



ST. ELIZABETH PARISH LIBRARY NETWORK

The St. Elizabeth Parish Library was founded by the late Rev. Walter Lewis, a Presbyterian minister and pioneer in public library development in Jamaica, who saw the need for a library in the thriving logwood town of Black River. A committee of interested persons was set up under the chairmanship of Mrs. Julia Johnston and three months later, on February 5, 1944, the Library became a reality. It began operations in a room above a store in down town Black River, when it was officially opened as the St. Elizabeth Public Library. In 1950, it was later incorporated into the recently established Jamaica Library Service and in 1953 land was acquired for its relocation to 64 High Street, Black River, where it is currently situated.

Until its erection in 1953, serious problems were encountered in finding accommodation for the Library. In addition to increased rental, notice to vacate the premises within one day, brought about a crisis which threatened to necessitate the closing down of the library in September, 1947. An earlier appeal to the Colonial Secretary for a grant of two hundred (\$200) dollars to commence building had been turned down. The Hon. Sir Donald Sangster, then a member of the Library Committee provided accommodation in his offices and there it remained until the completion of the library building in 1953.

The building was constructed at a cost of seven thousand three hundred (\$7,300.00) dollars, three-quarters of which were provided by Central Government through the Jamaica Library Board and a quarter by the Parish Council through the St. Elizabeth Parish Library Committee. The library was officially opened on April 29, 1953, by His Excellency Sir Hugh Foot, K.C.M.G., O.B.E. then Governor of the Island. This was the second library building constructed under the Jamaica Library Service building scheme instituted in 1950.

In 1963, the building was extended. This included a workroom/garage to accommodate the Schools Library Service Bookmobile when operating in the parish, and also to relive the shortage of workroom space. Foreseeing the need for further extension of the building, the Committee began negotiations to acquire additional land and the Johnston family generously donated land adjoining the present site, in memory of the late Mrs. Julia Johnston who had been so closely associated with the development of the public library service in St. Elizabeth.

Over time, the Library extended its services to smaller towns across the parish with the establishment of branch libraries, a Postal-Reader Service and a mobile library service (1979 - 2007).

The St. Elizabeth Parish Library currently has responsibility for administering the public library service within the parish of St. Elizabeth through its main Library in Black River and network of ten (10) branch libraries, offering a wide range of programmes and services to members of the public, which cater to persons of all ages.