

Toronto Public Library  
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## **NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Toronto Public Library Highlights Sci-Fi Prophets**

(Toronto, Ont., May 1, 2025) On May 11, the Toronto Public Library (TPL) is opening a new exhibit at its Lillian H. Smith branch to highlight works of science fiction that predicted the future.

The exhibit, titled *Inventions and Innovations*, features science fiction books and art that anticipated technologies that are common today. These works are curated from the TPL's extensive Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy, housed at the Lillian H. Smith branch on College St.

"I think our visitors will be fascinated to see how science fiction has often guided technological development," said Margaret Asimov, librarian and head curator at the Merrill Collection. "Wristwatches, cell phones, organ transplants and the internet all began as figments of some author's imagination, and now they're real."

Vickery Bowles, the TPL's City Librarian, stated: "This exhibition is a reminder of the Library's rich collection. We hope that it will inspire Torontonians to come visit their local branch."

*Inventions and Innovations* will be on display from Sunday, May 11 to Sunday, July 27. Visit at 239 College St., 3rd floor, and find out more at <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/merril>.

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### **About Toronto Public Library**

Toronto Public Library is the biggest and busiest public library system in North America, with more than 46 million annual visits to our branches and online. We empower Torontonians to thrive in the digital age and knowledge economy through easy access to technology, lifelong learning, and diverse cultural and leisure experiences, where, when and how our customers need us. To learn more, visit [tpl.ca](http://tpl.ca).

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## Fact Sheet

- The TPL is North America's largest and busiest public library system. It hosts 46 million visitors annually in its branches and online. 68% of Torontonians use the library, according to a survey in 2019
- The TPL has over 100 branches and two bookmobiles. It holds over 10.5 million items in its collections in over 40 languages. In 2023, library materials were borrowed 25 million times, and 252,000 people registered for a library card.
- The TPL is home to many services beyond its circulation desk. In 2023, it hosted over 33,000 in-person library programs and 1000 online programs attended by over 45,000 people. Six million people used the public wifi and 1.9 million people used the public computer workstations.
- The earliest roots of the TPL can be traced back to 1810. It became the Toronto Public Library in 1883. Its current form is the result of an amalgamation of seven library systems in 1998.
- The Lillian H. Smith Toronto Public Library Branch is named after a librarian who oversaw the expansion of the TPL's childrens' services. The College Street branch was named in her honour in 1995.
- The Judith Merril Collection is named after the renowned American-Canadian science fiction author, who was instrumental in popularizing science fiction in North America. She donated a collection of over 5000 science fiction books to the TPL in 1974.
- Merril was politically active as a Marxist and a Zionist. Her first published novel is about atomic bombs being dropped on New York City. She moved to Canada in protest of the American suppression of Vietnam war protests and spent the rest of her life involved in the anti-war movement.
- Merril acted as curator of the Judith Merril Collection until her death. She was known to have periodically lived in her office at the Collection, sleeping in a cot.
- The Judith Merril Collection hosts a monthly science fiction book club and maintains a regular series of exhibitions. Its materials can be viewed in its reading room but are not available for circulation.

## Backgrounder

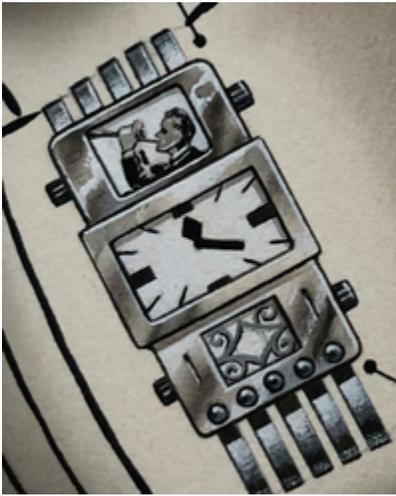
The Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy is a collection of over 80,000 books, graphic novels, pulp magazines, periodical, original art, manuscripts, and role-playing game books. It is housed on the 3rd floor of the Lilian H. Smith TPL branch at 239 College Street.

The Collection was started in 1970 when sci-fi author Judith Merrill donated over 5,000 books to the TPL. It was originally called the Spaced Out Library. Judith Merrill was the pen name of Judith Grossman, who immigrated to Canada from the United States in 1968. She was hugely influential as both an author and an editor, and helped nurture Canada's burgeoning sci-fi scene by starting Canada's first association for science fiction writers, the Hydra Club North. She died in 1997.

Today the Merrill collection houses many unique and rare items; a first edition of H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*, a CD collection with the sounds sent on the golden discs of the Voyager spacecraft, and periodicals from 1875 that contain the world's first vampire story are all available to the public. All items in the Merrill Collection are viewable in the Collection's reading room but are not available for circulation.

The *Inventions and Innovations* exhibit displays items from the Collection that show technological innovations before their time. Sci-fi authors were often ahead of the curve of technological development, imagining things that would only become reality years later, like submarines, wristwatches, organ transplants, cell phones, and the internet. The exhibit investigates the relationship between art and science and shows how science fiction has often led technological development. The TPL hopes that the exhibit will raise awareness of the Merrill Collection and get more readers interested in sci-fi.

## Images



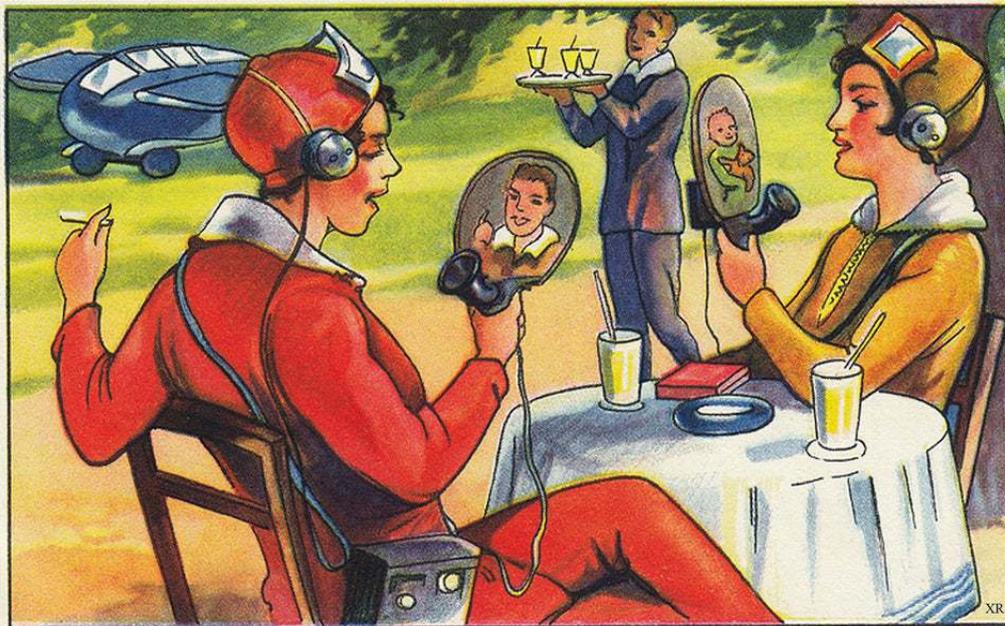
Promotional image used for the *Innovations and Inventions* exhibit. Image of a watch taken from the Judith Merrill Collection.



Judith Merrill posing in the collection in 1985.



The interior of the Lilian H. Smith Toronto Public Library Branch.



Painting from the collection *France in the Year 2000* by Jean-Marc Côté (1899) showing an early imagining of cell phones.