

## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Local History Room Naming: The Gladys Allison North York History Room

**Date:** February 26, 2024  
**To:** Naming Committee  
**From:** City Librarian

#### SUMMARY

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The purpose of this report is to seek approval to name the newly renovated North York History Room at North York Central Library (NYCL) as the Gladys Allison North York History Room to recognize the role Gladys Allison played in establishing public library service in North York. The name Gladys Allison has been associated with library service in North York since 1959 when the original Central Library was named the Gladys Allison Building. In 1987, when the new NYCL building opened, the local history and genealogy department became known as the Gladys Allison Canadiana Room. Transferring the name to the newly established North York History Room respects the original naming decision and recognizes Gladys Allison's connection to the North York history collection. The Room opened to the public in October 2023.

The proposed name complies with Toronto Public Library's (TPL's) [Naming Policy](#) and is aligned with the City's new [Commemorative Framework](#).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **The City Librarian recommends that the Naming Committee:**

1. approve the name of the newly renovated North York History Room at North York Central Library (NYCL) as the Gladys Allison North York History Room and recommend this naming to the Toronto Public Library Board for approval.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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This report has no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

## ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

This naming proposal is aligned with TPL's strategic priority Opening up our Public Space. A focus on equity is also embedded throughout [TPL's Strategic Plan](#) to ensure that library services and actions break down barriers to access and increase inclusion. The launch of the newly established Gladys Allison North York History Room will provide the community with a chance to connect more deeply with local history resources, staff expertise, and each other through TPL's programs, services and collections.

## EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The opening of the Gladys Allison North York History Room will have a positive impact for anyone seeking historical information about the North York community. All community members will have equal opportunity and access to the resources, services and programs offered in the space. Naming the space as the Gladys Allison North York History Room provides historical context and recognizes the importance of offering and supporting local history services. The name also aligns with the City's new Commemorative Framework, which

prioritizes equity-deserving groups, including women as an underrepresented group, to be commemorated.

## ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Gladys Allison Canadiana Room, located on the sixth floor of the North York Central Library, closed in 2016 in preparation for the North York Central Library renovation. Most of the collection was relocated to the Toronto Reference Library, with the exception of material related to North York history. This collection, along with the North York Historical Society's collection, which was donated to TPL in 2015, remains at NYCL along with the Golden Lion sculpture, which, as of 2017, is on permanent loan. As part of the renovation, plans were developed for a Local History Room and it was suggested at the time that transfer of Gladys Allison's name be incorporated into plans for the new space to continue to recognize the vital role she played in developing library service in North York.

The new North York History Room, located on the fifth floor of NYCL in the Society and Recreation Department is now open to the public.

Prior to opening, staff developed a service plan, described below, and curated a collection for the room. When the plans were developed for the renovation, incorporating transfer of Gladys Allison's name into the name of the new Local History Room was discussed and shared as a suggestion with key stakeholders, including the North York Historical Society.

## COMMENTS

### **Gladys Allison's Relationship to Library Service in North York**

Gladys Allison (1901-1979) moved to the Willowdale area in 1936. By 1945, she helped to establish a small lending library staffed by volunteers in the basement of the Willowdale United Church, with support from the provincial Department of Education.

In 1950, the North York Public Library (NYPL) was officially formed, operating out of a single room on the ground floor of the then new North York Memorial Community Hall (5090 Yonge Street). Gladys became the Chair of the North York Library Planning Commission in 1953 and by 1954, she spearheaded and launched a bookmobile service.

In 1955, the North York Public Library Board was formed (of which Gladys was a member), and in October 1959 the NYPL opened the first municipally owned library building at 5126 Yonge Street, officially named the Gladys Allison Building. Gladys became chair of the North York Public Library Board in 1961.

Gladys was also a founding member and later board member of the North York Historical Society.

In 1972, Gladys was awarded a North York Golden Anniversary medallion for her years of work to make "North York a good place in which to live".

In the early 1990's, the Heritage Services Section of the North York Property and Economic Development Department recommended a new street name in close proximity to the library which has particular historical significance to the area. A street near NYCL now bears the name Gladys Allison Place.

### **Considerations related to the Transfer of the Gladys Allison Name to the North York History Room**

TPL's [Naming Policy](#) establishes the process to name TPL branches, rooms, programs, or collections. TPL has a history of naming branches, rooms, programs and collections for their geographic location, function, or subject or to honour individuals or donors. The policy sets out criteria and conditions for naming with and without a gift.

The decision, made in 1959 by the former North York Public Library Board, to recognize Gladys Allison's contributions continues to remain in alignment with TPL's current Naming Policy. As stated, "consideration may be given to the naming of rooms after an individual whose contribution to the Library or the City of Toronto is well documented and is widely recognized and valued". Naming the Local History room as the Gladys Allison North York History Room

continues to commemorate her vital role in both establishing public library service in North York, and in founding the North York Historical Society. It would also continue the established tradition of officially naming library services after her in North York: first, the original Central Library (the Gladys Allison Building) from 1959-1985; then the Gladys Allison Canadiana Room in the North York Central Library from 1987-2016.

TPL's Naming Policy states that: "When a branch or room is named after an individual, that name will be effective for the useful life of the facility or collection or for a term as specified in the terms of the agreement. Should a physical facility be replaced or substantially renovated, or the use of an area redesignated, the renaming of the facility may be considered." In addition, "appropriate recognition of previous donors or honorees may be included in the new or renovated facility."

In July 2022 the City approved a new Commemorative Framework which outlines six [Guiding Principles for Commemoration](#) for new proposals to commemoratively name or rename streets and City properties:

1. Be informed by historical research, traditional knowledge and community insights.
2. Be supported by communities through meaningful engagement.
3. Honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being.
4. Prioritize commemorations significant to Indigenous Peoples, Black communities and equity-deserving groups.
5. Connect to Toronto, Ontario or Canada's histories and cultures.
6. Share knowledge and stories behind commemorations.

Although the request to carry forward the Gladys Allison name to the North York Local History Room is not technically within scope of the City's Framework given that it is not a proposal for a new commemorative name, the approach is in general alignment with the Guiding Principles.

The City's Commemorative Framework include a process to request review of existing names that may be problematic. There have been no known complaints about the use of Gladys Allison's name or associated discriminatory views or actions identified.

## **Service Model**

The new local history space is open for full NYCL operating hours, and includes:

- A curated collection of approximately 875 books, 140 maps, about 1,500 photographs, 1,200 files stored in vertical file holders, 680 microfilm reels and 4,000 microfiches, and 12 periodical and newspaper titles. Items deemed to be of significant value, irreplaceable and/or requiring climate controlled conditions are housed in the 6<sup>th</sup> floor stacks.
- Several print finding aids covering material such as: vertical file headings, voters' lists, postcards and posters.
- Bound NY Historical Board/Heritage Committee minutes, NY Council Meeting Minutes, and NY Board of Education Minutes.
- Staff expertise for local history research and reference services.
- Glass display space for photos, materials of interest and small historical artefacts.
- Two computers with ScanPro 2200 machines for microfilm/fiche reading, including an ability to save images.
- Study tables and a large mounted screen for digital signage that can also be used during programs.
- Adaptable space that can accommodate some small to medium-sized programs to help support the collection and lifelong learning, in collaboration with the North York Historical Society.
- The historic Golden Lion sculpture (ca. 1840), on permanent loan from the North York Historical Society, is located in a glass enclosure on the fifth floor. The sculpture graced the entrance to the landmark Golden Lion hotel located at the corner of Yonge and Sheppard until 1928.
- Signage will be developed for display on the glass partition leading into the space and on wayfinding signage.
- A recognition event will be planned in conjunction with the North York Historical Society.

## **CONCLUSION**

Incorporating Gladys Allison's name into the name for the new North York Local History Room is even more appropriate now that the focus of the collection is on North York History. It continues to honour and respect the original 1959 naming decision along with her connection to the collection, library service and

the North York Historical Society. Current policies support the transfer of the name to the new service.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Vickery Bowles  
City Librarian



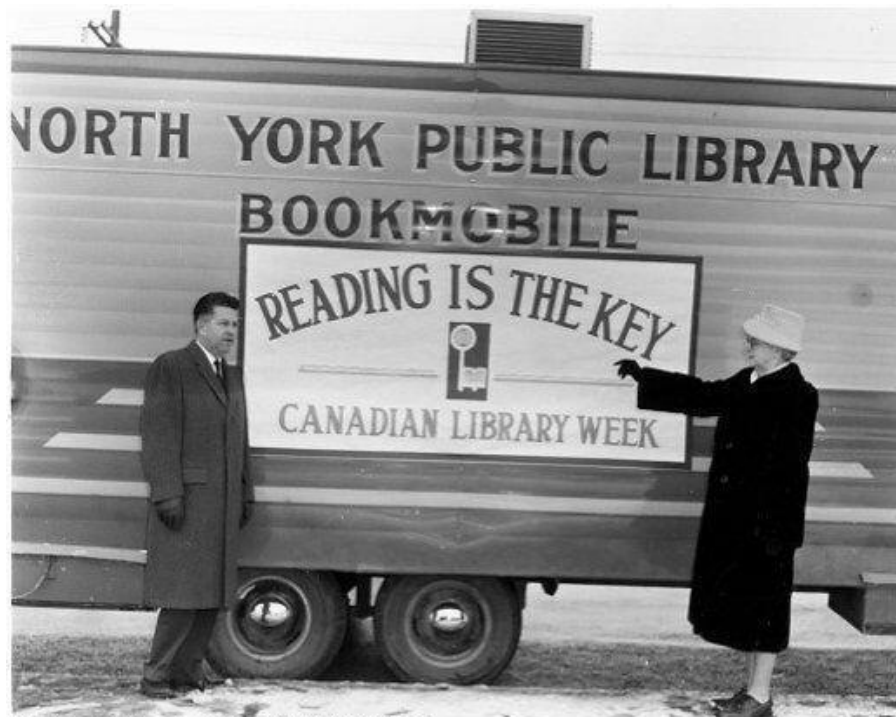
# Naming Committee

## Gladys Allison Local History Room

February 26, 2024



# Gladys Allison Local History Room



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 217 f0217\_s0246\_f0317\_A0002

Gladys Allison, at the 1964 inauguration of the bookmobile  
North York Historical Society

# Gladys Allison Local History Room

- Naming Policy states that “Appropriate recognition of previous donors or honorees may be included in a new or renovated facility”
- Gladys Allison has been associated with library service in North York since 1959
  - driving force behind the creation of the first North York Public Library in 1959, and a founding member and later chair of the North York Library Board
  - the original Central Library was named the Gladys Allison Building from 1959-1985
  - Gladys Allison Canadiana Room in the North York Central Library from 1987-2016
- Transferring the name to the newly established North York History Room continues to honour Gladys Allison’s connection to the North York history collection