

THE CANAL ZONE

LIBRARY - MUSEUM

THE CANAL ZONE LIBRARY-MUSEUM

The Canal Zone Library-Museum is a function of the Civil Affairs Bureau of the Canal Zone Government, and as such provides reference service for officials of the Panama Canal Company - Canal Zone Government organization, informational and recreational library service for employees of the U. S. Government in the Canal Zone and in addition operates a small but growing museum, mainly to preserve and exhibit articles relating to the historical past of the Isthmus with emphasis on the construction of the Panama Canal.

Although the lending facilities of the Library are primarily for the convenience of employees of the Panama Canal Company and Canal Zone Government, any person on the Isthmus who requests Canal Zone Library service is free to have it, provided only that he conform with the regulations of the Library and provide suitable identification before borrowing books.

Early History. The Panama Canal Library, the fore-runner of the present Canal Zone Library-Museum, was established in 1914 by General George W. Goethals, Builder and Governor of the Panama Canal. The official circular, dated August 24, 1914 and signed by General Goethals, stated in part that "a library is being established in the new Administration Building at Balboa to provide for the accumulation of official books, documents, reports, etc. which are indiscriminately kept in the various offices on the Isthmus at present." In addition, files of current manufacturers' catalogs also were included in the holdings of the new library.

On February 2, 1916, the first number of the Library Bulletin was issued. This Bulletin, which appeared in the Canal Record, included a list of books recently added to the Library, new manufacturer's catalogs, and periodicals currently received. It is the predecessor of the present Library Bulletin, the 2,060th number of which is soon to be issued. Copies of the present bulletin are available to all patrons in the Library and also are published in several local Panama newspapers.

By 1916, The Panama Canal Library, as reported in the Canal Record, contained between 7,500 and 10,000 items for which a complete catalog was then in preparation. The divisions and other units of The Panama Canal were each urged to cooperate with the Librarian and to make recommendations for the purchase of books which would be helpful in carrying on the official activity of the Canal.

In 1918, the former Miss Blanche Shelp (Mrs. C. M. Lupfer), for many years a well-known local artist and a professional librarian, was employed to reorganize the expanding library and to coordinate the official services housed in the Administration Building with several small recreational branches which were opened in the club-houses about that time. By 1919, there were active small branches in Ancon, Balboa, Cristobal, Gatun and Pedro Miguel, in addition to a children's branch which was operated in the school building during the summer months. The Central Library in the Administration Building was open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on every work day. It

provided official service to Canal officers and employees, and by mid 1920 was circulating 1,020 books per month. First established on the third floor of the Administration Building, the Library later was moved to the first floor, the space now occupied by the Personnel Bureau.

By 1929, following several surveys and studies authorized by officials of The Panama Canal, the Library had assumed many of its present characteristics. In addition to the extensive reference books housed in the Main Library, approximately one hundred periodicals were received regularly; the hours had been increased and the library system was maintaining six branches in various communities in the Canal Zone. Library service was available through its Main Library and branches to employees of the Canal and to members of the armed forces on the Isthmus and residents of the Republic of Panama. The Library contained more than 30,000 volumes.

In the fall of 1949, the Main Library was moved from its quarters on the first floor of the Administration Building to its present location in the southwest wing of the Civil Affairs Building on Gaillard Highway, Ancon. Many Isthmians will remember the period during the fall of 1949 when the Library was closed to the public for the seven weeks of the move and when huge cranes could be seen lifting heavy steel book stacks to the second floor terrace of the new quarters.

In the new and larger stack area, the book stacks were more generously spaced and the Library staff was provided with more effective workrooms than had been available in the Administration



13-M-7(3) Panama Canal Library Equipment being moved into new offices at C. Z. Air Terminal, Oct. 26, 1949



88-A-2 (12) a.

Canal Zone Air Terminal, Balboa, Canal Zone
December, 1943.

The Library has been located in the southwest wing of this building since November, 1949.

Building location. In addition, there was ample parking space for all Library patrons.

As a result of the reorganization of The Panama Canal in 1951, the Library and its new adjunct, the Museum, became a function of the Canal Zone Government, and the name of The Panama Canal Library was changed to the Canal Zone Library-Museum.

Present Library System. The Canal Zone Library system now is composed of the Main Library in the Civil Affairs Building, Ancon; two branches in Cristobal and La Boca; and five deposit libraries in Gamboa, Gatun, Paraiso, Pedro Miguel and Santa Cruz. The branches maintain their own public catalogs and have permanent book collections, while the smaller deposits operate with rotating book collections on long-term loan from the Main Library.

The Main Library, in addition to its technical and industrial reference services which are available to all officials of the Canal-Government organization, maintains administrative control over all branches and deposits, provides technical service to them, acts as a depository for all book rotation, and serves as a recreational and informational library for the Pacific side Ancon-Balboa-Diablo Heights district.

Organized and maintained according to professional United States library standards, the Canal Zone Library now is staffed by three professional librarians, six sub-professional library assistants, four library attendants and fourteen part-time library assistants, several of whom however are on a relief status and work only when called because of the illness of one of the regular deposit librarians.

The Library's more than 8,000 registered borrowers take out more than 200,000 books and periodicals each year. A substantially larger number of patrons use the more than 103,000 volumes within the central library, branches and deposit libraries themselves.

Main Library. The Main Library is housed in the two floors of the southwest wing of the Civil Affairs Building, located on Gaillard Highway, midway between the Pacific side townsites of Balboa and Ancon. On the second floor are the reading and reference rooms, pleasant and spacious with light and air on three sides. Large reading tables are surrounded by upholstered tubular steel armchairs, with writing tables and waiting seats nearby. Opening on the reading rooms are the book stacks, which are open to the public at all times. The Children's Room is located on the right of the entrance to the Reading Room and is under constant direct supervision. The Reference Room which is directed by the Reference Librarian, a graduate professional librarian, adjoins the Reading Room and contains a more elaborate reference collection than is found in the average public library of its size.

Indeed the emphasis on reference facilities is heavy, since the Canal Zone Library provides official reference and industrial facilities for both the Panama Canal Company and the Canal Zone Government, as well as for the many other government agencies on the Isthmus of Panama, including the United States armed forces. In addition, reference services also are available to all individuals in the Canal Zone and to persons in the Republic of Panama who request them. Reference service, aside from the answering of specific



Circulation desk in Main Library Reading Room, Canal Zone Library.

and often complicated questions, includes the compilation of book lists, programs, assistance service to students and teachers, and preparation of bibliographies on local material. Reference queries from the United States and other parts of the world are not infrequent.

Panama Collection. Also housed in the Reference Room and administered by the Reference Librarian is the world-famous Panama Collection of the Canal Zone Library. This collection, which includes rare items in both Spanish and English, attracts students and researchers from wide-spread parts of the world, and comprizes the largest collection of books and periodicals in English about the history of the Isthmus and in particular the construction of the Panama Canal which may be found outside the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C.

There is of course no doubt that the Library's Panama Collection, at present predominantly an English language collection, could be broadened immensely by the addition of many Spanish titles which are included as a matter of course in many Panama libraries. The staff of the Canal Zone Library now is studying this field, and gradually is widening the collection in this way. Eventually, it is hoped that there will be a balance between the two language groups in the Panama Collection which will present an even broader and thus more effective picture of the Isthmus and its early history.

Periodical Collection. U. S. and local periodicals and newspapers occupy much of the ground floor of the Library's wing. Bound periodical files are kept in closed stacks but are available

to the public during Canal Zone official working hours by stack pass, issued on request at the circulation desk. Newspaper files include bound volumes of the (Panama) Star and Herald from 1908 to date, files of the (Panama) Panama American, the (Panama) Nation and Panama Government's Gaceta Oficial, as well as files of the New York Times from 1921 to date.

The office of the Librarian and all workrooms are located in the Library's main floor space.

Exhibits and Displays of Local Material. In addition to the usual activities of the Library system in its performance as a public library and as a Government reference library, increasing attention is devoted to specialized public relations in the form of exhibitions of rare local material. These exhibitions are displayed in the Museum in the lobby of the Civil Affairs Building, as well as in the Main Library Reading Room, and feature early explorations, voyages and travels, surveys of canal routes, initiation of canal building plans, and general Isthmian history.

Museum. These displays complement the Canal Zone Museum, which although only recently established as an adjunct of the Canal Zone Library system, has made rapid progress during its three years of existence. This small but rapidly growing historical museum has the purpose of presenting the history of the Isthmian past so that it may serve a useful purpose in the present - that of stimulating a common feeling of enthusiasm in the history of the Canal and of the Isthmus among new and old employees alike.

The collection now includes a variety of items - construction day relics, articles from the building of the Panama Railroad,

regional Indian displays, shell and animal groups, models of early construction equipment, relief maps and archaeological exhibits. Only this year, the Museum received an extensive collection of Panama huacas, presented to the Canal Zone Museum by the Panama National University in conjunction with the National Museum. This gift to the Museum typified the spirit of cooperation and friendship which exists in all contacts between the Canal Zone Library-Museum and its cultural counterpart in Panama.

Toward the advancement of the fullest and freest cultural exchange, the Canal Zone Library is able to welcome not only many visiting groups from Panama schools and organizations, but daily extends its services to many individual Panamanians, who we hope find the Canal Zone Library a pleasant and productive place in which to work and study.

Only recently, as exemplified in the photographs in this article, a group of Canal Zone Librarians, on invitation from the Director of the Biblioteca Nacional of Panama, paid an official visit to the Biblioteca Nacional where the Canal Zone Library was presented with a copy of his History of Panama by the National Library's Director, Mr. Bonifacio Pereira J. The Canal Zone Library, during the return visit to the Library-Museum, was happy to present the National Library with a copy of Anderson's Old Panama and Castilla del Oro from the Library's Panama Collection.

The Canal Zone Library now is planning to send an exhibit to the Panama Book Week soon to be celebrated in Santa Ana Plaza,



Staff members from the Canal Zone Library visit the Biblioteca Nacional.



56-A-2 (798) A

Gift from Canal Zone Library's Panama Collection being presented to Biblioteca Nacional.

August 4, 1953.