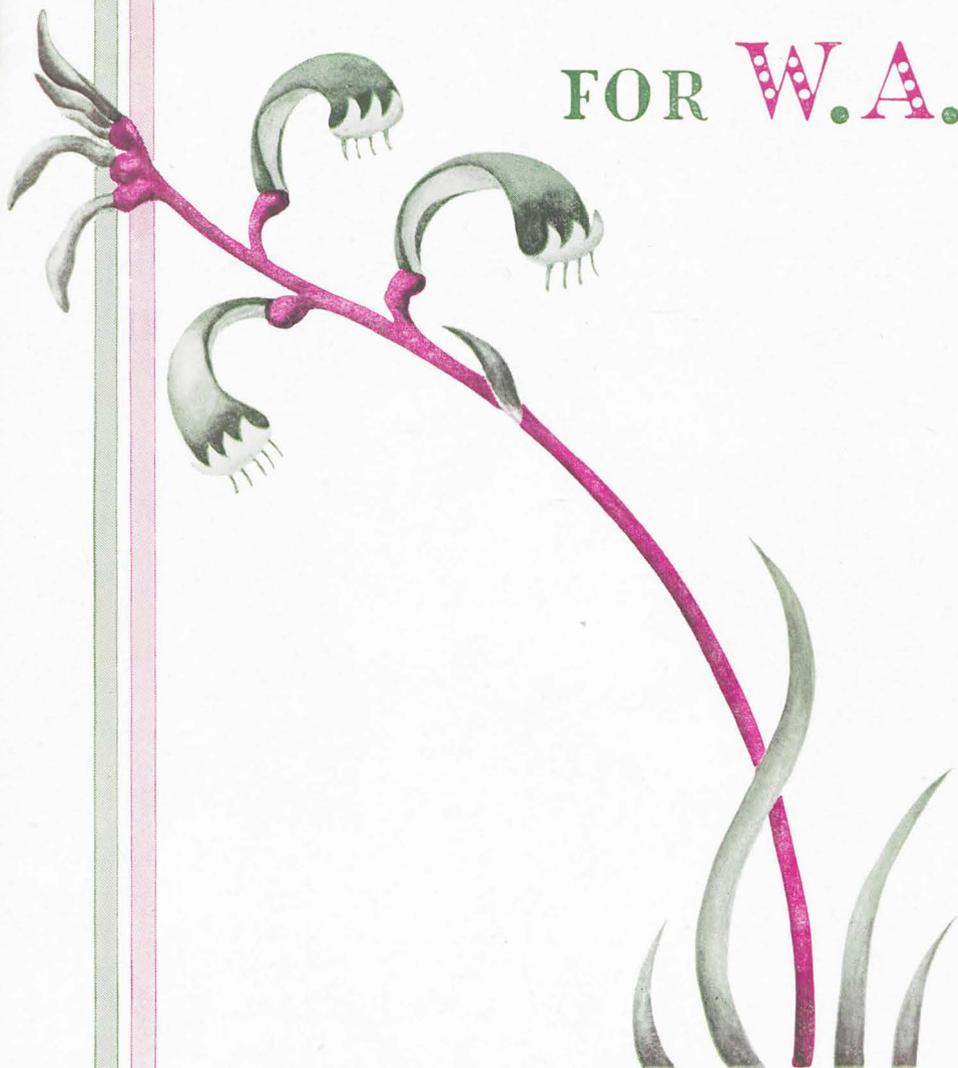


A
LIBRARY SERVICE

FOR W.A.



1953

LIBRARY *of* BOARD
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

LIBRARY BOARD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

A LIBRARY SERVICE
for
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1st Annual Report of the Board, 1952-3

PERTH,
1953

THE LIBRARY BOARD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Members :

Professor F. Alexander, M.A., *Chairman*
Cr. B. W. F. Lee, *Vice Chairman*
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Mr. O. E. W. Bruns
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Mr. A. F. Noonan
Dr. T. L. Robertson, M.A., Ph.D., Dip.Ed.
Miss M. E. Wood, M.A., A.L.A.

* Resigned 5th June, 1953.

Executive Officer and Secretary :

Mr. F. A. Sharr, B.A., F.L.A.

Miss M. E. Wood acted as Hon. Secretary of the Board from its inauguration until 1st April, 1953, when the Executive Officer assumed the duties of Secretary.

Communications should be addressed to :

The Executive Officer, Library Board of W.A.,
547 Hay Street, Perth.

Telephone, BA 4717

THE Library Board of Western Australia was established under the provisions of the Library Board of Western Australia Act, 1951, which came into force by proclamation on 30th September, 1952.

The Constitution of the Board is defined as—

Three *ex officio* members :

The Director of Education

The Director of Adult Education

*The Chairman of Trustees of the Public Library,
Museum and Art Gallery

Ten members nominated by the Minister for Education :

Five representative of local government :

One representing each of the following :

The City of Perth

The City of Fremantle

The Road Board Association of Western Australia

The Country Municipal Councils Association
of Western Australia

The Local Government Association of Western
Australia

Three representative of the Library Association of
Australia, Western Australian Branch

Two not holding any of the above qualifications and
nominated by the Minister.

The duties and functions of the Board are fully set out in the Act, but they may be briefly summarized as :

To encourage and assist local authorities to establish free public libraries;

To co-ordinate those public libraries into a State-wide system;

To allocate such subsidies to public libraries as the State may make available;

To provide for the training of librarians and assistant librarians;

To advise the Minister for Education and participating bodies on matters of general policy relating to libraries.

The inaugural meeting of the Board was convened by the Minister for Education (Hon. A. F. Watts, C.M.G., M.L.A.) on 3rd July, 1952, and six further meetings have been held. Throughout this, its first year, the major concern of the Board has been to study present library provision and to consider in what ways the assistance of the State, both financial and other, could most effectively be applied to the development of a public library system for the people of Western Australia.

* At present represented by the Chairman of the Library Committee of the Public Library, Professor R. G. Cameron.

THE NEED FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

Public libraries are today recognised in most developed countries not merely as desirable amenities, but as social necessities. Our civilization is based on the printed word ; without it there can be neither personal fulfilment, industrial efficiency nor national development. The purpose of the public library service is to provide and organize print in all its forms so that all members of the community, and all organizations within it, may derive to the fullest extent of their own needs or desires the information, enrichment and delight which is to be had from books and other printed sources. More specifically, a public library service is needed for the following three purposes :

To make available to all citizens, young and old, books, periodicals and other graphic records which foster a full, useful and good life and which tend to the personal development of the individual or the social development of the community;

To provide information on any subject which may reasonably be expected to be of value to the public, including the industrial and commercial world;

To encourage and promote the use of books and information.

It is not sufficient that a library provide excellent books and information ; it must also take all appropriate steps to ensure that they are used to the best advantage by all who can profit by them. If a library service is to fulfill these purposes, it must be free in both senses : freely available to all citizens without regard to financial capacity, race or age, and free in the sense that it accepts all facets of opinion and all aspects of knowledge leaving the reader to make his choice and decision as to their truth and value.

The essence and kernel of any library is its books, including within the term books : periodicals, maps, pamphlets, prints, trade catalogues, manuscripts, archives, music, micro-films and all the other forms of record which a modern library handles. The book stock of the library should be so chosen as to represent all the interests, economic, social and leisure, of the people it serves in so far as their needs are not met by other agencies.

Novels should form a considerable proportion of the stock, but only novels of some value. The novel is a recognised form of literature ; indeed, the novel and the play are perhaps the most significant forms of contemporary literature. A novel which will broaden the experience or develop the mind of a reader should be included in the

stock ; but there are some which do neither, and they should be excluded. There are plenty of good novels of all types, including thrillers, and it is better to multiply copies of those than to buy indiscriminately in order to make up numbers.

Technical books relative to the industries of the district are essential and must be both authoritative and up-to-date. Books on history and current affairs enable the citizen to form sound opinions and wisely to exercise his democratic rights. Practical books on country crafts, housekeeping and home decoration, hobbies, sports and the like will give pleasure and assistance to many. The needs of the professional man, the business executive or the trade union official, will require such subjects as accountancy, personnel management, and social administration to be represented. The list could be extended almost indefinitely to cover philosophy, religion, the fine arts, literature, biography, travel, and so on. Much of the book stock will inevitably be contemporary, but it will not be complete without those standard works of the great writers and thinkers upon which our civilization was founded and developed.

Books for children are very important. The child of today, if he finds the library a place of delight, will become the adult reader of tomorrow. It is particularly desirable that books for children should be in good editions, well-printed and attractively produced, that the child may learn to value books for their own sake and not merely as sources of information.

Such a book stock cannot be built up, nor used and exploited fully, without an adequate staff of professionally qualified librarians. They are required to select the books, to catalogue and arrange them for use, to assist readers in their choice, and to draw the attention of readers to books which may particularly interest them. There is, of course, in all libraries, much work of a more routine character for which qualified staff are not required, and in libraries serving very small places, it may be impracticable fully to occupy the whole time of a qualified librarian, in which case some form of co-operative use of his services by more than one library is clearly suggested.

The third element which goes to the making of a library is the building. This may be large and complex, for a great or metropolitan library, or just one room in a small country place. However large or small, it should be bright, attractive, and scrupulously maintained. It may be desirable that a library should possess grace and dignity ; it is essential that a public library should offer a friendly and cordial welcome, so that even the most diffident person may not feel ill at ease, nor the least bookish be repelled.

A LIBRARY SERVICE FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

Over two-thirds of the local authorities in Western Australia serve populations of less than 2,500. There are therefore certain difficulties in the provision of a service such as has been described over much of the area of the State. There is, in fact, in the State no single local authority which could alone provide at reasonable cost a full and comprehensive public library service. Hence the necessity for assistance from the State government.

The Existing Libraries.

A number of the existing libraries in the State have been visited and the following difficulties were found to be experienced almost everywhere :

- (1) Local librarians, without access to information about new publications and books available for purchase, were unable easily to select books for their libraries.
- (2) Owing to the small population served by most of the libraries, the books tended to become "read out" before they were worn out. This resulted in books lying idle on the shelves—an uneconomical situation and a discouragement to readers.
- (3) Owing to their small population and limited resources, it was impossible for the libraries to purchase books of other than general interest. They made therefore little or no appeal to those whose interests were in any way out of the ordinary. In many cases, these are just the people who could most profit from the provision of a library service, but they realise the inevitable limitation of the existing libraries and so do not expect them to be able to meet their needs.

In the opinion of the Board, any co-ordinated system for public libraries must meet and solve these three difficulties of informed selection, satisfactory circulation and adequate coverage if it is to offer an effective service.

The root causes of the present admitted weaknesses in the public library provision in Western Australia are lack of adequate book resources and lack of professional staff, and both arise from the small populations of the present library authorities. The range of reading interests in a town of 2,000 population may well be as wide as in one of 20,000, but there are not in the small town sufficient readers to

justify economically the satisfaction of unusual demands. The problem is primarily not one of money, but of population. Even were some Mycaenas to appear who wished, regardless of cost, to give his local small town in isolation an adequate library service, he could do so only by quite extravagant expenditure, certainly on a scale which no public authority could or should contemplate from public funds.

A Mobile Book Stock.

After a very thorough and lengthy consideration of the problem, the Board has decided that it would best serve the interests of local libraries and their readers by establishing a State-wide mobile book stock, from which books would be supplied to local libraries and changed as often as might be necessary to maintain the stocks of local libraries fresh and attractive to readers. This would meet the problem of books in the present libraries being "read out" before they are worn out and at the same time offer very considerable financial economies. For example, in a small library, the stock could be changed three times a year, and readers therefore have three times as many titles in the course of a year from which to make their selection, without any increased expenditure on the purchase of books. Again, if the Board bought twenty-five copies of one book, one cataloguing operation would suffice for them all, whereas if twenty-five libraries each bought one, the operation and therefore the cost would be multiplied twenty-five times. In the selection of books for each library, local wishes, tastes and needs would of course be given every consideration.

Books Specially Requested by Readers.

The Board would also maintain at its headquarters in Perth a location index showing the whereabouts of every non-fiction book in the stock of the State. If a reader at, for example, Kulin, wished to read a book which was not then at the Kulin library, an application would be sent to the Board, and if the book were in the Headquarters stock or in another library, it would be supplied to Kulin from wherever it might be at the time. If, on the other hand, the book were not in stock and were suitable for purchase, it would be bought and supplied to Kulin for the reader, afterwards being returned to the general stock of the Board.

Information Service.

There are many occasions on which readers want a book on, or information about, a particular subject without knowing a suitable title or where the information is to be found. To meet this need, the Board would accept "subject requests" and the staff at the Head-

quarters would choose a suitable book and arrange for it to be sent to the reader. Much information, and particularly the most up-to-date information on technical subjects which might be required by an advanced student or a business executive is not to be found in books but can only be traced in periodicals, government reports, research publications and the like, while not infrequently an article in an encyclopaedia will answer an inquiry better than a book. Wherever the information were to be found, it would be the responsibility of the staff to find it, if possible, and the Board would earnestly hope that in the operation of this service, it might enjoy the co-operation of specialists and special libraries in the State and even outside the State. The Board would of course be pleased to place its resources reciprocally at the disposal of such specialists or libraries on any occasion upon which they might wish to call upon them. The Board is aware of the facilities for photographic and micro-reproduction of documents which now exist and would wish to make use of them wherever appropriate.

Publishers do not, normally, publish books for which there will not be enough readers to exhaust an edition. It has been found from experience that a population of about half a million contains sufficient interested people to justify the purchase of almost any book published, and such a population can at reasonable per capita cost afford to acquire and maintain a comprehensive collection of books. The population of Western Australia is just over half a million. Therefore, the Board, given sufficient funds, would be fully justified in purchasing many quite abstruse and specialised works, and the reader, having access to such a State-wide stock, wherever he lived, be it in Perth or in a country town or at the most isolated station, would be able to obtain the books he required however advanced or unusual, as certainly, though not always as quickly, as if he were able to use one of the great city libraries which exist elsewhere.

Isolated Readers.

In the southern portion of the State, which is relatively closely populated, most, if not all, readers could be served by static libraries established in appropriate towns. There is, however, a large area of the State so sparsely populated that it is doubtful whether a library service based upon local libraries could be effective. The only practicable way of serving isolated readers who live in these sparsely populated areas would be for the Board to provide, on request, a direct loan service by post, rail or other similar means. The Board is empowered to do this under the Act and will establish this service as soon as it is in a position to do so.

Making Known the Resources of the Library.

A major problem in libraries the world over in places of less than metropolitan size is that of making known to readers the books which are available to them. However good the stock of the library, it is of little service to readers if they are unaware of the resources at their disposal, and for this reason a catalogue is necessary.

In the past, library catalogues have commonly taken one of two forms : the printed book, which was convenient to readers, but expensive and quickly out of date ; and the card catalogue, which is more expensive than commonly supposed, easily disarranged, but can be completely up to date. It would be quite impossible to provide in every library a complete card catalogue of the books available throughout the whole State, while, if the local catalogue indicated only those books which happened to be in the local library at the time, it would tend rather to limit than to widen the readers' choice of reading and would offer no information on books available from elsewhere. The Board has given some preliminary consideration to this problem and hopes to be able to provide at each library (and even to isolated readers, if required) a catalogue in some form indicating the whole non-fiction resources of the State.

Staff.

Every library should be under the supervision, directly or indirectly, of a qualified librarian, and one of the responsibilities laid upon the Board by the Act is to " provide for the training of persons to carry out the duties of librarians and library assistants, such training to conform to the requirements of the Library Association of Australia."

In the larger authorities, the need for full-time staff, including at least one qualified librarian, will be obvious. In the smaller authorities, however, the employment of a full-time librarian would be impracticable, at least at present. In some districts, it might well be practicable for two or more small authorities to combine together to obtain the services of a professional librarian to assist, guide and encourage the local librarians of each authority. Distance and transport facilities would of course be important factors to be considered in the practicability of such an arrangement. In the course of time a regional organization should be built up based upon the larger towns, with a senior librarian at the head of each region who would be responsible for the general organization and development of the service within his region. As the population of the State grew, these regional librarians could take more and more responsibility and any danger of over-centralization in the future be thus avoided.

Division of Financial Responsibility.

Although the Board has very wide powers under the Act, it was the intention of Parliament that the provision of public libraries should not be a responsibility borne solely by the State nor by local authorities, but should be a joint enterprise in which the cost was met approximately equally by the State on one hand and local authorities on the other.

The Board is empowered to grant subsidies to library authorities in cash or in kind on a basis of up to a pound for a pound, and as far as can at present be foreseen, when the Board makes its subsidy in the form of a supply of fully processed and catalogued books and of central services, while local authorities accept responsibility for the cost of accommodation, staffing and incidentals, the total cost of the service will be almost equally divided when the service is developed over the major part of the State. At the same time the selection of books available to readers at any individual library will be immeasurably greater than would be possible for any existing local authority to provide. Initially, of course, the State expenditure will considerably exceed that of local authorities, while the necessary stock is being built up, but the proportions will become more and more nearly equal as more local authorities enter into co-operation.

Children's Libraries.

Most of the existing libraries serve adults only. It is, of course, most important that children should be served but the Board has not yet had the opportunity fully to consider the many aspects of the provision of books for children in children's libraries and/or in school libraries. Where, however, a participating library serves adults only, the Board's subsidy would be reduced in proportion to the population of the age groups unserved.

There are a few children's libraries unconnected with adult libraries. The wisdom of providing a children's library where no adult library exists is very much open to question, except as a short term expedient prior to the opening of an adult library. Some of the present children's libraries are good and well organized and are worthy of assistance from the Board. The existence of a children's library, however, makes the provision of an adult library a matter of some urgency and importance, and the Board would wish that any assistance it might give to children's libraries should be given in such a way as to offer the greatest incentive to the provision of an adult library by the local authority concerned.

Headquarters.

It will be necessary for the Board to set up a Headquarters organization to handle the selection and purchase, cataloguing, classification and distribution of books, the direct loan service to individuals and the research and information service which will supply books and information in answer to specific requests.

Premises suitable at least for the first few years of the Board's activities will also have to be obtained.

After the approval of the Government to the Board's policy, it will inevitably be some months before this can be done, and after the staff has been appointed, further time will be required to acquire an initial stock of books. It is unlikely, therefore, that the Board will be able to offer any book service to registered libraries for at least nine to twelve months, but this need not involve serious delay in the ultimate provision of services because the steps to be taken prior to the registration of a library, which are laid down in the Act, will necessarily extend over a number of months.

REGISTRATION OF LIBRARIES.

The procedure to be followed by a local authority which wishes to enter into co-operation with the Board and to enjoy the subsidy which the Board may offer is laid down in the Act.

The Board's power of subsidy applies only to "registered libraries" and the Board clearly cannot register a library until it has been established; indeed, a duty is laid upon the Board to "inspect or cause to be inspected" a library before any allocation of State aid is made to it. The responsibility for the initial provision of a library rests therefore with the local authority concerned and not with the Board. Nevertheless the Board is empowered in certain circumstances, and with the approval of the Minister, to make a grant for initial stocking with books.

There is ample experience to show the unwisdom of starting a free public library without an adequate stock of books, and the Board will not be prepared to register a library unless it possesses such a stock, among other things. In the case of those authorities which already possess adequate stock, no difficulty will arise, but in the case of those which at present do not, the question arises of how and whence the books are to be obtained.

This initial stock could be provided either by the Board or by the local authority. In most places it would be better for the Board to provide it for the following reasons:

- (a) Selection of the books by professional staff is most desirable;
- (b) Central processing of those books bought new would be essential;
- (c) Conflict or friction with the local authority over the value to be placed on its existing stock would be avoided;
- (d) The offer of an adequate stock by the Board would be a powerful incentive to a local authority to provide adequate accommodation and staffing;
- (e) It would be necessary for the Board to build up a pool stock consisting of two classes of books: those required to carry out normal exchanges, and those required for individual requests, too specialised for normal library open shelves. When, however, libraries are started in the larger centres, and particularly when the central library for Perth is established, many of the latter books could with advantage

be transferred to public shelves, and this would, in fact, be the only practicable method of acquiring the stock for the future lending library for Perth. Even in a small library, the inclusion of a proportion of books already in the pool stock would result in a more balanced collection and in greater economy;

- (f) Few, if any, local authorities could provide adequate initial stocks from one year's revenue, and even if they could do so, the present state of the book market renders it almost impossible to purchase an adequate, balanced collection of any size in a short period. The only practicable method, therefore, to provide such a collection, is to draw on the stock of the Board. This implies that the Board should be given funds to build up a stock for the purpose. It would then be administratively simpler and altogether more satisfactory if the books were made available to local authorities without repayment being demanded.

It would appear inequitable, however, that those local authorities which have made an effort to provide a library should receive the same treatment as those which have made no effort. The Board will, therefore, expect a local authority to provide books equal in number to one-third of those required for initial stocking, or to make a payment to the Board of one-third of the cost of the initial stock. This would also offer an inducement to local authorities to help themselves until such time as the Board is able to provide further help.

STATEMENT OF POLICY.

The Board has therefore adopted the following Statements of Preliminary Policy on the initiation of registered libraries and on the method of payment of subsidy, respectively.

Policy on the Initiation of Registered Libraries.

The Board will provide the stock required for the initiation of a registered free library service, subject to—

- (i) adequate accommodation and equipment to the satisfaction of the Board being provided by the local authority ;
- (ii) an undertaking on the part of the local authority to make adequate arrangements, to the satisfaction of the Board, for the future staffing and maintenance of the library ;
- (iii) payment by the local authority to the Board of a sum representing at least one-third of the estimated cost of the books initially provided, such payment to be in one lump sum or by instalments *provided that* no such payment shall be expected of the local authority if, at the time when the initial stock is provided by the Board, all the then existing books in the library are vested in the Board and the number of books so vested equals or exceeds one-third of the population of the local authority ; *provided further that* the Board may at its discretion exempt from vesting any particular book or books of special local value at the request of the local authority concerned ;
- (iv) agreement by the local authority that any enrolled reader of any other registered library shall be permitted to use all the facilities of the library upon presentation of his reader's ticket ;
- (v) agreement by the local authority to do all in its power to assist the efficiency of the interlending system.

Policy on the Maintenance of Registered Libraries.

The Board will adopt the policy—

- (i) that the Board's subsidy to registered free libraries be made by means of the supply and circulation of fully processed books at approximately regular intervals ;
- (ii) this subsidy will not be made available unless the local authority concerned makes proper provision to the satisfaction of the Board for accommodation, staffing and other local costs ;

- (iii) that the Board will provide additional books should the population of the area served by the library increase and may reduce the number of books should the population decrease ;
- (iv) that the Board will not normally provide periodicals under its power of subsidy.

Subject to the approval by the Government of the financial implication of this policy, the Board will welcome enquiries from local authorities and interested persons on the application of its policy and will be pleased to give any assistance in its power on any matter which lies within its scope. The Executive Officer of the Board, who is a qualified librarian, is available for consultation at the Board's office in Perth and will readily arrange to visit any library, local authority or other body in the State to discuss or assist the establishment or development of a free public library or library service.

During the year under review, the Board has had neither the financial resources nor the opportunity to offer any tangible assistance to libraries, and it has accordingly made little or no attempt actively to promote interest in, or stir up enthusiasm for, libraries and library services. It has therefore been all the more encouraged by the substantial spontaneous interest in its activities shown by local authorities, the press and by private citizens. A number of local authorities is known to be keenly interested in the improvement of existing or the establishment of new libraries. There is no doubt whatever that, throughout the State, there is a very definite demand and enthusiasm from the general public for the provision of effective library services. The Board recognises that these demands cannot be met without considerable expenditure. In view of the fact that the expenditure on libraries in this State is well below the average of the other States, it is nevertheless confident that both State Government and local authorities will recognise the claims of the people of Western Australia to enjoy a social service already established in almost every other developed member of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

FRED ALEXANDER,
Chairman.

F. A. SHARR,
Executive Officer and Secretary.

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