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ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN AFRICA

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LIBRARY SERVICES IN NORTHERN RHODESIA

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although the first public library in Central Africa was opened in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia in 1896, it was not until 1928 that in Livingstone, then the capital of Northern Rhodesia, a small public library was started.

Elsewhere in the Territory there were a few libraries in clubs or Women's Institutes, begun and maintained by local initiative, financed by local subscriptions, staffed by untrained though enthusiastic local voluntary staff. It was this pattern of small local libraries, mainly fiction, which characterised the services of the Territory over the next decade.

Even to-day in the rural areas it is usually the club library which serves the small pockets of European settlements, while the occasional Welfare Hall library is available for the African population around the District or Provincial Headquarters. Except in the schools of the Territory, it is along the line-of-rail that there has been most development, albeit unco-ordinated, in library facilities.

EXISTING SERVICES

The existing services may be grouped under the following heads:-

- (a) National Library System
- (b) National Reference Centres
- (c) National Lending Service
- (d) Libraries of Information and Research
- (e) Libraries of Formal Education

- (f) Libraries of Informal Education and Recreation
- (g) Libraries for Special Categories of Readers
- (a) National Library System

With the exception of the National Free Library Service, mentioned below, there is no national library system in any of the three territories of Central Africa.

(b) National Reference Library

By Ordinance, a copy of all printed material published in Northern Rhodesia must be deposited in the Archives. For convenience, the Archives of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland are centralised and situated in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia.

(c) National Lending Service

Although there is no separate national lending service in the Territory, Northern Rhodesia may make use of the National Free Library Service of Southern Rhodesia, a part of the Bulawayo Public Library. Essentially a student service, the library is free though users must pay the return postage and a returnable deposit equal to the value of the books borrowed.

(d) Libraries of Information and Research

The Secretariat Library at Lusaka, which is designed to serve all Government Departments with current administrative material, and has attached to itself the nucleus of a postal service to public servants throughout the Territory, is a very good one and has a full-time librarian in charge. There is also a small library for the use of members of the Legislative Council. In addition, many of the Government Departments have small technical libraries for the use of their own staff.

The library of the Central African Archives at Salisbury serving all three territories, is very complete and well organised.

Scattered throughout the Territory are certain other technical libraries, such as those at the Mines, at Magistrates Courts, etc. though there is inadequate cataloguing of these resources.

At the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum at Livingstone, and at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Lusaka, there are very good libraries with trained librarians in charge.

(c) Libraries of Formal Education

Virtually no library exists for either Higher Education or Technical Education though it may be assumed that this situation will alter with the growth of the Central African University now being set up.

School libraries, though by no means perfect, are growing rapidly and, though accommodation is difficult, are playing an increasing part in the curriculum of the schools. To the European, Indian and Coloured Schools grants are made annually by the European Education Department for the extension and maintenance of the school libraries and, in addition to basic grants, £1-for-£1 grants are made to those schools where Parent-Teachers Associations have raised funds through their own initiative. At Headquarters there exists a technical library for the use of the staff of the schools and also there is a special library holding sets of Readers, supplementary to the normal English course, which may be borrowed by the schools for use as additional readers for the class. Similarly, the African Education Department makes grants both to Government and aided schools for the provision and maintenance of school libraries. Mwalali Secondary School, the African Secondary School at Lusaka, has one of the most adequate libraries of formal education in the country. Educational films, film strip and picture libraries are also maintained by both Departments of Education.

(f) Libraries of Informal Education and Recreation

Free libraries exist at Livingstone, Lusaka and Ndola whilst on the Copperbelt the mine libraries are open to the general public. Those at Livingstone and Ndola are grant-aided by the local authority, that at Lusaka is wholly rate-supported, the mine libraries are maintained by the mine clubs themselves. Also along the line-of-rail there exist a few commercial libraries, e.g. that of the Astonian Press at Lusaka.

Elsewhere, as has already been mentioned, club or institute libraries exist, maintained by subscriptions.

(g) Libraries for Special Categories of Readers

Most hospitals have libraries; most prisons have libraries organised by local welfare associations; there is at present no library for the blind.

Although the services outlined before can serve the needs of the well-educated African, for the vast majority of the African population, with little English or literacy in the vernacular only, a separate service has grown up. This aims at providing books either in simple English or in the vernaculars.

In the urban areas the provision of library facilities at Welfare Centres is the responsibility of the local authority. Through the recently formed Department of Welfare and Probation Services the local authority can receive 50% grants from Government for this purpose. Although the adequacy of provision varies with the enthusiasm of the local Welfare Officer, most Welfare Centres have libraries and well-equipped reading and writing rooms.

In the rural areas, although funds are available from Provincial sources, progress has been slower owing to the lack of any central organisation.

It is the intention of the Department of Welfare and Probation Services to turn its attention to the provision of really adequate library facilities in both urban and rural areas as soon as staff becomes available.

Mention here must be made of the work of the Joint Publications Bureau of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. This Bureau was formed (i) to produce books of general interest to Africans (ii) to encourage African authorship (iii) to co-operate with other departments in producing books required for Community Development and (iv) to co-operate with British publishers in producing sound books in the vernaculars and English.

In 1937, when the African Literature Committee was first formed, the need for books produced for this specialised reading public was anticipated. Since then the Committee and the Bureau, which took over the work of the Committee in 1947, have been responsible for the production of over 40 books in Simple English and over 100 in the vernaculars. Thus a supply of suitable books has been available for the static libraries of the Territory and this year the Publications Bureau is starting a system of distribution, by vans, of books both for sale and for library use, intended in the main for Africans in the remoter rural areas.

Thus, although the Bureau exists primarily for the production of books for sale to Africans, by encouraging the desire to read, its work is complementary to, and not competitive with, library services and forms a link between the trade on the one hand and the Education and Welfare Services on the other.

GENERAL SUMMARY

Although it can be said that there is no National Library Service, co-ordinated as such, in Northern Rhodesia the separate elements of such a service do exist, either in the Territory itself or, with comparatively easy access, in the neighbouring territory of Southern Rhodesia.

Sources of Information

"Library Services in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland"
a report by D. H. Varley 1951.

Additional information obtained from the Departments of African Education; European Education; Welfare and Probation Services; Commissioner for Native Development and Publications Bureau.