

Feds Curb Canadian Access to Library on the Border

New Homeland Security rules require separate entry point

By [Aviva Bechky](https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/authors/aviva-bechky/)

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Inside the Haskell Library, a black line on the floor marks the border between the United States and Canada, which patrons from both countries can freely move across.

courtesy of Sylvie Boudreau

For more than a century, Canadians have used nothing but a narrow sidewalk to cross their national border into Vermont and enter the Haskell Free Library and Opera House. Inside, a line of black tape on the library's floor demarcates the US-Canada border, and patrons from both countries can freely move across it. Anyone who lives within a 30-mile radius of the library is eligible for a library card.

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Ada EZach Knippen writes: "In honor of National Library Week, teachers and staff [at Ada



(Ohio) Exempted Village Schools] cooperated on a fun event for their students. Teachers volunteered to be a 'Masked Reader' and picked a book to read in their mask, and just like the show *The Masked Singer*, their voices were modified so the students couldn't easily guess them. 'I've heard kids of all ages, I'm saying kindergarten through 12th grade, who have just been chattering this week about the videos that they saw and guessing who they were,' said District Librarian Chanda Smith."

[WLIQ-TV \(Lima, Ohio\), Apr. 10](#)

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Robin Camille Davis writes: "Are you the only



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US Rep. Natalie M. Blais (D-Mass.), who grew up in nearby Derby Line, Vermont, calls the library her “entryway to other worlds growing up in a really small town.” The line on the floor delineating the border, she says, never seemed particularly important.

“It just wasn’t something that we paid attention to,” Blais says. “Being in the library, it wasn’t important where you came from.”

Now, however, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has announced plans to limit access to the library from the Canadian side of the border. Until October 1, library cardholders coming from Canada can still use the sidewalk to cross. After that, anyone in Canada who wants to use the library’s main entrance must cross at an approved checkpoint or use an entrance on the Canadian side of the library that is about to undergo renovations.

Recognized as a national historic site in Canada, the library is also listed on the US National Register of Historic Places. Since its founding in 1901, the building has become a symbol of international cooperation as well as a community resource for neighbors in Derby Line and in Stanstead, Québec.

Years ago, as a student at Stanstead College—a Québec boarding school that lies less than two miles from the library—Jack Walker marched in Armistice Day parades that led toward the border, into Vermont via the sidewalk, and into the library for speeches and a musical performance.

“Americans would use the library, and Canadians used the library,” Walker says. “We always thought about it as kind of a beacon of neighborly cooperation and participation.”

But since the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001, the library has faced increasing headwinds from border control, says Sylvie Boudreau, president of the library’s board of trustees.

Those headwinds turned into a gale January 30, when DHS Secretary Kristi Noem visited (<https://www.ctvnews.ca/montreal/article/dhs-secretary-kristi-noem-accused-of-referring-to-canada-as-51st-state-at-quebec-vermont-border/>) the library, saying, “USA number one” on the American side before stepping over the line into Canada and saying, “The 51st state.”

At that point, Boudreau says, “I knew it was a question of time” before the US entrance closed to visitors from Canada.

Increased border enforcement is necessary, DHS argues, to prevent drug traffickers and smugglers from using the library as a site for illegal activity. The department reports that in fiscal year 2024, it recorded 147 apprehensions, one vehicle incursion, and four vehicle seizures surrounding the library.



(https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0c4AEbW2iMv1j91w4HwiCo1eFqpnVsRzWuQUVkw8qGv1FHJJtRtSDd8edBUQfsel&id=61573177956173)

Until construction of a permanent entrance, parking lot, and access ramps are complete, patrons and staffers coming from Canada are encouraged to use the emergency-exit door on the library’s Canadian side.

Photo: Haskell Free Library and Opera House Facebook page

“We are ending such exploitation by criminals and protecting Americans,” a department official wrote in a March 21 statement.

Boudreau, who worked for years in Canadian customs, says she understands DHS’s concerns. In 2011, for example, two Americans smuggled about 20 guns into the library and stashed them in a bathroom; a Canadian retrieved the weapons and sold them in Québec. Nevertheless, Boudreau is determined to maintain the library’s accessibility on both sides of the border.

For now, Boudreau encourages patrons coming from Canada to use the emergency-exit door on the Canadian side, even though library members will be allowed to walk along the sidewalk to the main entrance for a few more months. Library staffers who live in Canada are doing the same.

“We don’t want them to have any problems” such as being arrested or fined, Boudreau says.

To address the issue in the long term, the library’s Canadian side is being renovated to include a permanent entrance, parking lot, and access ramps. Boudreau’s goal is to finish the renovations by July—and, powered by community donations, she may be able to.

Individual contributions, a [GoFundMe](#),

(<https://www.gofundme.com/f/haskell-infrastructure-overhaul?modal=contact>) and a CanadaHelps fundraising page have already brought in more than \$200,000.

Best-selling Canadian author Louise Penny, who writes the popular [Armand Gamache](#) (<https://www.booklistonline.com/products/1636640>) mysteries, has visited and held events at the Haskell for years. In fact, several scenes in her next book are set at the library.

The author argues that libraries and learning institutions, which she calls “conduit[s] for a dissenting voice,” are often early targets of “tyrants.” She hopes that the changes at the library will serve as a wake-up call to “how vulnerable these institutions are.”

“If they can do it to the [Kennedy Center](#) (<https://www.npr.org/2025/02/12/nx-s1-5294697/trump-kennedy-center-chairman>),” Penny says, “can you imagine what they can do to the Haskell?” ■

AVIVA BECHKY is a journalism student at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Their work has appeared in *The Oregonian/OregonLive*, *Block Club Chicago*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The Seattle Times*.

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