

# LIBRARY BOARD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

# A LIBRARY SERVICE for WESTERN AUSTRALIA

2nd Annual Report of the Board, 1953-4

#### THE LIBRARY BOARD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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THE first Annual Report of the Board which was written when the Board had been in effective operation for only three months was, in effect, a statement of policy. This Report will seek to amplify some details of that policy and to record progress made during the year.

It may be well to recapitulate briefly the Board's policy. Under the provisions of the Act the Board is empowered to subsidise local authorities up to a pound for a pound of local expenditure in the maintenance of free public libraries and, with the approval of the Minister, to give additional help towards the initial stocking of a library with books. The Board's subsidy will take the form of the free supply on loan and exchange of books required to maintain a library conducted by a local authority, provided that the local authority concerned agrees to make adequate provision for the accommodation and administration of the library. To people who live in areas of so small and scattered a population that a normal public library cannot function, the Board is prepared to supply books directly on request. This will apply particularly in parts of the North-West and the extreme East of the State.

The principal functions of the Board fall therefore under the following headings: promotion, selection and acquisition of books, cataloguing, distribution of books, request and information service, training of librarians. In addition the Board has the duty, under the Act, to advise the Minister and local authorities on matters of general policy relating to libraries and it is proposed in each Annual Report to touch upon certain such matters.

The year under review has fallen into three phases. The first three months were occupied with tentative arrangements pending the approval by the Government of the Board's budget. six after governmental approval had been given, were devoted to preparation for carrying out the approved policy, the selection and and appointment of staff, acquisition of headquarters premises and publicity activities with local authorities. The last three months following the appointment of a cadre of professional staff and the move into temporary headquarters premises have seen the practical beginning of the task of building up and processing the State wide bookstock. It is expected that the Board will be able to supply books, and cataloguing services, and to provide a Request and Information Service to the first three country libraries at York, Donnybrook and Moora in August and September, 1954. In the last Annual Report it was stated that it was unlikely that the Board would be able to offer any book service to registered libraries "for at least nine to twelve months after the approval of the Government to the Board's policy." The Board will in fact begin its service with the first local authority in a little over eleven months.

### PROMOTION ACTIVITIES.

The first major activity of the Board was the issue of the first Annual Report. Some 3,500 copies were distributed throughout the State and the volume of correspondence which ensued clearly showed that the idea of an effective public library service for the whole State evoked widespread interest. This interest in the Board's plans was not confined to Western Australia: requests for copies of the Annual Report or for other details have been received from as far afield as New Zealand, South and West Africa, India, Egypt, United States of America, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy and the United Kingdom.

The Executive Officer, on the Board's behalf, has visited at their request a considerable number of local authorities and other interested bodies during the year. As a result some twenty-three local authorities (as at 30th June) have resolved to become Participating Bodies. To those local authorities whose invitations are still outstanding the Board offers its apologies and an assurance that they will be visited as soon as it is possible to do so.

There is widespread, though not yet universal, agreement that access to books and information is a necessity to the life and particularly to the development of a civilized community. In most places which have been visited the discussion has accordingly centred mainly on the practical application of the Board's policy rather than on whether or not a library is desirable in principle. It may therefore be useful in this Report to discuss some of the questions more frequently asked.

What sort of books will the Board supply?

The short answer is that any and every sort of worthwhile book will be available. It goes without saying that the Board will supply novels and such generally recreational types of books as biography,

travel, and books on sport, and that these would form a very considerable proportion of the stock in any library. There are however many other books which are of great interest to many readers—or could be if they knew of them—and which are not usually obtainable with ease except from a public library. There are, for example, the books which the business man wants to follow his special professional or occupational interests: books on accountancy, engineering, any type of technology or on farming. Again there is a wide range of practical manuals on all sorts of subjects from how to build your own home to how to design an evening frock. This type of book is not only of interest but it is also of practical and financial value to the reader for very obvious reasons. There is also widespread interest in the arts not only in the metropolitan area but in the country too. Books on painting, drawing, photography, ballet, the theatre, and music would be needed in any library, for the executant who wishes to improve his own performance and for those whose interest lies rather in the appreciation and criticism of the work of others.

As wide a range of choice as possible should be offered to a reader when he comes to the library—it is better and more agreeable to choose one's own book from the shelves—but to supplement the choice available at any particular time, and to meet the needs of people who want quite advanced or specialised material, every library will be able to call on the Request and Information Service on behalf of its readers. Thus if Mr. (or Miss) Smith wants a book—or not knowing the title of a suitable book, some information—which is not in the library, he will fill in a postcard and hand it to the librarian, who will send a request to the Board for the book or information required. When the book or the information arrives at the library the card filled in by the reader will be posted to him and he will without delay be able to come and collect or send for his book.

To make this service possible the Board will record the whereabouts of every non-fiction book in the whole State stock, and if the book requested is not in stock will purchase it, if possible, or try to borrow it from another library. For example: some time ago a reader at the Fremantle Library wanted a book published in Minneapolis (U.S.A.) in 1916 called "The Rhyncophera of North Eastern America." A search was instituted and no copy could be found in Australia. The book was therefore borrowed, through the Commonwealth National Library, from Columbia University Library, New York and supplied to the reader. When he had studied the book he said that he would like to have photo-copies for his own use of certain pages, and they were accordingly supplied before the book was returned to New York. It should not be thought that the Request and Information Service is confined to specialised and rare material. A reader at York Library (at which the Board will shortly begin its services) wanted to know how to fix loose tiles in a fireplace. A suitable book was provided immediately. These are but two examples of the range of service which will be available to every member at every library associated with the Board.

It is a mistake to think of a properly run public library as being mainly a preserve of the academic or studious type of reader, or on the other hand as being a place where little more than light entertainment can be had. It is proper that the library should meet the needs of the scholar and the student and it is proper also that it should provide recreational reading of a worthwhile type, but in between these two extremes there is a very wide range of books designed for the general reader. Unfortunately a great many people who could derive pleasure and perhaps profit from those books do not know of their existence, and one of the functions of the library is to bring them to readers' notice.

Booksellers and librarians all over the English speaking world have in the last few years noticed and commented upon the increasing interest of the reading public in books on practical subjects and there is no reason to think that this demand will not be felt in Western Australia when the supply is there to meet it. Its causes are not far to seek. One of them is, of course, the development of general education which has spread the ability to read to all classes of the community whereas formerly it was restricted to a minority, on the whole little concerned with manual and technical skills. Another is the development of technological society. The pioneers of the early days of the industrial revolution made their inventions and developed new techniques largely by rule of thumb or by chance. Development today, on the other hand, springs from the results of research disseminated through books and periodicals and this affects not only the big industrial enterprise which maintains its own research department but spreads right down the line to the individual worker or craftsman who realises that if he is to keep abreast of new techniques traditional skills are not enough.

The need for books is greater in Western Australia today than it has ever been in the past. We are moving from the pioneering stage when-particularly in the country-almost every waking hour was occupied in taming nature and breaking in the land. The thoughts and problems of the young farmer of today are, and throughout his working life will be, quite different from those of his father. concerned far more with the economics of competitive agriculture and the application of scientific principles and technology and he therefore needs to rely to a much greater extent on written sources of information. At the same time he has more leisure and therefore both the time and the incentive to concern himself with the things of the mind and with cultural activities. It is a commonplace to say that the State is on the threshold of a major industrial development but it is perhaps less generally realised that industrial development today depends as never before on technical information. As our industries develop they are bound to become competitive with industries elsewhere in the Commonwealth and overseas many of which at present enjoy highly developed technical information services. This State will be at a serious disadvantage if it cannot call upon information services at least as efficient as those which already exist for its competitors in other parts of the Commonwealth and the world.

The Board regards the provision of such services as of great importance and will do all it can to develop them.

It should not however be thought that the Board is exclusively interested in books of information and that it is unconcerned with recreational reading. There is, of course, no sharp line of division between the two; the same book may be read for both purposes by different readers or by the same reader at different times. Nevertheless there are many books written primarily to divert or entertain which have little information to impart. These books will be properly and adequately represented in the Board's stock. Less emphasis has been placed on them in this Report not only because they are on the whole better known and "need no bush" but also because most people in Western Australia have not had the opportunity of realising the very wide range of books of information which a well run library provides. Working people enjoy today more leisure than ever before. A very valuable aspect of the public library service is the opportunity and encouragement it offers for some of that leisure to be devoted to "the nice and subtle happiness of reading."

How much will the service cost the ratepayers?

It is not of course possible to answer this question precisely without reference to a particular place and its circumstances, but generally speaking in those places in the State for which definite estimates have been worked out the annual cost to a local authority of maintaining a library is between 1s. 9d. and 2s. 6d. per head of population, or say 8s. to 10s. a year per family. This cannot be regarded as a serious burden upon any normal family budget.

Is the appointment of full time professional staff necessary?

In the average country town it will be quite unnecessary and indeed undesirable to appoint a full time librarian because there would not be enough work to keep him or her occupied. There are three ways of staffing the average country library. A part time librarian can be appointed if the work is sufficient to justify the appointment. Alternatively, the library can be operated by a member of the Road Board staff combining attention to readers with his or her normal duties; that is only practicable, of course, if the library is adjacent to the Road Board office. The third method is to secure the services of one or more local volunteers willing to undertake the work as a piece of social service. Which of these three is the best in any particular place can be decided only with knowledge of the situation in that place; but except in the large towns one of them should be quite satisfactory.

In the metropolitan area and in the more important country towns a proper service cannot be given without the employment of full time librarians, one, at least, of whom should be qualified. The need for full time staff arises from the volume of demand which is to be expected from an adequately stocked library in such places and which would be too much for part time workers or volunteers to handle. At least one qualified librarian is needed to give a proper

service to the public, and to train the younger staff. In small country towns it is not practicable fully to employ the time of a qualified librarian; in the large towns and suburbs it is both possible and practicable and if the library services in Western Australia are to bear comparison with those elsewhere professional staff are essential.

A modern public library is a dynamic, active organisation. It does not rest content merely to provide a number of books for those who care to come and find them. It strives continuously to help readers and to develop its service. It is not enough that a library provide books; it must also see that they are brought to the attention of those who may use them for pleasure or profit. To this end it has librarians, experts on books, to help readers find what they want, be it an agreeable book for the week end, or the answer to some difficult question of research. The primary function of a librarian is to bring books and readers together, the right book to the right reader. To assist him in this work he uses, of course, professional techniques such as the provision of a proper catalogue, of displays of books on selected subjects, the production and use of reading lists and bibliographies, and so on. Equally or more important he ensures that the atmosphere of the library is attractive; that it offers a ready and courteous welcome to everyone who comes in, that the staff at all times appear willing and pleased to assist a reader, and that the assistance when sought is found to be competent and useful. A library must of course have a well selected book stock, but without professional staff that book stock cannot be fully exploited by the readers, who therefore get less value than they might for the money spent on the books.

These qualities: friendly welcome, readiness to help and above all accomplished and expert advisory service, are the marks of a well run library and of a competent librarian.

If a local authority already has a suitable room and secures the services of volunteers how can it spend sufficient to get a worthwhile subsidy on a  $\pounds$  for  $\pounds$  basis?

Under the provisions of the Act the Library Board may subsidise a local authority up to pound for pound of the local expenditure. The minimum stock of books with which an effective service can be given in a local library is one volume per head of population if all ages are served, or two books for every three persons of total population if adults only (14 or 15 years of age and upwards) are served. It is estimated that the cost of maintaining 1,000 books, that is maintaining them in a physically good condition and replacing them as they become worn or obsolete, is £150 per annum. Therefore the Board's subsidy to a local authority can be assessed on the book stock necessary for that authority, e.g., if the population is 1,500 and children are not served, the book stock required will be 1,000 volumes, the maintenance cost of which is £150 per annum; therefore the value of the Board's subsidy is in that case £150.

In many small country places, where full time staff is not necessary and accommodation already exists, the local costs of operating the service are very small, and so small that a subsidy from the Board of only equal value would be ineffective in providing a reasonable choice of books to readers. In such places, in order to conform to the requirements of the Act, the Board must ask the local authority to make an annual Balancing Payment which will equalise the expenditure by both parties. The value of the balancing payment is arrived at by totalling all local costs and subtracting the total from the Board's cost in maintaining a minimum book stock. The Balancing Payment which is paid by the local authority to the Board is thus half the difference between local and Board expenditure. As local expenditure increases, so the Balancing Payment is reduced to maintain an equality by both sides.

Will not the losses of books be very high?

Experience elsewhere has shown that losses are not heavy provided that the library is efficiently conducted and that the local authority has legal powers to proceed against persons who misuse the service.

Regulations for the Conduct of Public Libraries have been gazetted and now have the force of law. They give all co-operating local authorities full powers to secure the return of books, and to require a deposit from persons who are not resident in the area. There is therefore no reason to fear undue losses if the normal system suggested by the Board is followed.

# HEADQUARTERS ACTIVITIES.

At the beginning of April the Board occupied a house at 11 Havelock Street, West Perth, as a temporary headquarters. The premises are not suitable as permanent headquarters for the Board because they are not large enough but it is hoped they will serve for a matter of two years. Their total capacity is about 15,000 volumes but most of the shelving is required for the processing and handling of books and for headquarters stock. When the time comes for the Board to enter into co-operation with some of the larger local authorities who at present have no libraries, it will be necessary to select and collect together a stock of several thousand volumes prior to the opening of each library. There is not room in the present temporary headquarters for such a stock of books to be collected or stored and the Board will therefore be obliged, while it occupies them, to concentrate on co-operation with smaller country authorities whose needs are within the capacity of its headquarters building.

Following upon the approval by the Government of the Board's policy, four professional positions were advertised throughout Australia and in New Zealand and United Kingdom and after considering carefully all the applications received the Board made the necessary appointments. These officers, Chief Assistant Librarian, Chief Cataloguer, Librarian: Accessions Section and one Cataloguer, took up their duties at the beginning of April.

BOOK SELECTION.

The careful selection of books to meet the very varied needs, and potential needs, of readers throughout the State is a most important responsibility of the Board and it entails in the staff not only a wide acquaintance with books and publishing, but also a clear understanding of the needs of readers.

One of the difficulties librarians have faced in the last few years is the paucity of good fiction. A novelist must do two things: tell a story and entertain the reader, but all too many of recent years have done neither. They have instead sought to analyse the evils of society or probe the recesses of abnormal minds rather than to fulfil their true function which is to illuminate some aspect of life through a well written and well told story. There is much merit in Hilaire Belloc's view that "The writer, as writer, is there to write stuff which the reader, as reader, will like to read." Another fault in a good many post war novels has been a tendency to introduce passages which are commonly said to be "very frank" or "stark." novelist who wishes to direct attention to the physical concomitants of emotional processes should certainly be permitted to do so, but provided that he does so honestly in an endeavour to seek the truth. Books of that type do not make a general appeal and do little harm but there seems to have been a tendency of recent years to introduce quite unnecessary (and therefore artistically indefensible) material into otherwise normal novels. This causes offence to some Both the bookseller and the librarian are placed in a position of embarrassment; neither can read every novel that he stocks and both are likely to be criticised by readers who dislike this type of writing and have stumbled across it unexpectedly. It seems, happily, that the book world itself is checking this sort of thing, and it may be hoped that what is no doubt only a passing phase will soon have passed.

Before the war it could almost be assumed that only a novel would be a best seller; today that situation has quite changed. Many of the best sellers of today are non-fiction books—for example The Kon Tiki Expedition, The Dam Busters, The Doctor in the House, Cousteau's Silent World and Churchill's Second World War. This transfer of public interest from fiction to non-fiction may be due to the difficulty which the ordinary person meets in finding suitably attractive modern novels. It also probably indicates an increasing intellectual awareness and curiosity among the reading public, due perhaps to better education and probably to the fact that many people's mental horizons and habit patterns were extended and jolted by the war. The remarkable extension of public library facilities as a result of public demand in so many countries since the war, suggests that this is so.

The public librarian, coming as he does into contact with all types of readers and knowing their tastes, must often disagree with lay critics who tend to judge the reading taste of the whole public by their own or that of their friends, and very often to under-estimate the quality of the books for which there is considerable demand.

The commercial success of books in such series as the Pelicans, has been quite astonishing. Who would have thought, for example, that the Penguin translation of the "Odyssey" would have become almost a best seller, as it was? A letter from a lady in an eastern wheatbelt town gives an example of this latent demand:

"From time to time I have seen references to the Library Board and know that things are moving .... I wonder whether it is possible for me to obtain books now? I could let you have a list a mile long as there are so many books I want to read, but I'd prefer to have the ones I cannot get anywhere else if you can supply them."

## BOOKS REQUIRED.

Confessions of a Young Man Impressions and Opinions

Fathers and Children Dream Tales On the Eve

The Growth of the English Novel

The Road to the Realm of Bells

W. B. Yeats: The Tragic Phase

Tale of a Tub

George Moore

Turgenev

Richard Church

Harry Martinsson

V. W. B. Koch

Swift

Not everybody of course wishes to read books of that type, but it is too commonly assumed that nobody wants to read them. Readers are on the whole of a gentle disposition and do not cause a loud commotion when their desires are not met. It is however, the librarian's duty to meet their softly spoken needs and even to anticipate his readers' demands, so that he may bring to their attention books of which they might otherwise be unaware.

## Accessions Section.

The Accessions Section of a library is concerned with the acquisition of books. In the three months since the section was established some 10,000 books have been purchased. All of these books must be correctly recorded since they are public, and therefore accountable, property; they must also be labelled and prepared with the necessary stationery to be issued to readers. This work is now proceeding.

# CATALOGUE SECTION.

The operation of a mobile book stock requires a considerable apparatus of catalogues and other records both for administrative purposes—recording stock and the location of books—and to enable readers to know what books are available to them. The production of these records is the responsibility of the Catalogue Section. There

are three aspects to the work: cataloguing (i.e., making a record of a book on a card or sheet of paper); classification (i.e., deciding the subject of the book and allocating it to a place in a scheme of classification so that all books on one subject come together on the shelves and in the catalogue); and the actual production of the necessary cards, sheets, etc.

The main catalogue at Headquarters is on cards arranged in dictionary order. It has two uses: as an official record of stock and as a means by which the staff can find out what books by a given author or on a given subject are in the whole State wide stock, when that information is required for any purpose and particularly for readers' requests. Full and detailed information about each book must be recorded in this catalogue because most of the actual books will be away in libraries all over the State. In addition, a much simpler location index, also on cards, is needed to show where any book is at any time.

The main catalogue at Headquarters will however be of little direct use to readers, who need something similar in their local libraries. A catalogue in loose leaf book form will therefore be produced and supplied to each registered library. It will list not only the books in that library but the whole non-fiction stock of all libraries, and will be kept up to date by constant revision. It will be arranged by subjects so that all the books on, for example, beekeeping or ballet or photography will be together.

Books must be arranged in a library in a way which makes them easy for readers to find. The most convenient arrangement for novels is by the author's names in alphabetical order, and this is easily done because publishers print the name on the back of each book. Nonfiction books are however best arranged by subject. To help local librarians arrange their books by subject a classification number allotted by the Catalogue Section is lettered on the back of each nonfiction book. All the local librarian has to do is to arrange the books in numerical order and they will automatically be arranged by subject. The numbers used on the backs of the books will be the same as those in the catalogue so that the reader who is interested in motor cars and lorries, for example, will find all the books on that subject together at the same number both in the catalogue and on the shelves.

In addition to these records and facilities which are primarily designed to help the reader find the books he wants, the local library authority needs (for administrative purposes) a list of the books which it has on loan from the Board. To avoid the waste of time involved in repetitive listing, a card is produced for every book and when a collection is sent to a library a bundle of corresponding cards is also sent. These, if filed in a drawer, form a record of all the books held by that library, and when any book is returned to the Board the corresponding card is likewise returned.

The necessary cards for these various purposes and others required for purely internal use in the Headquarters are produced as unit cards on a Multilith machine. This not only reduces typing and

checking costs, and speeds up the availability of books, but also ensures that all cards for the same book are identical and thus helps to avoid queries and misunderstandings. Since the cards sent as a record of stock to each library will contain full catalogue entries and subject tracings the local librarian, if it be so desired, can produce a public dictionary or classified catalogue of his own stock by merely copytyping the necessary additional cards. This will be a major economy in those libraries large enough to justify their own public catalogue and will greatly improve the service which their staff can give to the public by relieving them of the time consuming, and perhaps doubtfully useful, work of local cataloguing.

The scale of the work involved may be indicated by the fact that the 10,000 volumes purchased in the last three months of the year require the production of some 50,000 cards.

DISTRIBUTION AND REQUEST AND INFORMATION SERVICE.

This Section has not yet been established because the need has not yet arisen. On distribution there is nothing to report, but the foundations have been laid of a fairly comprehensive bibliographical collection which will be essential to the future efficiency of the Request and Information Service.

To avoid wasting money by the unnecessary purchase of bibliographies already in another library in Perth, and in order to obtain for future use a survey of the resources available, the Board's Chief Cataloguer, with the ready co-operation of the librarians and other officials concerned, has compiled a union list of bibliographical and abstracting material in the major libraries of Perth. It is thought that after it has been edited this list might, in addition to its internal use, be of value to students and scholars and, if the other libraries whose stock is listed are agreeable, it may be published later.

## TRAINING OF LIBRARIANS.

One of the duties laid upon the Board by the Act is to provide for the training of librarians and assistant librarians.

The training required has two aspects:

(a) The training of local persons who are to operate small country libraries on a voluntary or part time basis, in the essential routine skills, and

(b) professional training of potential librarians.

The Board intends to meet the first need by offering to such people a period of attachment to the Headquarters in Perth and, with the co-operation of the local authority concerned, to a well run library in the metropolitan area. During the period of attachment they will learn the ordinary day to day working of a library, and also the facilities which exist at Headquarters upon which they will be able to call when they go back to their country centre.

There will not be in Western Australia, within a foreseeable future, sufficient professional students of librarianship to justify the establishment of a School of Librarianship in the State. The Board

has therefore decided to appoint one or two graduate cadets each year and to send them, under bond, to a School of Librarianship in the Eastern States. This should go some considerable way to ensure a supply of the qualified librarians without whom the development of effective services in the metropolitan area and in the large country towns will be impossible.

### THE METROPOLITAN AREA.

The Board has given consideration to the library needs of the metropolitan area and a report on the matter more detailed than is appropriate here was circulated in March to the local authorities concerned.

An effective public library service such as is enjoyed in cities of similar size elsewhere would comprise a number (perhaps 20) of local lending libraries for both adults and children; a central lending library having a stock of books more advanced or specialized than those appropriate to a local library; a central reference library with specialized departments for certain subjects such as Commerce and Science and Technology; and appropriate extra-mural or extension services in places like hospitals, prisons, and old people's homes, whose residents are immobilized from access to normal public libraries.

Local lending libraries are, under the provisions of the Act, a responsibility of local authorities who may enjoy the Board's book supply subsidy. In addition to the books available for home reading they will also need quick reference collections of perhaps 200 to 500 volumes; a small number of periodicals would be desirable. To be effective they must be located at places to which people naturally and frequently go for other purposes such as at shopping centres; and to be economical they should serve a population (at the normal housing density in Perth) of about 15,000 to 20,000.

Efficiency, that is, effectiveness with economy, will be achieved in the metropolitan area only if the service is planned as a unity; this does not imply administration by one body, although, if it were possible, that would have advantages. The present local government boundaries bear little or no relation to the natural boundaries of social catchment areas, nor to the capacity of the authorities to bear the cost of a library service. A Commission on Metropolitan Boundaries is at present sitting and until the question is settled or has reached a measure of finality little progress is to be expected. Local libraries should for maximum efficiency be situated at the natural focal points of their catchment areas without undue regard to authority boundaries. This could of course be achieved only with the agreement and cooperation of the local authorities and after the question of their future boundaries has been settled. The Board is of the opinion that when the time is appropriate it may be desirable to invite representatives of the metropolitan local authorities to a conference to discuss the matter. It is possible that they might agree to set up a joint committee or authority to plan and even perhaps to operate the whole of the local metropolitan services as a coherent unity.

The provision of the central services, lending and reference, concerns not only the Board but also the Trustees of the Public Library of Western Australia and the Lord Mayor and Councillors of the City of Perth. Since no consultation has yet taken place on the matter between the three bodies, it would not be proper for the Board to express its views in this Report.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

The Board wishes to record its gratitude to the Lord Mayor and the City of Perth for their continued hospitality in placing a committee room at the Board's disposal for meetings.

The Board has been greatly helped on many occasions throughout the year by the ready and cordial co-operation offered by departments of the State Government and by the London Office, and wishes formally, but none the less sincerely, to express its appreciation therefor.

#### CONCLUSION.

Throughout history the possession of wealth and power has carried an obligation to support and maintain the arts, science and the things of the mind. In the Ancient World, the great Royal library at Alexandria; in the Middle Ages, the rich monastic libraries; after the Renaissance, the libraries of noble houses, many of which became the basis of great national libraries, all bear witness to this tradition. Today we live in a democratic age. We believe that the governing class should be, not an hereditary or other elite, but the whole body of the people. The obligation nevertheless still remains; patronage of the arts and sciences which was, in the past, extended by Kings, Church and nobility must now be provided by the governments, Federal, State and local, which are elected by the people. The more broadly based is political power and the more evenly spread financial capacity, the more heavily does responsibility bear upon each individual citizen as a guardian of our civilization and culture. This duty is recognised in the scientific field by increasing Commonwealth and State support for research and training; but man does not live by bread alone, nor may civilizations die by atom bombs alone. The arts and the humanities are just as essential to greatness in a nation as science and technology and if our civilization and culture are to survive, they, too, must be cherished by all the people who make up that democracy.

The public library is the most democratic of our institutions; on its shelves all the great minds of the past and the present, and some of the lesser ones, patiently await the reader's attention. The library is a sanctuary of the free mind and an oasis of tolerance. Those who have tyrannized over the minds or souls of men have always wanted to deny access to books, or to burn them.

The fundamental assumption upon which democracy rests is that, given access to the necessary information, the people will choose the right policy and choose it more surely than will an oligarchy or an autocracy. But the essential condition is "given access to the necessary information." The public library is the only institution which

can give that information without bias and without slant. The individual newspaper cannot; a radio commentator cannot; an author cannot; a teacher may not. These all, inevitably and rightly, have their individual viewpoints. Only the whole congregation of writers who make up a library can provide the complete information, leaving the reader to choose between their several interpretations.

It is to the younger people of today that the establishment of public libraries throughout the State will be of greatest benefit. If Western Australia is to advance and our young people are to grasp the opportunities now opening to them, they must be given access to books and periodicals which will bring them into contact with cultural, scientific, technical and social ideas. At the lowest, this is necessary if they are not to be outstripped by, and subordinated in the future to, their contemporaries from the Eastern States and abroad who have had such access and have profited by it. At a higher level, such facilities are necessary if they are to build, upon the foundations so hardly laid by the pioneers, a society which can live a life gracious and cultured as well as technologically advanced. To those who have no faith in the young people of today such an argument is without weight but the challenge will be clear to all who wish to see their children and their friends' children enter into the heritage which should rightly be theirs.

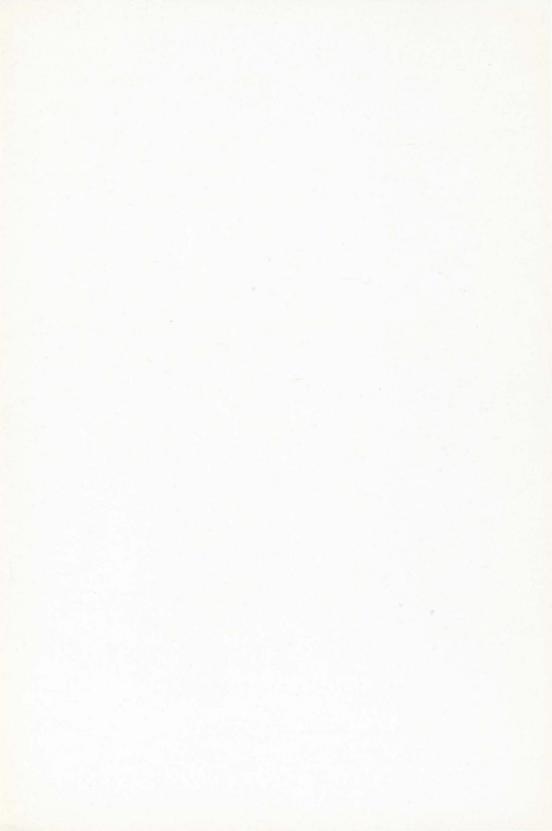
King George V, who was a great lover of outdoor sports, once said—

"Public libraries are as essential to the minds of the people as open spaces to the health of their bodies."

Nature has endowed the State of Western Australia with many open spaces; State and local authorities, with public support, have added, and will rightly continue to add, many man-made ovals, swimming pools and other aids to healthy bodies. The Library Board of Western Australia, in pursuance of its statutory duty, looks with confidence to the co-operation of local authorities and general public alike in providing at least comparable facilities for the free play of healthy minds in this large State which now appears to stand on the threshold of great material progress.

FRED ALEXANDER,
Chairman.

F. A. SHARR,
Executive Officer and Secretary.



The flower on the cover of this Report is the Sturt Pea, a wild flower which is found mainly in desert country from the North-West to Kalgoorlie. The design was executed by Miss M. Devlin of the Government Lithographic Staff.