillip Carter's exploration and discovery theme in the 2008 renovation.

Le@rning Centre

The library building is round with three smaller round rooms on the perimeter. Each smaller room has a special purpose. The Le@rning Centre is neatly housed in one of these rooms. When the Centre is not booked for computer and electronic resources training, the computers are free to be used by anyone. The other small round rooms are nearer the front of the building, already visited: the Teens' area and reading lounge.

Elevator and Stairs to the Lower Level

In order to create the winding central staircase to the lower level, the main floor concrete slab was cut and then supported by a new set of beams. The elevator, together with the ramp to the auditorium, makes the lower levels fully accessible.

Moons, stars and planets in the café area floor at the foot of the staircase continue the branch's space theme. The bistro tables and chairs create a comfortable setting for people who want to take a break, have a chat or a snack while they are in the library. There are vending machines around the corner.

Children's library

A large display case greets children on their way into the children's area. It's always stocked with books and interesting displays to excite their curiosity.

Enjoy a wander through the large collection of children's books, CDs, DVDs and other materials and walk by the computer stations.

When you make your way back to the Information Desk, find your library card and insert it into the slot on the gateway to KidsStop. Watch the magic begin!

KidsStop

This is an interactive learning centre where parents and caregivers can help their children develop pre-literacy skills. Children explore the joy of written language through play that in turn develops their emergent literacy skills. KidsStop fires children's imaginations and creates a sense of wonder, exploration and discovery.

The S. Walter Stewart Branch KidsStop is Toronto Public Library's first. Ludzer Vandermolten took Phillip Carter's designs and created the delightfully surprising KidsStop gateway and its irresistible rocket.

Featured in this area, too, are 3 original artworks created by Toronto author and illustrator, Barbara Reid, for Read Me a Book. Look for them on the wall across from the "big book" version of this children's literature classic.

KidsStops' interactive play elements help reinforce the skills that Toronto Public Library staff incorporate in preschool Ready for Reading programs. Visit the Story Room where these programs happen throughout the year.

Pick up pamphlets with more details about KidsStop and Ready for Reading and talk with library staff about encouraging our next generation of readers!

John S. Ridout Auditorium

When you can tear yourself away from the sparkle and fun of S. Walter Stewart Branch's children's area, walk down the ramp beside the café into the auditorium.

You will pass by two A.Y. Jackson pencil sketches, donated by the artist in 1963, and by Carl Shaefer's watercolour, Wheatfield, which he donated in 1979.

The auditorium, with its small stage and Heintzman piano, is a wonderful space for programs, meetings and other events planned by the library and can be rented by community members. The room is also available for art exhibits and for quiet study space at all times when there are no events booked.

Next to the auditorium is a small meeting room also available for rental by community groups.

The auditorium was named in honour of John S. Ridout in 1995. Ridout (1926-2003) served on the East York and Metropolitan Toronto Library Boards for many years, often as Chair.

Literacy

Toronto Public Library's Adult Literacy program, which provides one-on-one tutorial support to people wanting to upgrade their skills, is offered in a large room off the auditorium. The program provides collections of print materials as well as computer programs to assist learners.

On the Outside

Following your walking tour inside, take the time to enjoy the branch on the outside. It is situated beside the City of Toronto's True Davidson Park where a tall, untitled sculpture by Canadian artist Gerald Gladstone (1929-2005) stands. This pylon was described by Gladstone as "a physical statement by an artist on a philosophical problem. The concrete represents the space that our galaxy hangs in – the bronze part represents the galaxy – the lights represent energy within it. The whole piece is based on circles and straight lines." The sculpture was commissioned in 1960 by the East York Public Library Board and is now the property of the City of Toronto.

The library branch itself is a striking civic building with its new raised roof clad in copper which blends so well with the brick of the original building.



2008 Renovation

Phillip H. Carter, Architect in joint venture with Ellen Vera Allen, Architect

Sheilagh Fletcher, Interior Designer

Ross Clair Contractors Ltd., General Contractor

Closed for construction September 2, 2006

Reopened May 29, 2008