

## THE CAPE TOWN MEDICAL LIBRARY DURING THE PAST 50 YEARS

G. GLICKMAN, B.A., A.S.A.L.A., ASS. A.A. MED.-REC.-LIBS., *Medical Librarian, University of Cape Town*

The first independent medical library in Cape Town was launched on 16 November 1906, when the Library Committee of the Medical Association (Cape Western Branch) held its initial meeting in No. 1 Committee Room of the City Hall. This meeting was convened by Dr. Jasper Anderson, who was subsequently elected chairman, with Dr. Hugh Smith as secretary.

As a result of a deputation to the officials of the South African College, a large side room was obtained on a 3-year lease at a rental of £100 *per annum*. The Branch Council contributed £250 towards the furnishing of the library and a separate annual grant towards its maintenance.

Steps were taken to obtain gifts of books and duplicate volumes, etc. from the libraries of the British Medical Association in London and from the Royal College of Physicians of England. Also, subscriptions were placed to 17 journals as from January 1907 at a total cost of £20 1s. 6d. per year.

In August 1907 Dr. H. A. Moffat was invited to become the honorary librarian of the Cape Western Branch of the Medical Association. In reply to this invitation he wrote: 'I shall be pleased to do anything I can for the Library Committee, and so accept with pleasure, but fear also, the position of the librarian, though I am absolutely ignorant of the duties.'

This first medical library was conducted more or less on a self-service basis. A record book was provided in which any member who took out a book or periodical recorded his name and address, short title of the book or name and date of the periodical, and the date on which it was taken out. On returning the item borrowed, the member entered the date of its return. Members outside Cape Town obtained journals or books by application to the hon. librarian. The cost of sending them was borne by the Association and the cost of returning by the borrowing member.

Besides the Association's library, medical books and journals were acquired by the South African College (later the University of Cape Town) as part of its general library, ever since the establishment in 1912 of its Medical School. The entire university library was in those days housed on the ground floor of the Hiddingh Hall, until the medical school moved to the Groote Schuur site in 1928.

The nucleus of the present excellent collection of periodicals was built up by Prof. William Adam Jolly, who was appointed to the chair of Physiology in October 1911 and subsequently became the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in 1917. Professor Jolly was the real founder of the medical library. Through his personal endeavours a number of donations were received for the library. The sum of £1,000 was donated by Dr. Christian Lawrence Herman, who was a student at the South African College from 1873-1877 and subsequently spent some time doing research in Professor Jolly's department. Substantial dona-

tions were also received from Mr. John Koster, Mrs. Elizabeth Berlein, and others. These donations were used chiefly for the purchase of back numbers of periodicals. In 1916 Sir Alfred Thomson, M.D., bequeathed £2,000 to the University, the interest on which was to be devoted to the purchase of current medical periodicals.

When the medical faculty moved in 1928 from the old University buildings in Orange Street to the Wernher and Beit Medical Laboratories, adjoining the Groote Schuur Hospital site, the medical book and periodical collection was moved from Hiddingh Hall to the pathology block, where 3 rooms were allocated to house it — in this way it became the first branch library of the University of Cape Town.

From 1928 till 1931 Mr. S. Harvey, of the Hiddingh Hall Library — a retired post office official — served as the first medical librarian. This gaunt and very elderly gentleman was popularly known as 'bokbaard' on account of the goatee he sported. To have termed him a librarian was actually a misnomer. He was rather a clerk who acted as custodian of the collection, and who resented change of any sort. He abhorred draughts and always kept the library entrance door closed. He was not in good health and preferred to be disturbed as little as possible while he read the daily newspaper. Those who remember Mr. Harvey will recall the homely touch supplied to the library by his little bunches of flowers, especially violets.

Owing to Mr. Harvey's increased difficulty in climbing steps he asked to be released from the medical library, and in January 1931 the clerical assistant in the Pathology Department was asked by Prof. J. W. C. Gunn, chairman of the University Library Committee and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine (at the suggestion of Prof. B. J. Ryrie), to take charge of the medical library. This was in addition to her original duties. By 1935, however, the demands upon the services of the medical library had grown to such an extent that it was no longer possible to continue opening the library for only a few hours daily. The post of a full-time medical librarian was accordingly advertised.

Applicants for this post were required to 'possess a university degree, and a knowledge of French, or German, in addition to both official languages'. The salary offered was £180 *per annum*! As a result of this advertisement Mrs. Miriam S. Walsh, a city councillor at the time, in the *Cape Review* of 21 June 1935, questioned the value of university education in view of the remuneration offered by the *Alma Mater*. She asked, 'Is a degree essential for such a job as this, and if so, is the pay not grossly inadequate?' To quote from Dr. Moffat's letter, Mrs. Walsh appeared 'absolutely ignorant of the duties' of a medical librarian.

Between 1928 and 1935 the medical library continued to expand steadily. Then the university authorities were approached with the request to incorporate the old library of the Medical Association (Cape Western Branch) into

the University's medical library. Dr. A. W. S. Sichel was the hon. librarian of the Branch at the time. In April 1936 agreement was reached on the incorporation, subject to certain conditions. The Branch retained its property which was always to be readily identifiable, and its members allowed free borrowing privileges, while provision was made for country members, too, to have literature supplied to them. The Cape Western Branch continued to subscribe to and bind journals it was already taking.

By the end of World War II the medical library was bursting its seams, even though from time to time it was given additional space until it occupied 8 different rooms on various floors of the pathology block. The need for a new medical library was actually discussed as far back as 1936. Various sites were considered from time to time. At one time Dr. C. L. Herman, who died in 1940, contemplated leaving money for a medical library to be named after him, but on account of the delay this never materialized, and he left £40,000 instead for medical research.

The new medical library, designed by Mr. F. L. Sturrock of the firm of Thornton White, Pryce Lewis and Sturrock, was completed in September 1953 at a cost of £90,500, and well situated between the Groote Schuur Hospital, the Medical Residence and the Medical School buildings. Although not yet completely furnished, the library was formally opened on 19 January 1954 by the University Chancellor, the Hon. A. v. d. Sandt Centlivres.

The medical library, which is the largest branch of the University of Cape Town library, has a staff of 3 full-time and 2 part-time professional librarians, a clerical assistant, as well as a stackroom and cleaning staff of 4. The medical library is chiefly a reference library and caters

largely for postgraduate readers. Its services extend far beyond the physical boundaries of the University, since a large postal service is conducted for country members of the Medical Association. Country members are entitled to the same bibliographical services as urban members enjoy, such as the compilation of bibliographies, the searching for information in answer to reference queries, and supplying photographic services. Literature not available from the library stock is supplemented by a very extensive inter-library loan system and by the importation of microfilms and photo-copies from abroad.

The new medical library has a specially equipped room set aside for reading microfilms. Seating accommodation for about 200 readers is provided in the various reading rooms. A pleasant feature of the library is the Doctors' Room which is reserved for medical men and postgraduate research workers. Various donors have been responsible for furnishing this room, which is also available for evening meetings of any medical society. A separate entrance for this purpose was provided when the library was planned. The display case in the vestibule of the medical library was donated by the present honorary librarian of the Cape Western Branch, Dr. Harold Hofmeyr.

The medical library has a stock of about 42,000 volumes and receives currently about 1,200 different serials, which have been acquired by subscription, exchange and donation. All duplicates are made available to other medical libraries that lack these titles. Periodicals constitute about three-quarters of the stock. There are, too, collections of medical history, medical theses, medical Africana and reference books. These sections are limited to use in the library only, but copied extracts may be provided if required.