

# Many Happy Returns

Julia Matthews, former Museum librarian comes back to lead ROM ReCollects, our Centennial celebration

BY MATTHEW CHURCH

**I**n 2012, planning first got underway on the Royal Ontario Museum's 100th birthday in 2014. The feeling right away was that there had to be a multitude of perspectives, and that among the most important would be those of the audience and users of the Museum ("ROM-goers," you might say) throughout its history. Thus was ROM ReCollects born.

Designed to encourage, facilitate, and organize contributions of the public's anecdotes, memories, and reflections to our Centennial celebrations, ROM ReCollects would need a unique person to lead it. It would require someone with a passion for history, someone with an appreciation for the role the ROM has played in the past, someone who could tackle a large and evolving project with intelligence and passion.

For Dan Rahimi, the ROM's vice president, Program, and the man overseeing the ROM ReCollects project, the perfect person was obvious: retired librarian Julia Matthews. "Not only had Julia been at the ROM for nearly a quarter of a century, she had worked in the library and had been responsible for the Museum archives. She had been the lead on ensuring public access to the collections. She was perfect."

Of course, when she first started back in 1982, the ROM was a different place than it is today. "Before I was hired, I remember the museum director taking me for lunch to discuss the job. In hindsight I think he was checking out my table manners, to determine if I belonged at the Royal Ontario Museum." (Now in his 80s, he recently met with Julia to offer his memories to ROM ReCollects.)

It was also a time of exciting change at the Museum. "It was exhilarating! There was such tremendous spirit," says Julia now. "There was an excitement about the new spaces, new labs, new equipment. A whole new outlook really." To be a librarian at that moment, on the cusp of the digital revolution, meant that change was the one constant.



Now museums, including the ROM, are more open, more inclusive and collaborative. There is less of a "because I said so" attitude, says Julia. "Look at [ROM CEO] Janet Carding's idea of the Museum as a collection of Centres of Discovery. That signifies a major change: we are putting the audience first."

And when it comes to stories, Julia has more than a few of her own. Among her favourites is the time she pulled an old *Baedeker* guide to Egypt off the shelf and out of it fell two rail tickets that had belonged to Charles Currelly, first director of the ROM of Archaeology. Or the request that still makes her laugh: "Someone told me they needed a 'a photograph of Toronto before anyone lived here!'"

As Julia says, "a good librarian has the capacity to match an individual with content and make a link that will last a lifetime. To do that you have to be a good listener."

Which is pretty much what Julia will be doing between now and the March 2014 kickoff of our Centennial: listening to you and thousands more who share their stories about the ROM. □

HERE'S HOW YOU  
CAN GET INVOLVED...



- Patrons, donors, members, join in! Share your impressions and memories. Comment and expand on what others have submitted.
- Help us make a record of 100 years of collecting, exhibiting, interpreting, and engaging people.
- Send us your images, video, written or spoken words. These will be compiled and arranged on our website during the next year.
- Visit [rom.on.ca/en/about-us/rom-100/rom-recollects](http://rom.on.ca/en/about-us/rom-100/rom-recollects).