

State Library looks back on 100 years

The celebration of the State Library's centenary from October 12-19 1987 marks the end of a colourful and interesting era in which various important historical, literary and library personalities played a prominent role.

There was, for instance, Pres. Paul Kruger who, realizing the necessity for a national library for the young Republic, signed the first rules and regulations; Rev. S.J. du Toit, Afrikaans language campaigner, and chairman of the "Commissie voor de Staats-Bibliotheek"; Rev. A.J. Begemann, the first state librarian and the poet Jan F.E. Celliers, who was a state librarian of exceptional vision.

Decisive roles in shaping library development in South Africa were played by past council members such as the well-known Dr F.V. Engelenburg, Dr G. van N. Viljoen, Dr W.K. du Plessis and Prof. P.C. Coetzee; and prominent directors such as Matthew Stirling, who campaigned for the introduction of free public library ser-

vices in South Africa and Dr H.J. Aschenborn, who pioneered by introducing a computerised national bibliography and who established strong international connections.

In 1882 a Dutch company, the "Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde", donated a collection of Dutch literary and philological works to the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). The aim was to promote the Dutch language and literature and to display an understanding of and appreciation for the independence struggle of the ZAR. A commission, under the chairmanship of Rev. S.J. du Toit, was appointed to develop a library in which the donation could be housed. Other members of the commission were the Revs. P. Postma and H.S. Bosman.

An initial consignment of crates containing books was sent to the ZAR in 1883. The books were put into storage until 31 March 1887 by which time the renovation of the first "goewerment-skool" on Church Square in Pretoria had been completed, and the State Library could be housed there. Rev. A.J. Begemann was appointed as the first state librarian. After the signing of the rules and regulations by Pres. Kruger on 11 October 1887, the State Library opened its doors.

In 1893 the State Library moved to more spacious quarters in the Erasmus Building, adjoining Church Square. In the same year the State Library merged with the Pretoria Public Library, which had been a subscription library.

to page 2



The Frank Stevens building, 233 Church Street, where the State Library was housed from 1903-1920.



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Maandeliks gepubliseer deur die Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut vir Biblioteek- en Inligting-wese

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ISSN 0256-6710

REDAKTEUR: John Frylinck

Assistent-redakteur: Thomas v.d. Walt
Uitleg: Diana Frylinck

TAK-SKAKELBEAMPTES

Oos-Kaap: Mnr HS Fourie (041 — 53312)

Natal: Mev R van Niekerk (0331 — 33371)

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Suidwes-Afrika: Mev R Morgenstern (061 — 308-2133)

REDAKSIONELE ADRES

Die Redakteur
SAIBI-Nuusbrieff
RAU-Biblioteek
Posbus 524
2000 JOHANNESBURG
Tel: (011) 726-5000 x 2169
na ure: (011) 726-6630
Teleks: 42-4526 SA
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INTEKENING

R7,50 per jaar.

AFSLUITTYD

Nuusberigte en advertensies wat geset moet word: 23ste van die maand voor publikasie. Kopieklare advertensies: 6de van publikasie-maand.

PUBLIKASIEDATUM

15de van die maand.

SIRKULASIE 2 700

from page 1

The State Library provided a public library service for Pretoria, but systematically began to assume functions in the national interest.

In Celliers' time (1893-99) collections were begun of Africana material and official publications of the ZAR, as well as publications of the other colonies and states in South Africa. Publishers were induced to supply the State Library with copies, despite the *Copyright Act of 1887* not coming into effect. As early as 1898 the first foreign exchange agreements were concluded. The agreement with the Smithsonian Institute in Washington for the supply of official publications of the United States dates from this time. Later the *Copyright Act of 1916* facilitated the State Library's acquisition of the national book production on an obligatory basis. With time the accommodation of this material and other supplies demanded more and better space. The State Library accordingly moved to the old Government Printer's Office in Church Street in 1903 which was also known as the Frank Stevens Building, and previously occupied by the Department of Customs and Military Compensations.

Central library

Following the investigation of the Carnegie Corporation (conducted by Messrs Ferguson and Pitt) and the National Library Conference of 1928, the State Library was designated a central library for South Africa with the task of providing support and assistance in developing the library movement. During this period the State Library finally moved to its present site, firstly occupying the old Masonic Hall (previously the Vaudette Theatre) in 1921.

During Stirling's time as state librarian (1931-1958), the State Library was active on various levels. On the local level it continued to serve as the public library of Pretoria. On the national level it undertook additional tasks, such as being a centre for providing expensive and specialized material to the country and being responsible for organizing a countrywide library service. Interlending between libraries was initiated in 1933 and a joint catalogue of book holdings of South African libraries has been maintained since 1941. The task of organizing a countrywide service was undertaken by Stirling to the point where the groundwork for the new provincial library services was laid. By 1950 the majority of South African readers had access to free library services. A start was also made on the compilation of the *South*



Mrs Vanessa du Plessis, above, P.R.O. for the State Library, compiled the accompanying article.

African National Bibliography (SANB), the first annual edition of which appeared in 1959.

The accommodation of the State Library once again became critical between 1930 and 1950. The old Baptist Church, next to the Masonic Hall in Andries Street, was bought in 1933. Building operations on the site, on the northern side of the Masonic Hall, started in 1936, were partially completed in 1937 and completed finally, with a four storey wing, in 1957. The fourth building on the site, adjoining the new wing, that of the University of Pretoria, was allocated to the State Library in 1959.

The public library function of the State Library was taken over in 1964 by the Municipality of Pretoria and the State Library could apply its energies to the expansion of its national library functions. The aim and functions of the State Library were determined — the primary objective being to collect, preserve and make information sources available to the entire South African population. Various bibliographic projects resulted accordingly, i.a the *Directory of Southern African Libraries*, *Bibliography of the Tswana Language*, *Swaziland Government Publications* and the *List of Southern*