

Children's Library Born By Work of Devoted Few

By OLIVE DICKASON

Elizabeth Murray is a great believer in a person putting her whole effort into one thing and doing it well.

Her life work has been the Montreal Children's Library, which she helped found 25 years ago today. "We opened on Oct. 15, 1929 with \$3,000 which we had collected over a period of time," Miss Murray reminisced yesterday. "With that sum we carried on for the first year, which meant buying our original stock of books and paying the librarian's salary for that time."

The library was an instant success, the tall, slim Miss Murray continued. "We began with 27 children, and before you knew it we had a membership of 700," she smiled. "Now we have four branches and 5,500 children. It has been wonderful to see it grow."

Idea Developed

Miss Murray looked back to the days when there was no children's library in Montreal. "I used to visit the librarian at the Fraser Institute and have talks with him about the lack of facilities in our city," she said. "He told me there was an empty room at the institute, and it occurred to me that it would be a wonderful idea to use it for a children's library."

At the same time, although she didn't know about it at the time, the Local Council of Women was conducting a survey with a view to establishing just such a library in the city. Both Miss Murray and the council wrote to the board of directors of the Institute, urging the establishment of the library. "I had been to call on all the directors urging them to support the venture," Miss Murray said. "When they agreed to the project, our troubles were only started, as we then had to raise the money. The most difficult thing of all, though, was to find a qualified librarian."

Librarians Scarce

A librarian was finally brought down from Toronto but not before considerable delay, Miss Murray continued. "In those days it was all but impossible to find a qualified children's librarian, and even today they are difficult to find," the Montrealer observed. "It is pleasant and satisfying work besides being creative... I should think more young girls would be interested in it."

Miss Murray herself acted as

librarian for two afternoons a week for 12 years, as well as handling a story-telling period Saturday mornings. "I enjoyed every minute of it," she smiled, and went on to recall such incidents as two little girls coming to the library with an alarm clock all set "because we never remember to get home in time for supper."

Learning English

Another incident she recalled was a Polish refugee, an adult, who asked if he could become a member of the library as he believed that reading children's books would be the best way to learn English. "He got on very well, and is now working in Ottawa," Miss Murray said.

"Lasie Come Home" was easily the most popular of children's books during her time as librarian, Miss Murray said. "You never could imagine a book so popular... we had five copies at the Mackay street branch alone, and one was never in the library more than five minutes."

She is looking forward to continued growth of children's libraries in the city. "One good idea is the establishment of a corner for teen-age readers," she said. "It keeps them coming to the library after they have out-grown the childhood classic stage. Books needn't be dull to be good, and if they're interesting they will attract the young people."

Miss Murray comes by her role as founder naturally: her mother, Mrs. Clarke Murray, founded the I.O.D.E. Her father was professor of mental and moral philosophy at McGill for 35 years.