

Atwater Library's 190th Anniversary Reception – November 21, 2018

Notes for address by John Aylen, President

When you turn 190, you can't expect many of your contemporaries to come to your birthday party. When the Mechanics' Institute came into being in 1828, I'm sure that Sir William Kempt, Governor of Lower Canada, Louis Gogy, Sheriff of Montreal, John Molson, Horatio Gates, Louis Joseph Papineau and Rev. Henry Esson would not have expected we would pronounce their names here today 190 years later.

And that's exactly why I am saying their names.

When you turn 190, you can't expect many of your contemporaries to come to your birthday party. But you hope that some of your great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandchildren do. And that is who we are. Figuratively, we are their descendents and the keepers of the great legacy they created.

When you turn 190, you can't expect many of your contemporary institutions to still be there. And you would be right. Most of the great Montreal anglo institutions are no longer here.

But we are.

We are here as a building, a mighty fine one, only our second home in 190 years, and we are here as an institution.

We are here because of people like you, people like us, who care deeply about the institution, caring deeply about preserving it and evolving it so it continues to be relevant and to serve its community. And that's what we are doing.

Foremost among these people are our dedicated volunteers and our wonderful staff.

Foremost among them, are our wonderful executive directors over the years, two of whom are here today.

Susan McGuire – I can't imagine holding an event to mark our remarkable history without your being on hand.

Not only was Susan the volunteer executive director prior to our current one, she is also responsible for researching and publishing our history, which I am hoping you will consult on our website.

My remarks would not be complete without signalling the contribution of Lynn Verge, our current executive director who has stewarded our library through thick and thin. A lot of thin and quite a lot of thick.

I am happy to say we are more vibrant, more successful, more useful that we have ever been. Our founders would be proud. And we should all be proud too.

I also want to mention that Lynn Verge was honoured last night at the Quebec Writers Federation Gala for her contribution to Quebec writing. They gave her the Judy Mappin award for her community contribution. It was very much merited.

One of the worst places you can be is between people and their cake. So I am going to step aside and ask both Lynn and Susan to make at least the first ceremonial cut of our birthday cake.

Congratulations, Mechanics' Institute. Congratulations Atwater Library. Congratulations everyone.