

Mayor Walter Sendzik and Members of City Council:

I am writing to express concern about the ongoing plundering of one of the cultural treasures of this city, i.e. the Special Collections Room of the St. Catharines Public Library.

The Special Collections Room was established decades ago as a resource for local historians and genealogists to use to understand, publicize and encourage study of the history of this city and of Niagara more broadly. The room has become a home to valuable books, periodicals, and original documents related to our history. It encourages the work of local scholars and draws in scholars from far and wide who are studying local subjects of national and international significance – the Underground Railroad and iconic figure Harriet Tubman, the Welland Canal (a key North American transportation corridor), the War of 1812, the Fenian invasions of 1866 and 1870, the manufacturing history of this country (notably our city's role in the automotive industry and in ship building), . . . (There's many a book whose acknowledgements page salutes the Special Collections Room of the St. Catharines Public Library.)

For the past 25 years I've been writing the "Yesterday and Today" series of local history articles in *The Standard*. During that time I've spent many hours benefitting from the holdings of the Special Collections Room and its knowledgeable staff.

However, in the past year I have become concerned by the steady discarding of a significant part of the Room's holdings -- the cessation of having any knowledgeable staff available to aid visitors and researchers in accessing the sources they are seeking and to maintain the security of the room's sometimes valuable holdings -- and the failure to have one Special Collections librarian responsible for preserving the existing collection and guiding the growth of the collection in future.

As I consider all this I'm reminded of an occasion a couple of decades ago when our Library's Special Collections Room was given provincial recognition by the Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS) for its services to the study of this community's history and heritage. I fear that the same Special Collections Room – which ought to be a subject of local pride – is now being steadily dismantled.

Is this what the City of St. Catharines wishes to achieve? I hope not.

Dennis Gannon,
St. Catharines