

Research Libraries in South Africa

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WHEN I TRAVELED from New York to Cape Town less than seven years ago, I came by cargo boat on a regular Europe, America, round Africa, back to Europe route. I asked the ship's engineer what his normal cargo to and from Africa was. He replied, "Missionaries on the way out, wild animals on the way back." This was doubtless an exaggeration and out of date when he said it, but there was a time, and not so long ago either, when it was not completely untrue.

Today, however, the passenger list of each air liner touching down at Johannesburg or ship calling at Cape Town and Durban as often as not contains the name of a great industrialist or well-known scholar. The former is tempted by a still largely unexploited continent, and the considerable supply of labor that goes with it. What brings the latter in increasing numbers to our shores? It is surely the realization that here we have a natural and human laboratory, a happy hunting ground, for the sociologist, anthropologist, archaeologist, botanist, zoologist and medical researcher.

But what resources in the printed and written word can the continent offer? From the days of the Alexandrian Library, Egypt and North Africa have frequently been great reservoirs of the printed and written word. However, it would seem that their present-day resources (little known though they are) are outside the scope of this survey in that the cultures that they represent are of Oriental rather than European or African origin. A desert is a more effec-

tive natural barrier than a mountain range or even an ocean, and Africa south of the Sahara rather than Africa as a whole is a unit after the fashion of North America, South America, or Europe.

It is probably true to say that, before the last world war, no single collection of books running into five—let alone six—figures existed between the line of latitude running through Cairo and the one running through Johannesburg, surely one of the most poverty-stricken library areas in the world. Even today, apart from the collections being built up by the Central African Archives in Salisbury (which should be visited), the library of the University College of Ibadan in Nigeria, and certain collections in the Belgian Congo, this statement is still largely true.

One is thus brought back to the fact that the libraries of the Union of South Africa are likely to remain for some time the main on-the-spot quarry for any scholar living and working in Africa. As a country of settlers from Europe, South Africa is almost as old as the United States, but its oldest library is less than 150 years old. Little is known of books and readers before the first British occupation at the end of the eighteenth century. However, the smallness of the population alone, less than 25,000 (limited to an area one-tenth the present extent of the country) and the lack of a printing press were factors hardly conducive to the building up of large libraries. Such collections as there were—and there is some evidence of the existence of "gentlemen's libraries" belonging to Dutch and later to British officials—have vanished almost without

trace, one of the few exceptions being the Dessinian collection (dating from the mid-eighteenth century), which formed the basis of our oldest library, the South African Public Library, founded by a British governor in 1818.

The rest of the country, now the provinces of Transvaal, Orange Free State, and Natal, did not develop on any large scale at all until well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed the most significant industrial development of the country, a development quite out of proportion to the growth of its white population, has taken place in the last 20 years.

It is perhaps more appropriate and more in accordance with historical perspective if, in surveying the library scene, one starts at Cape Town, landing at the base, so to speak, rather than dropping by air into the front line at Johannesburg.

In many ways, of all the "new countries" of the world (the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand), South Africa has the closest cultural ties with Europe. A pleasant and not too long sea voyage and, until the present century, the lack of facilities for higher education in the country itself, fostered these close ties. Nor has the tie by any means been exclusively with Britain. A South African professor is more likely to hold a doctorate from Leyden or Munich than from Oxford or Cambridge. The familiarity of most South Africans with Afrikaans has insured that the German and Dutch languages are never quite regarded as foreign languages to the extent that they are by the Englishman or the American. However it must be admitted that the educated South African's familiarity with cultures other than the Dutch and German (with French and Italian for example) is much thinner than is the Englishman's. Indeed, to an English immigrant the South African's concept of British culture itself

sometimes appears a bit superficial and distorted.

Before describing the contents of the various South African libraries, it is as well perhaps that something be said about Africana. It is as well because the South African librarian will allow little time to elapse before uttering the inevitable "But I must show you my Africana."

What is Africana? Africana is any book, pamphlet, anything connected with South Africa. Africana is also the disease or mania of collecting Africana. It might easily be assumed that the South African librarian's, the South African millionaire's, and indeed any South African's interest in this field sprang from his nationalism. But this is not really the case. South Africa has crammed an awful lot of complicated history into 300 years of a small country.

The earliest collectors in the field were not South Africans, but immigrant Englishmen fascinated by the past and the present. The fruits of these early collectors found their way into the libraries of the country, notably the Mendlesohn collection into the Library of Parliament and the Gubbins Collection into the Witwatersrand University Library. Perhaps the finest Africana still in private hands is the Campbell Collection in Durban. It will be likely to find its way to the Natal University Library.

The deposit of these two collections, greatly enriching what were comparatively poorly stocked libraries, has led to intense competition among all libraries of any standing at all, to build up similar collections—this in the face of competition by private collectors. Other Africana collections of note in the country are in the South African Public Library, Cape Town, a collection with an older history than the Mendlesohn and Gubbins, and in the Johannesburg Public Library, which, together with the Africana Museum associated with it, must surely be one of the largest and

best organized "local collections" (even if of continental dimensions) in the world.

In gauging the significance of this type of collecting, it must be realized that the libraries concerned compete against each other in collecting in the whole field (in the geographical sense) of Africana. Indeed in some respects the purely *local* collection, in the English librarian's sense of the term, has even been neglected. Some idea of the costs of competition may be gathered from the fact that the standard bibliography of Africana (Mendlesohn) until reprinted a few months ago brought \$250; indeed it is even doubtful that the reprinting will have much effect on the price of the original edition.

The Van Riebeeck Society has printed at a cost of a 10/- annual subscription about 30 original historical manuscripts in the last 20 years or so. A set now fetches \$400—a good investment for the annual subscriber. Even in the realm of out-of-print textbooks, figures like \$25 are not uncommon, while the standard work on South African architecture fetches \$150.

I have spoken at some length on this subject because there is no doubt that Africana has had a large effect on the content and scope of the average South African library. On the credit side, it has no doubt meant that South Africa does not suffer quite so much as some countries in losing its original material to overseas institutions. On the debit side there is no doubt that if even a small proportion of the effort that has gone into Africana collecting had gone into collecting in other fields, the contents of South African libraries would have been far more catholic than they are. As it is, time and again requests for material on interlibrary loan are returned from the state library in Pretoria, which acts as the center for this service, marked "not available in South Africa."

Fortunately there are signs that several of the leading libraries are beginning to realize the importance of, if not the necessity of, a modified Farmington Plan for South Africa, at least the cultivation of a Farmington Plan attitude. As South African industry is developing at a tremendous rate and yet with a scarcity of skilled labor, so is South African scholarship often handicapped by the lack of the necessary research works. South African libraries are at a stage where their task is to get books into the country, not just current material but the older works as well. America's and Britain's problem of the overwhelming size of their libraries is hardly of interest to South Africa as yet.

The American visitor, if he reads these lines *after* visiting our libraries, may feel that my remarks about our resources are perhaps too critical and carping. He will have been agreeably surprised at the good service and comparatively modernity of our half-dozen larger libraries, which do go a long way towards compensating for the poverty of our collections.

The writer has held appointments only in the Cape and Durban areas and must apologize to any of his colleagues who may read this article if it appears that his account of the resources of the Pretoria-Johannesburg area is sketchy. While several South African libraries, notably the South African Library, the Cape Town University Library, and the Johannesburg Public Library issue interesting annual reports, few have produced comprehensive accounts of their collections, on the lines of the *Guide* issued by the British Library of Political Science. A list of special collections in the scientific and technical field is available in Mews' and Krige's *Directory of Scientific, Technical and Medical Libraries in the Union* issued by the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. A comprehensive compilation of the collections in the

humanistic field is in preparation. Useful too is Kritzinger's *List of Libraries in Government Departments* issued by the Government Printer. A wider field than the Union is covered by the *Directory of Scientific and Technical Libraries South of the Sahara* published by the Scientific Council for Africa South of the Sahara.

In Cape Town there are possibly as many different books as there are people, that is, about half a million. This city has by far the longest record of publicly housed libraries. The Dessinian Library, now integrated in the South African Library, was formed in the middle of the eighteenth century and would appear to have been available for public use before the first British occupation. Book stamps reveal that libraries for military personnel, parish libraries, even a branch of Dr. Bray's clerical libraries, were in existence before the middle of the nineteenth century. The greatest impetus to library development was the foundation in 1818 of the South African Library. This institution is unusual in that it appears to be the only example of an attempt to reproduce that unique institution, the British Museum Library, which it must be remembered was itself at that time hardly out of its teen-age. Its type of governing body was and is a curious replica of its infinitely larger and richer prototype. Like the British Museum, it consists of various collections, kept separately, besides the more recently accumulated main collection.

It benefited considerably by the acquisition in the middle of the nineteenth century of Sir George Grey's library. It is remarkable, when one considers that even 100 years ago this library possessed its Shakespeare folio, illuminated medieval manuscripts and incunabula. Indeed its holdings of material of antiquarian interest must, at that time, easily have stood comparison with libraries on the North American con-

continent. It is probably still the strongest of any library in the country in its holdings of the standard works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is a library of a kind in which discoveries can be and are still being made. Its long history as a copyright deposit library renders it very strong in all the earliest South African imprints and it has good runs of newspapers and journals. This library and the Cape Archives, situated nearby, are the sources to which the historian should turn for the papers of South African statesmen and families. It is also the most bibliographically active library in the country and its librarian is, by virtue of his position, cognizant of other sources of material in various parts of the country.

Situated literally within a stone's throw of this library are the Library of Parliament, with its Mendlesohn collection of Africana; the Library of the South African Museum, containing like many other South African museums good runs of journals in the fields of the natural sciences; the Diocesan Library of the Church of the Province of South Africa, a library with a long history which is well worth a visit; and the law libraries of the Cape Supreme Court and of the University of Cape Town's Faculty of Law. Nor are the bookshops to be despised. Besides local firms, branches of well-known British and Dutch firms will be found. German firms are located in the Pretoria area.

The other group of libraries in Cape Town is represented by those of the university, situated about four miles out of town. The university library has developed rapidly in the last 20 years and is now the leading university library of the country. Although not as strong in Africana as one might expect, it shows its strength in other directions possibly of more value to the researcher. Its medical library of 40,000 volumes, housed in a separate building, can more than stand comparison with the average university

medical library. So can its music library with its 12,000 scores, 4,000 records, 3,000 volumes, and specially designed listening room. However, it has not specialized to any extent in the music of the native peoples, for which one must turn to the African Music Society in Johannesburg. The library of the Royal Society of South Africa is housed in the university library and their amalgamated holdings of scientific journals and of the proceedings of learned societies from all parts of the world are perhaps the best quarry we have for the natural scientist. The Bleek Library of publications in the African languages contains many scarce early imprints of the various mission presses already active 100 years ago.

No visitor to the university library should pass over the library's well-equipped photographic department, which will be able to give the visiting scholar good service wherever he may be. The library of the Bolus Herbarium is a fine collection of systematic botany containing many pre-Hookerian imprints. It has recently been enriched by the accession of General Smuts' botanical library. Botanists should visit the library of the Botanical Gardens on the slopes of Table Mountain. The university library, like the South African Library, is active in the bibliographical field.

Students interested in the Afrikaans language and literature will find most of the larger libraries rich in these resources. Possibly the most comprehensive early collection of Afrikaans imprints is in the South African Library. Cape Town University is fairly rich in manuscripts of such writers as Louis Leipoldt and in the philological connections of the "Taal" with European and other languages. Perhaps the most comprehensive collection of the whole output in Afrikaans over the last 30 years will be found in the Johannesburg Public Library.

Most South African university libraries are stronger than the average American and British university library in the languages, literatures, and culture of the Low Countries. French studies are poorly represented in South Africa, Cape Town University perhaps having the strongest collection. A visit to the Cape's other university, Stellenbosch, 30 miles from Cape Town, should include a visit to the Seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church, which is strong in Protestant theology. The archives of this church, being in good order, are invaluable to students of the early history of South Africa. They are housed in Cape Town.

The third educational centre in the Cape Province is that at Grahamstown, where Rhodes University will be found. This university library is strong in the papers of early British settlers. Incidentally, it has produced in mimeographed form a good set of instructions for dealing with private papers and letters, a field of librarianship about which little has been written. In quite another field, Rhodes University possesses the library of the Leather Research Institute.

Scattered throughout the province are many small public libraries, originally run on a subscription basis, including several over 100 years old. The city library of Port Elizabeth is of some size and the others, although small, may produce some surprises for the curious visitor, notably that of Kimberley, which is rich in the older standard works on the fine arts.

The Orange Free State is not very rich in collections. Librarians interested in buildings should visit Bloemfontein, where new edifices for the public library and university library have recently been erected. The former is strong in drama and the latter has a considerable Africana collection. The university librarian will be able to put the botanist in touch with a valuable private botanical library. In Bloemfontein is situated the Harvard University Observatory, the

collection of which is part of Harvard University Library.

In the southwest corner of the Transvaal is Potchefstroom University, the only university in South Africa closely associated with a religious denomination, that of the "Dopper" branch of the Dutch Reformed Church, Paul Kruger's church. This university library is growing fast and has a most interesting recently erected library building, of which it might be said that the university is housed in the library. Many of the professors' private rooms have been deliberately placed in the library in close juxtaposition to material on the subjects for which they are responsible.

Our journey now brings us to the Transvaal and the Pretoria-Johannesburg area which, with the Cape, is the country's biggest book center. The Johannesburg City Library is, like the New York Public Library, a prominent building in that it is centrally placed and conspicuous in that it is not a skyscraper. As a city library, despite its poverty in suburban branches, it can be said to be one of the foremost in the world. Its Africana Library and Museum should on no account be missed by any visitor to South Africa. It is strong in holdings of journals of all kinds, particularly on engineering. Material on all parts of Africa will be found here. Other material characteristic of a large public library includes patent literature, incunabula, and a very comprehensive range of bibliographical reference works and sources.

The library of the University of Witwatersrand is only slightly smaller than that of Cape Town, and, with a longer active history, is in many respects more comprehensive. Its strong points are its Gubbins collection of Africana, a library of musical philology, a library of Anglican theology, and many works of a bibliophilic and bibliographical interest.

Besides these collections, it has a medical library similar in size to that of Cape

Town. The library of the Institute of Medical Research also is situated in Johannesburg. A library of recent development but of great value is that of the South African Institute of International Affairs, in which will be found a good collection of official publications of all African territories.

In Pretoria, 40 miles away, will be found the various libraries of the government departments, since Pretoria is the administrative capital of the Union. The largest of the government department libraries is that of the Department of Agriculture, which has branches in various parts of the country. Other government departmental libraries of value are those of the Botanical Department, Native Affairs Department, and Education Department. A visit should be made to the Veterinary Institute at Onders-tepoort, one of the most remarkable institutes of its kind in the world, brain-child of the late Sir Arnold Theiler. The Transvaal Museum Library is a strong museum library. Pretoria University Library is strong in German publications of all kinds, the German or Dutch textbook perhaps taking preference over the English textbook at this university. The library of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research should be visited by all scientists studying in South Africa, not only for its runs of scientific journals, many on microfilm or microcard, but also for its unique contacts with South African scientists, scientific institutions and industrial concerns. For similar reasons a visit should be made to the State Library, the Staatsbibliothek of the old South African Republic. It performs functions similar to those of the National Central Library in Britain, namely those of organizing the loan of material from one library to another throughout the whole country. This nationwide interlibrary loan system is well organized and compensates to some extent for the poverty of individual collections. Pho-

(Continued on page 191)

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- Manuscript Collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.* Comp. by Lucile M. Kane and Kathryn A. Johnson. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1955. 212p. \$3.60.
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Research Libraries in South Africa

(Continued from page 140)

tography is generally used in place of loans.

The youngest area industrially and in library resources is that of the Durban-Pietermaritzburg area. Natal University Library, with its Institute of Social Research (at which American professors such as Brunner of Columbia have recently worked for long periods), is fairly strong on sociology as is the city library, a library to which almost half of the local European population belong. The university library has a growing collection of material on the Indian subcontinent, and the curious may like to visit the Mahatma Gandhi Library and the library of the Arabic Study Circle. The university library is strong in runs of engineering journals and in geology. Its recently established medical library is small compared with those at Johannesburg and Cape Town. The medical faculty, which it serves, caters primarily to non-European students. Fortunately it has received considerable help from medical libraries in America and Britain. Natal is one of the big sugar-growing areas of the world, and a library containing a comprehensive collection of

material on this product will be found just outside Durban, namely that of the Sugar Experimental Station at Mount Edgecumbe.

In Pietermaritzburg, good collections of zoological journals will be found in the Natal Museum and in the library of the university. This city contains the Natal Society Library, a subscription library almost as old as the "colony" itself. Perhaps the most rewarding visit will be that paid to the private library and museum belonging to Miss Killie Campbell. Situated in her own home in Durban, this collection, cared for by Miss Campbell herself, with lady assistants, contains books (26,000 of them), papers, and objects relating to the African native south of the Sahara. It surely must be one of the most remarkable collections on a given field still remaining in private hands. What is more remarkable is that it is well organized and easily accessible.

This impressionistic survey has not been exhaustive or detailed. Perhaps it has even been a little unbalanced. But, if it has stimulated the curiosity of the reader, it will have served its purpose.