

Library Progress in Ghana

By Leonard S. Kenworthy

ONE OF THE PRIME EXAMPLES of the vitality and progress of Ghana which strikes the eye of the observant visitor is the library system of this new nation. Among the new buildings in the capital city of Accra, one of the most striking is the new library. It is constructed in reinforced concrete, is ultramodern in design, with full use of the latest thinking in tropical architecture.

One wing is devoted to the general circulation library and the other to the administrative work of this city library and to other work of the Ghana library board, an eighteen-member body in charge of library services for the entire country.

During my recent visit in Ghana I visited every nook and corner of this Accra Library, visited a similar although less spectacular library in Kumasi (capital of the Ashanti Territory), and saw the Children's Library in Accra in action.

Leonard Kenworthy, Director of World Affairs Materials at Brooklyn College, recently returned from a nine-months trip to the New Nations of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia during his sabbatical leave from Brooklyn.

In addition to these facilities, Ghana has public libraries in Sekondi, in the port city of Takarandi, in Koforidua, in Akoradi, in the Cape Coast, in Ho, in Kpandu, and in Tamale, the capital of the Northern Territory.

Ghana is also proud of its bookmobile service. It is not extensive, consisting of units operating out of Accra and Kumasi, but this is a good beginning for a newly-emerging nation. It also has a book-box service for individuals, clubs, churches, schools, and colleges. So far this has been used chiefly by schools and colleges and by many Europeans in Ghana who read easily in English.

Naturally one wonders how such a good system of libraries got started in an economically underdeveloped country. Upon inquiry I learned that the initial impetus came from a gift of 1,000 English pounds from the Bishop of Accra, John Aglionby, in 1935. The base of the present collection was donated by the British Council and housed eventually in a wing of the Parliament building, a prominent place for a library. In 1956 the present building was constructed and located in a cluster



ACCRA GHANA LIBRARY



GHANA BOOKMOBILE

of government buildings, including the Parliament house and the court. Not far away is the Accra Community Center, with a small building near it housing the Children's Library.

Almost all of the books in the central library and its branches are in English, since few books have been published as yet in any of the dialects of Ghana. Most of the books are printed in England, but there are a good many American publications. In one large room of the Accra Library are over 25,000 volumes collected by the Pennsbury High School in Pennsylvania and a smaller collection sent by the Barrels of Books for Ghana by residents of Los Angeles. (Incidentally, if others are interested in such enterprises, the writer urges them to communicate with the library officials in Ghana before launching such drives and to cull very carefully all volumes before they are shipped. This was done by the Pennsbury group and was greatly appreciated in Ghana.)

The librarians in Ghana are encouraged by the use of their facilities but are trying to coax more women to use them and to broaden the base of their reader groups. In a nation which is trying desperately to increase literacy, there is a paucity of materials for adults who have recently learned to read, although the Ghana Veracular Board is trying to fill this gap with simple primers in English and in six local dialects.

Glancing over the new books and talking with the librarians, I discovered that elementary school books are popular in all sub-

jects. Also in demand are volumes on science, mathematics, accounting, and bookkeeping. With a new government to develop and many problems of local-versus-federal control to resolve, such volumes as McIver's *The Modern State*, Robert Gardiner's *The Development of Social Administration*, and Akpan's *Epitaph to Indirect Rule: A Discourse on Local Government in West Africa* are much used.

Ghana has a long way to go to achieve the type of public library system which is needed, but it has made an excellent beginning and is proud of its present system, undoubtedly the best among the new nations of Africa.



THE LIBRARY BUILT OF SUGAR

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The building is surrounded by attractive grounds with tropical plants and a spacious parking lot. The library is open Monday through Friday 8 A.M.-12 N. and 4-8 P.M.

Originally the National Library was founded in 1901, being named at the time for General Leonard Wood, the American governor of the island. Since that time, the site has been moved three times, none of the facilities being sufficient. With the inauguration of the "Jose Marti" National Library, however, Cuba can now boast one of the most modern libraries in the Western Hemisphere.

The library is governed by a Junta de Patronos (board of proprietors), composed of members of various cultural institutions.