

THE LIBRARY OF THE NATAL PROVINCIAL COUNCIL, 1858-1962

During May 1962 the Natal Archives received one of the more valuable accessions ever received by an Archives depot in the country namely, the contents of the Library of the Natal Provincial Council, totalling some 14,200 items in all. It is a library of uncommon interest to the research-worker in a large number of fields, but particularly in that of historical investigation.

The intention of the Natal Legislative Council was to build up a complete library — reference section and all — and so books covering all aspects of life in which legislators might conceivably be interested were ordered from England and bound there in leather before being shipped to Natal. The Legislative Council, and later the Natal Parliament, voted an annual sum of money for its upkeep until Union in 1910; after 1910 this was discontinued but all government publications were sent to the library for the purposes of record.

The result is that the Library is, as a visiting librarian remarked enviously "both a museum-piece and a window on the Victorian and Edwardian worlds." Captured within it is the world as the Victorian and the Edwardian saw it. For as many aspects as it was possible to encompass within the confines of a fairly small reference library are represented here. There are books on: Fiction, Essays, Letters, Biographies, Geography, Geology, Anthropology, Entymology, History (Ancient and Modern), Useful Arts, Fine Arts, Architecture, Agriculture, Botany, Law, Tribal Wars, Religion, Politics, Dictionaries, Who's Who (British and South African), South African and Overseas Directories, Railway Engineering, Poetry, Literature, Encyclopaedias and Periodicals, to mention a few taken at random. There is of course a host of other subjects as well.

Perhaps the best description of the library was given in 1955, when it was reported to consist of: Statutes, Votes and Proceedings, etc. (of S.A., U.K. and other countries), Reports of Committees, Blue Books, Directories, Whitaker's, Who's Who, Law Books, etc., also much biography, some travel, Africana, hobbies, agriculture, natural science, sociology, etc., much fiction, poetry, essays, etc.

The library has a particularly fine section of legal books. Not only were books on legal subjects obtained, but also printed statutes of all the leading colonies, and these have been continued up to the present day — Canada, Australasia, African (including the Federation and East African High Commission) and West Indian Colonies, Bengal and the Empire of India. There are statutes of the United States and even those of the State of Connecticut. There are also the United Kingdom Statutes-at-Large and Public General Statutes from 1235 to 1909. This span however, is exceeded at both extremes by the British Hansard which stretches over many centuries to 1911 and is very neatly supplemented by the Natal Archives' own copies which commence at 1911. There are also complete sets of Cape, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal Hansards, as well as of Southern Rhodesia, the Federation and Mauritius. The Hansards of the

Union of South Africa and later of the Republic also form part of the library but have been retained by the Provincial Council, as have been all Blue-Books, Votes and Proceedings, Statutes and other Government publications relating to the Union, the Republic and the Provinces.

Also of interest to sociologists, and to others more frivolously disposed will be a set of *Punch* from 1841 to 1958. The originals of such famous jokes as "The Curate's Egg" ("No, my Lord, I assure you, parts of it are excellent") and the Scot in London ("It's just a ruinous Place, that! Man, a had na been the-erre abune twa hoours, when Bang went Saxpence!") which have become part of the English language, as well as such famous cartoons as "Dropping the Pilot" (Bismarck and William II) are in this collection. A good deal of valuable information about the customs, habits and problems of the time can be gleaned from its pages. Indeed the R.A.F. recently produced a History of the Royal Air Force as reflected in the pages of *Punch*.

No other periodical even closely approaches this span of 117 years; nonetheless there are a number of other periodicals of the later Victorian period and especially of the period 1880-1905. The *Illustrated London News* is inevitably represented, but is only one of many magazines. Such names as *Black and White*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Economist*, *European Mail*, *The Graphic*, *Fortnightly Review*, *Harpers*, *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, *Investor's Monthly Magazine*, *Sketch*, *Sphere*, *Truth*, *Vanity Fair*, *World*, all testify to the variety of interests and viewpoints of Victorian opinion portrayed in this section apart from its value to the literateur. The technical journals *Colliery Guardian* and *Engineering and Mining Journal* reveal the mainstays of Natal industry in the early 1900's.

The Library was intended as a reference library and consequently is rich in reference books. The *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885-1901) needs no comment; the British *Who's Who* (1916-1953) and the *South African Who's Who* (1909-1949) are also well known; *Burke's Peerage* (1888-1930), *Landed Gentry* (1928) and *Colonial Gentry* (1891-1895), *Walford's County Families of the United Kingdom* (1896-1903), *Debrett's House of Commons and the Bench* (1894-1906) and *Kelly's London Directory* 1863 and 1914 serve the Genealogist, as does *De Villiers Geslachtregister der oude Kaapsche Familien*; in the international field there are *Hazell's Annual* (1888-1920), the *Stateman's Year Book* (1887-1952) and *Whitaker's Almanack* (1878-1959), *Walch's Tasmanian Almanac* (1902-1914), *Thom's U.K. Directory and Irish Almanac* (1871-1896) and the *State of Connecticut Register and Manual* (1929-1960).

The relaxation of the legislators was catered for on a lighter note by a large selection of such novels as were then considered worthy of acquisition. Understandably, Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, Mrs. Gaskell and Wilkie Collins are all represented, and such authors as Beaconsfield, Hall Caine, Carlyle, De Quincy, Francis Marion Crawford, George Eliot, Rider Haggard, Thomas Hardy, Bret Harte, G. A. Henty, Anthony Hope, Washington Irving, Henry James, Mrs. Oliphant and Eden Phillpotts all have rather a period flavour.

The Victorian era was one of poetic effusion, even for the common man, and the library has a goodly poetry section. The writer of this article was however rather surprised to find Longfellow and James Russel Lowell under the heading of "English Poets" whilst Byron was classified as an "American Poet". As an idiosyncrasy of the classifier, it calls to mind the famous British statesman who classified an equally famous political opponent's autobiography in his library as "Fiction".

It is however in historical research material that the library is richest of all. There are books dealing with the colonies and colonial questions, e.g. settlement, afforestation, irrigation, farming and transport, to name but a few. There are books dealing with that vital but usually overlooked question, economic history, with legal history, e.g. Cobbett's *State Trials*, with political history and with the theory of politics. Most aspects of S.A. Roman-Dutch law are also covered by a well-equipped legal section. But easily the finest and most valuable section of the library is the AFRICANA. Some authorities on Africana have remarked that there are many extremely rare items in the collection, so rare they are known by repute only. Some of the books contained in the Africana are: *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (Winston Churchill); *Cetwayo and His Neighbours* (Rider Haggard); *The Raid on the Transvaal* (L. S. Jameson); *The War in South Africa 1899-1900* (Admiral A. T. Mahan), Theal of course; the travels of Boteler, Burchell, Campbell, Damberger, Denham, Clapperton, and Oudney, Gardiner, Le Vaillant, Leguat, Lichtenstein, Latrobe, Livingstone, Mungo Park, Napier, Paterson, Stanley, Johnston, Sonnini, Sparrman, Speke, Steedman, Thunberg and Thompson, Moodie's *Record*, *Kaffir Crimes and their Outbreaks 1847-1852* and inevitably, the *Times* and "official" histories of the Boer War 1899-1902 (Amery and Maurice, respectively). This is only a minute selection of what is contained in the library. Historians into the Boer War will also find Bailey's *Index to the Times 1899-1902* invaluable.

There is, too, a full selection of Blue Books and Government publications, e.g. Barbados, Bermuda, British Guiana, Cape, Ceylon, Jamaica, Natal, Rhodesian Federation, Singapore, Southern Rhodesia (1908-1961), the United Kingdom and Zanzibar, and, of course of the Union and Republic of South Africa. This last-named group has, however, been retained by the Provincial Council for the convenience of Provincial Councillors.

The Natal Provincial Council Library had its beginnings on the 10th April 1858 when John Moreland moved in the Legislative Council that the Lieutenant-Governor be requested to provide books to form a library of reference for the use of the Council. The motion was agreed to and a Select Committee which went into the matter recommended an outlay of £50. According to a note on the documents, the Select Committee's report was not presented to Parliament.

During June 1861 a motion was agreed to requesting the Lieutenant-Governor to spend £300 on procuring a Library of Reference. A Select Committee drew up a list of books for purchase. The list is revealing. It included Hansard's Debates, the Code Napoleon, Precedents and Practice of Parliament, U.K. Statutes at Large, speeches of various prominent parlia-

mentarians (Brougham, Pitt, Fox, Burke, Sheridan, Cobbett, etc) and Gibbon Wakefield's *View of the Art of Colonization*. The Select Committee recommended the exchange form of acquisition of books whereby Natal *Votes and Proceedings* would be exchanged for those of the Cape, Canada, Mauritius and New Zealand.

The members of the Legislative Council evidently took an interest in their library. On the 27th May 1862, the Sessional Committee for Printing, under which the control of the Library fell, decided to introduce a "Suggestion Book", and, on the 17th June 1862, decided that bound copies of all newspapers published in Natal be procured and supplied with an index together with such back-numbers as were currently obtainable. Nor was the matter allowed to rest there; on the 23rd July 1863, the Committee complained that its resolution regarding newspapers had not yet been implemented. Previous to this, it had complained about the incorrect numbering of the U.K. Hansards.

A similar interest was evinced in the housing of the library. On the 19th June 1861 Joseph Henderson moved that a room adjoining the Debating Chamber be equipped as a library. On the 12th May 1862, the Sessional Committee enquired what progress had been made in obtaining a room. The answer proving unsatisfactory, the Sessional Committee requested Mr. Speaker to obtain a special room. By now the books must have been fairly frequently consulted for, on the 12th August 1862, the Clerk of the House was instructed to hold the books accessible to members in his office in Burger St. (Pietermaritzburg) during the Parliamentary recess.

Indeed, a very close interest was being evinced in the library. On the 12th May 1864, the Sessional Committee ordered a classified catalogue of books to be printed and issued to members and a fortnight later issued instructions on the form the catalogue should take. A year later, on the 21st May 1865, Mr. Lyon, the Clerk of the House, was appointed Librarian. The Sessional Committee kept a very watchful eye on the library, for, at a meeting on the 18th September 1869 the Acting Librarian (Thos. Foster) was required to report on the condition of the books as well as on volumes which were missing. This was in consequence of complaints that had been received. Unfortunately the complaints themselves have disappeared completely. It is interesting to note that the Librarian reported that "All the books are in good state of preservation considering the number of fish-moths constantly attacking them and the want of more ventilation in the room." At this meeting he recommended that the acquisition of the Hansard Debates, the U.K. Statutes at Large and the various Colonial Acts be continued.

By 1879, the advantages of the library were becoming manifest; in moving that the normal vote be increased to £100 and that an extra £100 be spent on the library during the fiscal year 1879-1880, the proposer, John Robinson (later Sir John) said: "I . . . ask Honourable Members to consider what their state would have been if these Blue Books had not been supplied to them, and if the contents of these books had not been given to the public. It is entirely owing to these books that we have any information. Their

information has been invaluable." With this expansion the library outgrew its original home and when the new Parliament Buildings (the present Provincial Council Buildings) were occupied, it was found that the new library was, in the words of the Hon. J. Leige Hulett, M.L.A. for Victoria County, "very much too small to hold the books." Mr. Hulett consequently moved, on the 11th June 1889, that H.E. be requested to place a sum of money on the Supplementary Estimates for the erection of a new library. The ensuing debate was nothing if not lively. The Acting Colonial Secretary (Lieut. Col. A. H. Hime) opposed the scheme — Mr. Hulett had proposed building the library over the existing library — on the grounds that the building would be lopsided. Harry Escombe, M.L.A. for Klip River County, supported the scheme on the grounds that as the building was a "colossal mistake," disfigurement would make no difference since it would not be noticed. Mr. Hulett's motion was adopted.

The Library continued to expand until 1910 when a different policy was adopted. Until 1910 an annual vote of the Natal Parliament had been made for the purpose of the library, but this was now discontinued. The only direction in which the library expanded was in the accumulation of official records of the Union, Parliament, the Provinces, the statutes of the Dominions, and a number of colonies, and in a number of reference books.

In 1934 interest in the library re-awakened and Mr. Franklin Rooke, at that time the Durban Municipal Librarian, was asked to report on it. His report was destined to form the basis of future work in the library. Mr. Rooke pointed out that the only catalogue was a card index of authors and titles which had been compiled by the then Clerk of the Council, Mr. C. A. B. Peck. It may be added in parenthesis that printed catalogues had been issued from time to time, viz., 1884, 1892 and 1901, with an additional list in 1908, and a roneoed list of Africana in 1932, but they did not indicate where the books were to be found. Mr. Rooke accordingly recommended that the library be arranged according to the Dewey Decimal Classification system. Arrangement was indeed badly needed. Mr. Rooke found Henry George's *Open Letter to Pope Leo XII* cheek by jowl with *The Farmer's Veterinary Adviser* and Roget's *Thesaurus* rubbing shoulders with Dickens' *Little Dorrit*. Understandably, the library was no longer used.

Mr. Rooke's recommendations were adopted. The library was insured for £2,250, no book or set of books to be valued at more than £100 except the set of Imperial Hansards which were valued at £300. This is reputed to be the only Government — owned library which was considered advisable to insure. On the recommendation of the Clerk of the Council, Mr. G. W. Meister of the Natal Education Department was employed in January 1935 to undertake the classification armed with the Durban Library general catalogue and a copy of the 13th Dewey indexing guide, 1932 edition. The Clerk set his face against a subject index and a dictionary catalogue as recommended by Mr. Rooke, considering them unnecessary in view of the size of the library. The subject index he considered to be moreover partly covered by the title index. By January 1936 the classification was reported to have been completed. In fact, however, it was far from complete.

In 1943 the Administrator (the Hon. G. Heaton Nicholls) pointed out that no additions had been made for a considerable period. As a result a sum of £50 was voted for new books. Interest in the library then flagged for some ten years until, in 1954, the Sessional Committee called for a report on the library from the Provincial Library Organiser. The Organiser, Mr. Theo Friis, reported that although it contained a most valuable collection of books, most of which were irreplaceable, the library was very seldom used by members of the Provincial Council. He found that the library was not being administered according to recognised scientific library practice. He suggested that it be reorganised to give a good quick reference service during Council sessions and that books of "archival value" be transferred to the Provincial Library Service for preservation. He also recommended that the copyright privilege vested in the Natal Society Library of Pietermaritzburg should be transferred to the Provincial Council Library which, said Mr. Friis, "could be looked upon as the only form of copyright agency before 1916." While some eminent authorities in the field of librarianship have doubted whether the Provincial Council Library was actually a copyright library, this statement reveals the scope and extent of the books contained in the library.

Mr. Friis' recommendations were not adopted and the Library Organiser was next asked to report on the best use that could be made of the library. The report drawn up by Mr. Friis' successor, Mr. C. H. Vermeulen, in 1955, stated that the library was probably used by Provincial Councillors when it started but was now surpassed by other more modern and up-to-date libraries in Pietermaritzburg. Mr. Vermeulen recommended that the library be maintained as an information service only, making use of course of new issues of reference books. The remainder of the books should be transferred to the Provincial Library Service for preservation. Mr. Vermeulen added "All books retained must be classified and catalogued if any use is to be made of them. The present catalogue is no more than an index and does not indicate whether a given book is to be found on the shelves. (It is doubtful whether this catalogue is complete)". As events unfolded Mr. Vermeulen's recommendations were also destined to remain mere recommendations.

By now, an awareness of the value of the library to the researcher had become more widespread. In October 1955 Professor Arthur Keppel-Jones, Professor of History at Natal University, requested that the library be made available to researchers and the following month this was granted pending the ultimate disposal of the library. The same month the South African National Society requested that a list or catalogue of the books be drawn up.

Interest in the library was now greater than ever before. In March 1956 the Librarian of the University of Natal requested to be given custody of the library. In June 1957 the Archivist of the Natal Archives (Mr. P. C. O. Strydom) suggested that the books could be better preserved in the Archives and made more readily available to the public there. When Mr. Strydom's suggestion was brought before the Natal Provincial Council in session, it was decided not to take any immediate action and the matter was

referred back to the Sessional Committee. At this stage, too, some doubt arose as to whether the Natal Provincial Council was entitled, under the Archives Act then current (Act No. 22 of 1953), to transfer the library to a non-government institution and a legal opinion was sought. Meeting on the 9th January 1958, the Administrator-in-Executive-Committee decided to retain the library. This dispelled fears of the Archives that its contents might be dispersed.

This was not the end of the matter. Public interest was now thoroughly awakened and negotiations were reopened once more when in June 1959 the Natal Society Library of Pietermaritzburg offered to take over the library. The University of Natal closely followed this in November 1959 by an offer to take over all the contents of the library other than the Africana. However, the Sessional Committee, probably with the Archives Act of 1953 in mind, decided against both these proposals.

Negotiations continued with the Archives and on the 20th March 1962 the matter approached finality when the Clerk of the Provincial Council (Mr. T. F. B. Massingham) wrote to the Chief Archivist (Dr. A. Kieser):

"1. With reference to your minute no. 6/3/4 of the 12th July 1961, I am directed to state that the Provincial Council of Natal has authorised me to transfer the books in the Library — except those pertaining to Parliament, Senate and Provincial Councils in the Republic — to the local Archivist subject to the following conditions:—

(a) That the donation be made on the strict understanding that the books shall not be removed from the Natal Archives, with the proviso that, should the Chief Archivist deem it desirable to have one or more of the books repaired and/or rebound at the Archives Bindery at Pretoria, he shall be allowed, on the written consent of the Administrator of Natal, to remove such books to Pretoria for a period not exceeding two months in order to have them repaired and/or rebound.

(b) That the books shall be housed in a fire-proof room in the Natal Archives.

(c) That they shall be accessible to the public in the Reading Room of the Natal Archives.

(d) That the books shall be housed as an entity.

2. The view is held that the records (Hansard, Votes and Proceedings, Debates, etc.) of the various legislative bodies in the Republic are documents to which Members of the Provincial Council should have immediate access."

These conditions were accepted by the Chief Archivist on the 24th March 1962 and to the staff of the Natal Archives fell the task of listing all the items, numbering some 14,225 in all, within six weeks. Our first sight of the library was unforgettable and is probably best described in the words of the Natal Archives Librarian, Mrs. Cicely Donald, for the Archives staff magazine *Argiefnuus*: "On the right was the impressive Council Chamber, beautiful in its spaciousness and design, with pure white walls and dark red curtains, and a unique wrought-iron screen running the full width of the room, behind the Speaker's Chair (from a distance appearing delicate as old lace) .. . we unlocked the double doors of the Library and gazed at

the booklined shelves — rows and rows of beautifully leather-bound volumes from floor to ceiling. My first impression was one of peaceful withdrawal and atmosphere that clung to this gracious old room . . . preserving a tranquillity that was almost tangible — a heritage of another Age. The dim lighting (reflected) the warm colour of the pine ceiling and the shelves and panelling . . .” Impressive the old room certainly was with its flowing rich red and gold colouring, but it was also an extremely dangerous fire hazard and it had been a source of nagging concern to successive Clerks of the Provincial Council ever since Franklin Rooke had first drawn attention to it in 1934. Estimates for fire-proofing the room had been disconcertingly high. So the Clerk’s anxiety to see this valuable library removed to fire-proof and gas-equipped strong-rooms can readily be appreciated.

When the Archives came to draw up the list of books, the lack of classification posed a serious problem. The staff was simply not available to complete the classification even if there had been sufficient time, for approximately two thirds of the books were unclassified. We had perforce therefore to adopt a number of make-shift sub-divisions, viz.: Unclassified (for general books); Unclassified (legal section); Unclassified (illustrated); Government publications, Annuals, Almanacs, Year Books and Directories; and Magazines and Periodicals. We also found by divers means that in September 1911 the Provincial Council had donated a number of scientific books to the Natal Museum. No list was kept by either institution and so the Natal Archives had to search through the library holdings of the Natal Museum in order to incorporate these books in the list. The list, be it said, has been completed and it is our intention to issue it in roneoed form, with an explanatory foreword, to other Archives depots. We hope that the library will, in some measure at least, regain the popularity it lost when the improvement in rail and motor transport made it possible for legislators to hasten home in a matter of hours where previously days were required.

And what has hapened to the Library itself? In the beginning of May 1962, in a manoeuvre of military precision, it was removed to the Natal Archives and packed into two strongrooms in exactly the same order that it had occupied in the Provincial Council Building with the added advantage that the books were not packed two and three deep in the shelves as had been the case in its original home. Here it is our wish the Library will remain to be of enlightenment to all who wish to make use of it in whatever field they will.

J. Bodel.