



PORTLAND PARISH LIBRARY

Portland can be regarded as one of the pioneer parishes in library development. As early as 1824 the St. Georges Library Society began in Portland as a subscription library in Buff Bay. It was an active and progressive library whose members had to pay both an admission fee and an annual subscription fee.

In 1838 there were 79 members. This library set the pattern for the development of similar subscription libraries in St. Elizabeth, St. James, St. Ann, Trelawny and St. Catherine. Nearly 100 years later the idea of free libraries was able to gain favourable public support in most of these parishes. One such free library was formed by a small committee on the initiative of Mr. Horace Edwards and established in Port Antonio on March 14, 1943. Many citizens donated books and the Institute of Jamaica and British Council both also gave their assistance. The library was housed in an old building on the Public Works Department premises. This building was, marked for demolition, however, through the instrumentality of Mr. Sherlock, the committee was able to purchase it at a cost of six hundred (600) dollars.

The library flourished with 300 members including several persons in other parts of the parish who borrowed books through the post. After nearly a year and a half of operation the library met with disaster in the Hurricane of August 1944 which destroyed the building and most of its contents. This disaster, however, did not deter

the committee and under the chairmanship of the late Hon. F .V. Grossett, Custos of the parish, plans were put in place for the re-opening of the library. In the interim, a limited service was operated from the Methodist Church Hall and loans were made mainly to members of the Port Antonio Adult Education Group. Mr. Shelton was successful in obtaining further gifts of books for the Library from the British Council.

On the arrival of the first Director of the Jamaica Library Service, Mr. A. S. A. Brayant, in May 1948, discussions were held to incorporate the Free Library into the island-wide service and to develop it as the Portland Parish Library. The establishment of the Portland Library and the construction of a suitable building was however delayed as provision for local financing was not yet finalized with the Parochial Board (now known as the Parish Council). By 1950 however, space in the Forresters' Lodge building, Port Antonio, became available and the Portland Parish library was opened on June 14, 1950 under the auspices of the Jamaica Library Service (JLS).

A Parish Library Committee was appointed in accordance with the Jamaica Library Service Law and assumed responsibility for the operation of the Library. Three members of the original free Library committee Dr. E. D. Phillips, the late Hon. F. V. Grosset and the late Mr. S. L. Hillary who had worked assiduously for library development in Portland continued to serve on the new committee. Mr. I. W. Shelton who had also kept the library spirit alive during the difficult years was also a member.