

A Literary Ramble

The modern **Elma Turner Library** **1** opened in 1990 and bears the name of the woman who campaigned for decades for free and excellent library services for Nelson. It is the library's fourth permanent home and some of the original books from 1842 can still be found in the present day library reference room.

In Bridge Street is the attractive building of the **Nelson Mail** **2**. Robert Lucas started Nelson's first daily newspaper in 1866. Early newspapers were a vital part of colonial life. Papers Past, a database available free at the library, gives access to early papers such as the Nelson Evening Mail and The Examiner, the first newspaper published in the South Island in 1842. The first Nelson Mail building was destroyed by fire but a replica can be found at Founders Heritage Park on 87 Atawhai Drive, along with printing presses and other memorabilia.

Charles Elliott, publisher of the Examiner, opened the first bookshop in Nelson in 1842, one of the earliest in New Zealand. Jesse Hounsell and Robert Lucas were both selling books in 1865, and books were often sold alongside other merchandise. Oswald Curtis held book auctions in Trafalgar Street in the 1850s as did Alexander Aitken, who ran a circulating library.

New Zealanders continue to be avid readers and many booksellers can still be found with long histories. Local independent booksellers **Page and Blackmore** **3** was the result of a merger of Pages bookshop started in 1910 and the ABC Bookshop started in 1964.

A Historic Places Trust plaque by The Nelson Women's Club marks **the site of the first library** **4** founded by The Nelson Literary and Scientific Institute in 1842. The 700 books and "a sum of money ..for books of a useful character.." that formed the nucleus of

the Library, were pledged by a committee formed on board The Whitby in 1841. This included Arthur Wakefield, Frederick Tuckett, Alfred Domett, B.E. Duppa and W. Curling. Charles Elliott managed the library and reading room until William Moses Stanton was appointed as the first paid librarian.

Thomas Cawthron, founder of the Cawthron Institute, was known for his generous civic gifts, including these granite **Church steps** **5**. His gift to the Nelson Provincial Museum of a unique book Collection, dating from 1773 to the early 1920s, provided the nucleus of the museum's research library collection at Isel Park, Stoke.

The second library building opened in 1861, purpose built to house both library and museum. The foundation stone for this is now found in the foyer of Elma Turner Library. It was a subscription library with a membership fee and a fee for each item borrowed. The library did not become a free service until 1972. The wooden building succumbed to a spectacular fire in 1906. Images of this can be seen In The Nelson Provincial Museum's interactive street map which takes you back in time to trace early streetscapes.

Fortunately most books were saved and the library moved to temporary premises until the third new permanent library and museum building opened in 1912 on the same site. This is now known as the **School of Fisheries building** **6** who were the subsequent tenants when the library left this site and went to its fourth permanent home in 1990. The old wooden lean-to at the back, remnant of the 1861 building, became the Children's room in 1935.

A history of the library and people who shaped its development can be found on www.thePROW.org.nz which tells the stories of the Top of the South.



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Early European settlers who came to New Zealand wanted to improve their lot so they turned to books to satisfy their thirst for knowledge. Nelson is home to the oldest library in New Zealand and our Literary Ramble celebrates this and some of the people who helped make books accessible for all in the past.

For more information on Nelson's Heritage Week, other heritage walks and our heritage management go to www.nelsoncitycouncil.co.nz or visit our friendly customer service centre.

