

A Carnegie in Castries

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Abstract

A visitor to the city and capital of St. Lucia, Castries, would find it difficult to miss the Public Library. The red building with its impressive architectural features, looms majestically from the corner of Micoud and Bourbon Streets overlooking Derek Walcott Square (formerly Columbus Square). Between 1903 and 1916, Carnegie funds were granted to St. Lucia and five other territories for the construction of free public libraries. The others are Barbados, St Vincent, Dominica, British Guiana, now Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. It was a mere sixty years after emancipation and these colonies were still trying to recover from the ravages of over two hundred and fifty years of slavery.

It was the dawn of the 20th Century in America and a class of 'new millionaire' was emerging, all eager to make their mark. Great riches had been amassed after the 1861-1865 civil war had ended and the result for those who had made money, to participate in some type of philanthropic endeavour. While those in the middle class opted for systems and institutions promoting moral reform, others preferred to leave a legacy of a more permanent type - cultural buildings. Andrew Carnegie was one of the latter and he chose to erect public libraries all over the Americas, the United Kingdom and their former colonies and in Africa. He left a lasting legacy.

Free public libraries, accessible to all, was a new concept especially in these newly emancipated colonies and public libraries were the first to provide this type of access. This paper seeks to create a historical narrative of the Carnegie Free Library in St. Lucia against the backdrop of the social, economic and political conditions existing at the time. However, gaps exist in the storyline - The city of Castries fell victim to numerous fires during its existence and thousands of documents were destroyed.

Key Words: **Carnegie Libraries – Caribbean; Early Public Libraries**

A Carnegie in Castries

Introduction

History informs us that libraries were not new to the colonies - they were subscription, private and clerical, existing from as early as the 1600s. They originated with the flow of Spaniards to the New World in the wake of Columbus' voyages (Borome 1970). However, these types of libraries were available to only a small segment of the general population in these slave-holding colonies. Carnegie libraries, on the other hand, offered *free access for all*.

It was the early 1900s, a time when the cataclysmic effects of slavery were still evident across the Caribbean: sugar production continued to decline and the economic and social state of St. Lucia and the other colonies was dismal. According to the West India Royal Commission Report of 1897, the almost exclusive dependence of the colonies on the sugar industry meant that any reduction would have a deleterious effect on the economy.

The prosperity of the West Indies in former times was mainly due to sugar and rum, and the production of these commodities attained such dimensions as to dwarf, and at one time, almost to distinguish, every competing industry. (West India Royal Commission 1897, 3)

In 1924, after a long and complex process that included a letter writing campaign between the City Government and the Carnegie Corporation, advocacy by ordinary St. Lucians, a political power struggle and a number of other misfortunes, including fires, the library in Castries was finally opened to the public. However, the devastating fire of 1948 that wiped out the majority of the city including the library almost guaranteed the disappearance of the Carnegie Library from city's landscape. It took strong activism especially from political activist George Cooper, to ensure that the Carnegie Library

would not completely vanish from the city. Father Jesse, an eyewitness to the fire, reported,

All of the commercial section of Castries was destroyed, and the following Government buildings were lost: Administration, Customs Treasury, Audit, Post Office, Executive Architect, Education, Printery, Supreme and Magistrate’s Court, Registry Labour and Controller of Supplies. The Castries Town Board offices were gutted, so were the Carnegie Library with its excellent reference section... The value of property destroyed amounted to over nine million dollars. Irreparable damage was done to files, records and archives,... (Jesse 1964, 50)

The city needed to be rebuilt practically from the ground up and the library was an important part of that rebuilding process.

Illustration 1: Map of St Lucia



Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/caribbean/saint-lucia/>

St Lucia is a volcanic island in the Caribbean, located in the Lesser Antilles. It is 238 square miles (616.4 square kilometres) with a 2008 population estimate of 170,000 and an average

temperature of 78 degrees Fahrenheit (27 degrees Celsius). The capital city is Castries located in the north of the island. It is estimated that there are 151 species of trees on the island and is said to be home to three unique species of fauna – the St. Lucia parrot, the blue ground lizard and the St. Lucia grass snake.

Historical records indicate that the indigenous peoples were the Arawaks - Amerindians who first inhabited the island. It is believed that they travelled to St. Lucia from South America around 200-400 A.D. The Caribs gradually replaced the Arawaks and settled on the island from 800-1000 A.D. They were succeeded by the Spanish, led by Columbus, who had started their early exploration of the Caribbean in 1492 and 1493. Some historians believe that, after missing the island in his previous voyages, Columbus and his crew spotted the island of St. Lucia on June 15, 1502. Others thought it was a map drawn by another navigator, on a private voyage in the region that provided evidence of St. Lucia's existence. Whichever version is correct, the consensus is that Europeans knew of the island's existence from as early as the early sixteenth century (Harmsen, Ellis and Deveaux 2012, 14).

The Caribbean region was a place for European rivalry and domination and for two centuries, between the early 1600s through to 1800s, the French and English fought over St. Lucia. However, in 1814, the English finally wrested it away from the French and it remained an English colony until full independence on February 22, 1979. Therefore the social changes which occurred in Britain had repercussions for St. Lucian society.

Social Changes in England and the Colonies Post Emancipation

The mid nineteenth century was considered a time of social and economic transformation in both Britain and its colonies. In Britain, it was rooted in the Industrial Revolution which spanned the period between the late 1700s through to the mid-1800s. At this time, according to one author, "...1850s England had become an economic titan. Its goal was to supply two-thirds of the globe with cotton spun, dyed, and woven in the industrial centres of northern England" (Kreis 2011). Innovations were taking place in industries such as agriculture, transportation and

manufacturing. Factories, located primarily in the urban areas, were now contributing to the growth of cities and were responsible for the significant population shift. People were moving from rural to urban areas to find work resulting in severe social problems. Two of the most acute problems, poverty and illiteracy, plagued the working population. To alleviate some of these social ills, the Government passed several types of legislation to benefit this segment of the society. Forty-two percent of the population was illiterate and of that number, 25% were women and 17% men.

One of these pieces of legislation was the Public Libraries Act of 1850, pushed through by William Ewart, the member from Liverpool. He persisted in trying to make improvements in the lives of those in the working class despite the objections of his more conservative rivals, who argued that those in the middle and upper classes would be paying for a service to be used primarily by the lower echelon of society. His perseverance led to a law which considerably influenced the establishment of public libraries in Britain and contributed to the further development of libraries in the colonies. In 1887, there were 133 free public libraries in Britain and by 1900, there were 295.

Passage of the Emancipation Act of August 1, 1834 in the British colonies resulted in freedom for three quarters of one million persons in the British West Indies (Augier, Gordon and Hall 1975, 71). Of that number, 13,280 were in the island of St. Lucia. The period of apprenticeship, a four-year transitional period that followed, was touted as one of adjustment but contemporary historians generally agree that this period was set up to benefit the planters' economic interest. Antigua was the only colony to opt out of the arrangement and go directly to full emancipation. It was against this background and in the midst of this economic and social upheaval that local governments in the English-speaking Caribbean began to enact legislation to ameliorate the lives of the people.

A Public Library for St. Lucia

One such piece of legislation extended to the creation of *public* libraries in the colonies. In St. Lucia the law was passed in June 1847 but over seventy years elapsed before an actual building would be erected. That event occurred in 1924 when the Carnegie Library was finally opened to the public. Castries was afflicted by numerous fires which had contributed significantly to the dearth of information regarding aspects of the city's history and certainly its library development in the late nineteenth century. Fortunately, enough documentation survived to allow for a relatively coherent story.

The Castries Central Library is part of the rich history of the island and its colonial connections. In 1844, according to Henry Breen, Colonial Secretary and author of *History of St. Lucia*,

There is neither public library nor literary institution of any kind in the island. A reading room was establishment in 1830, and continued in existence for about a year. A circulating library was instituted in 1836, and lasted about the same space of time. An attempt to get up a reading room was again made in 1839 but failed, and again in 1842, but met with no further success. Indeed, reading is altogether at a sad discount. (Breen 1970, 273)

Linda Molloy saw the passage of the 1847 law as the groundwork for the eventual erection of an actual building. She declares in *St. Lucia Past: Pictorial History*, "1847 saw the foundation of the first library and museum in St. Lucia" (Molloy 1996).

A 1958 Central Library Annual Report noted that the first library ordinance - a Public Library, Museum and Commercial Reading Room Act was passed in 1888. This report later clarified that it was not a public library but a subscription library ordinance and included statistics from an 1891 Annual Report which stated that the book stock consisted of 232 volumes serving 100 members (Central Library of St. Lucia 1958, 4).

St. Lucia's library growth seemed to have come to a complete standstill in the late nineteenth century. It would take a number of years before the issue came up for discussion by the Castries Town Board, (subsequently referred to as the Board) which was the governing body of

the city responsible for matters of development, including the provision of essential services and amenities and the maintenance of order for the town of Castries, capital of St. Lucia. They took their duties very seriously, met quite regularly and “initiated and undertook many improvements to the Town and its immediate environs” (Carasco 1967, 26). The process had begun years earlier when Andrew Carnegie, a wealthy businessman had offered funds for the erection of public libraries across towns and cities of the Americas.

The Letter-writing Campaign

It was recorded that Andrew Carnegie through his Trust had made an offer of £2,500 to the Board for the erection of a library building. His terms and conditions were articulated in a letter dated December 14th 1906 from James Bertram, Carnegie’s personal secretary, to Mr. R. G. McHugh, Deputy Chairman of the Board. The letter stated:

Mr. Carnegie will be glad to provide twenty-five hundred pounds sterling to cover the cost of erecting a free public library building for Castries, St. Lucia, provided he receives pledges from the Government that one hundred and fifty pounds a year from the Government for maintenance of the library and from the Town Council that on their part fifty pounds will be given annually for maintenance of the library (Bertram 1906).

After the initial offer was made, the two parties exchanged a series of letters that outlined the details of the offer and included the architectural plans for the building. In one such letter dated July 29, 1908 Bertram reiterated one of the most important stipulations attached to the grant for all library buildings funded by Carnegie, namely that there be *free* access for all persons.

Please understand that if Mr. Carnegie is to consider this matter of a library for Castries further, it must be understood the Library is to be entirely free, both as to reading in the building and borrowing for home use, - no subscriptions, at least no subscriptions carrying privileges which cannot be had free (Bertram 1908).

Another hurdle to be overcome and one which caused further delay and controversy was the plans for the building. Bertram asked to see a plan of the building. A detailed letter that included the following information was submitted: the number of floors with dimensions, the height of the roof and the material to be used for the walls, floors and ceiling. There was even some consideration given to the number of floors because of the threat of earthquakes. It stated:

[T]he length 83 feet breadth 55 feet...there will be two floors... the walls of the building from ground floor to level of second floor will be of local stone ... the trusses over the main building will be of steel and the roof timbers in the verandah and towers of pitch pine. The roof covering in all cases will be of externit slates (in two shades) ... the interior floors will be of pitch pine laid on pitch pine joists carried over R.S joists ... The ceilings in the ground floor will be panelled in native woods, while the ceilings on the first floor will be covered in Architectural sheet metal manufactured by the Metallic Roofing Co. of Canada (Proposed Free Library 1908).

There were numerous letters between the Board and Carnegie but finally on February 20, 1909, McHugh sent correspondence accepting the funds on behalf of the Board.

In the midst of this letter-writing campaign, a resident living in the Square, Anne Lartigue injected a personal plea to Carnegie himself to intervene on her behalf and ask the Board to purchase her land. Her letter read in part,

...It is rumoured here that you are willing to help our poor island by the gift of a free library provided those in charge act in accordance with your wishes. As to the site, there has as you are no doubt aware been a good deal of controversy and up to this moment public opinion is at variance. The place now occupied as the Public Library of which you were forwarded a photograph some time ago belongs to us. Its rental amounting to £5 is our chief means of subsistence.

My mother is an aged widow and cannot work. I am her only child and live alone with her. May I ask you that as a favor to ask the town board to purchase the property which we are willing to sell.

To lose our present tenants would mean privation and suffering. We have occupied the premises twenty one years. A word from you then and perhaps as a little help would enable them to try and so do us a good turn, for which one more human being even in this our out of the way corner of the world would bless your name... (Lartigue 1908).

There is no evidence to indicate whether Carnegie, or his personal secretary, Bertram responded to Ms. Lartigue.

Accepting the funds for the building was the commencement of the process but further delay and internal strife between the opposing nominees for the Board delayed the construction for more than a decade.

Political Power Struggle - The Castries Town Board – The Squarites vs. The Anti-Squarites

It was 1909 and Board elections would be held in December of that year. A heated controversy was brewing amongst the members with regard to the site for the library. This decision came under their (the Board's) jurisdiction and the final outcome could be politically perilous or advantageous. In this election year, the public had become very interested in the outcome of this battle between members of the Board who were up for election. The candidates believed the result could influence the electorate in one direction or another. Some believed that Columbus Square (now Derek Walcott Square) should be used, others disagreed. The division became so intense that the two camps were referred to as the Squarites and the Anti-Squarites and the electorate lined up on one or either side of the debate.

There were several meetings with the final one held just before the election on December 20th. According to the December 24, 1909 newspaper of St Lucia, (the Voice), people were so interested in the outcome that attendance was restricted to ticket-holders only. Among those attending were the Attorney General, all members of the Legislative Council, Messrs. F.

Floosiac, Merchant, W.V. Degazon, Cools-Lartigue, F.I.F. Romeo, Barristers-at-Law and candidates for the Pro-Square ticket. Messrs. McHugh, Chairman of the Castries Town Board and Anti-Squarites, Alex Degazon, George Williams and Joseph Girard (Carasco 1967, 71). Each candidate voiced their opinion.

Those who disagreed with the use of Columbus Square argued that there were valid reasons why that spot should not be used. Mr. Cools-Lartigue said the Square was the only open public space in town that could be used for recreational purposes and it would deprive the residents of this benefit. He argued that there were other places more suited to the library building and a building in that location would end up as an eyesore. Candidate Mr. F. I. F Romeo suggested another site in Castries located between the Fire Brigade Station and the Market which was already owned by Government. The public reminded him that the place was both smelly and noisy. Another candidate, the Honourable J. E. M. Salmon refrained from taking one side or the other but mentioned the danger of the sand box trees and the lack of drainage that led to the mosquito problem in Columbus Square.

The proponents and ultimate winners of the debate said the noise and stench from the Government-owned spot was not conducive to an institution such as a library. Squarite McHugh, Board member and Editor of the Voice, delivered an eloquent speech on why he believed the library should be located in Columbus Square. McHugh clearly had a vested interest in the outcome. He asked the Chairman to allow him to address some of the concerns proposed by those against Columbus Square. He said they would be using a space not used for any other useful purpose. He argued that there was a fountain that never played, a hibiscus hedge which surrounded the fountain that served no more purpose than to be a scratching place for the poultry of the neighbourhood. Not a tree or a plant would be touched, he said, no grass plot would be encroached upon, the bandstand would not be affected and the alleys would remain just as they were. The air would circulate all around the building; no thoroughfare would be obstructed and the pretty little children could gambol on the grass plots to their hearts' content. He added that the concept promoting Columbus Square as the only

breathing place was a legend. The Botanical Gardens were a favourite afternoon resort for nurses and children. The Northern Wharf afforded a smooth walk along the broad concrete pavement for those who love ozone (Carasco 1967, 71).

Columbus Square was selected by a vote of five to three. McHugh's argument had won the day and he and his Squarites insisted that the library should be placed in a conspicuous place as an appreciation to Mr. Carnegie. It was reported that it was the first election campaign in Castries where the electorate had been asked to directly weigh in on a matter. After all of the campaigning and political posturing, the library was eventually placed not in the Square but at the corner of Bourbon and Micoud, overlooking the Square.

The election results effected a win for Squarites - McHugh, McVane, Gordon and Westall who all scored a victory in the December elections. It was clear that the success achieved in the fight had aided in their win at the polls. Francis Carasco posited the view that the site selection for the library had been a watershed in St Lucian politics,

[T]he library controversy had opened up a new political era in Castries and St Lucia. It was the first time that political campaigning had resulted in so many public meetings and the press reports at the time show that a great deal of interest was awakened among the citizens of Castries and an abundance of political heat generated by the groups representing Squarites and Anti-Squarites (Carasco 1967, 79).

The election result however, did not quite solve the problem. Once again, all discussion on the subject of the library abated. It was now 1921 and there was still no building erected using the Carnegie funds. At a Board meeting on April 12, 1921, a letter was read by the current administrator of St. Lucia, Mr. W. B. Davidson-Houston from the Carnegie Corporation asking why there had been no action on the grant. Money from Carnegie had not been released because of their (the Board's) reluctance to agree to the architectural plans set out by the Carnegie Corporation. The town planners had one proposal for the building, while the Carnegie representatives had another. Numerous architectural plans had been proposed and as many

were rejected. In the meanwhile, the parcel of land purchased by the Board for £500 sometime between 1910 and 1912 for the erection of a Town Hall remained unoccupied and the vacant lot had become a local eyesore. Some members of the Board complained bitterly.

Many years passed before Government would assume responsibility for erecting the building. They insisted that the Board gave the land freely and they would agree to pay a further £25 annually for the building's upkeep. *Ordinance number 7 of 1923* reported that,

An ordinance to vest the piece of land situated at the south-western corner of Bourbon and Micoud Street in the town of Castries, the property of the Castries Town Board in the Government of this colony for the purpose of erecting a public library (St Lucia. *Revised Ordinance 1957*).

The Carnegie Corporation finally agreed to hand over the money to the Government and the Town Council agreed to transfer the land free of cost to the Library Board with the understanding that they (the Town Council) would be represented on the Library's Board of Trustees. The controversy had finally been settled – a consensus had been reached regarding the location and the money was committed.

Fourteen years passed between the offer from Mr. Carnegie and the settlement of the entire matter. On May 15, 1923 the cornerstone of the Library was laid by Mrs. Davidson- Houston, wife of Administrator Lieutenant Colonel W. B. Davidson-Houston. In June 1924, the library was finally completed under the supervision of Mr. Lilburn E. Lawrence of the Public Works Department. On Monday December 1, 1924, the Carnegie Free Library was opened by Mrs. Davidson-Houston in the presence of a distinguished group of citizens and government officials. The photograph below was taken soon after its opening.

Illustration 2: Carnegie Library of St. Lucia



Source: <http://www.ebay.ca/itm/Carnegie-Library-St-Lucia-Caribbean-/231219328188>

The library remained operational until its complete destruction by the fire in 1948, described as the “greatest calamity to befall a Colony of its size and resources in so short a space of time” (Jesse 1964, 50).

The Fires

At least once every century since the 17th century, the landscape of Castries was changed by fire. This city had been plagued by fire throughout its history due to the lack of an efficient fire brigade. There were no laws that directly addressed building codes in the islands and so the “rich architectural blend which we now find throughout the Caribbean,” was constantly at risk (Gravette 2000, 18).

A disastrous fire in St. Lucia in 1796 completely razed the town of Castries. All official and private documents and records were reduced to ashes. Seventeen years later in 1813, another fire devastated Castries and demolished most of the town. In 1817, a cyclone caused considerable damage and in 1919, the headquarters of the fire fighters was ruined.

On Saturday May 14, 1927, fire once again broke out in Castries and destroyed substantial portions of the town. Fortunately, the Carnegie library escaped unscathed. On Saturday June 19, 1948 another fire broke out in a tailor's shop in the north-easterly part of Castries and a strong breeze that night sent the flames in a south-easterly direction. The damage was overwhelming. Four-fifths of the city of Castries fell victim to the fire including the library. Twenty thousand volumes were lost. It was noted that the library was operating efficiently when the fire occurred on June 19-20, "...all books, records, furniture, fittings and supplies within the walls of both storeys were destroyed. Truly an irreparable loss!" (St. Lucia Public Library, Board of Trustees 1948).

The tragedy prompted one author to comment "...Castries seems to be the victim of a curse. It is always catching fire and being burnt to the ground ..." (Fermor 1950, 199). St. Lucian Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott in his poem, 'City's Death by Fire,' expressed a different view. He saw the fires as a loss but with hope for a new beginning.¹

Aftermath of the 1948 Fire

After this devastating fire, the library was temporarily relocated to 34 Chisel Street in Castries, a space lent by Reverend. E.C. Mural, Superintendent of the Methodist church in St. Lucia. The only available stock of books now consisted of periodicals and newspapers received from overseas and a few books returned by borrowers who had them on loan before the fire. An appeal via the local press was made to the public for donations and an overseas appeal brought

¹ The Derek Walcott poem is available online at : <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-city-s-death-by-fire/>

in two large parcels of books containing periodicals, comics and some used and new books. The Information Officer in St. Lucia also made a donation. While in the new and cramped quarters, there were plans to find a more spacious and also centrally situated place for the library (St. Lucia Public Library. Minute Book 1948-1952).

In a meeting of the Board of Trustees on April 7, 1949, the subject of the new accommodation was high on the agenda. The Chairman reported that the property at the corner of Micoud and Bourbon Streets would be leased to accommodate a new building. It was also suggested that this site should be permanent rather than temporary. He reported that he had instructed the Colonial Engineer to carry out a survey of the walls of the burnt out library and submit an estimate for its complete rehabilitation. The Colonial Engineer estimated that cost to be about £18,000.

The Chairman then instructed the Librarian to follow up with the relevant authority whether any progress had been made concerning a grant from the Library Association of Great Britain and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Several meetings of the Board clearly confirm that they were trying to get some assistance in order to have a new library built. Board members came up with countless ideas on ways to raise enough money to rebuild the library. Creative ideas such as having dances and other entertainment were suggested.

In a special meeting of the Trustees held on Tuesday November 22, 1949, the Director of the Central Caribbean Regional Library Scheme, Mr. A.W. Hockey reported on the establishment of a Regional Library Scheme for the region. In this presentation, he offered financial assistance with the building of the book stock and staff training. The Trustees met again on August 18, 1950 and this time the Executive Architect, Mr. B. Fleming, was present (St. Lucia Public Library. Minute Book 1948-1952). The Administration had finally proposed a public library building plan which was then forwarded to the Director of the Regional Library Scheme for his input. At the next Trustee meeting held in September of the same year, the costs were discussed. Present were the Acting Executive Architect and the Director of the Regional Library Scheme. It was

announced that the amount given by the Castries Reconstruction Fund had been a mere £9,000 for rebuilding the library. Once again the Board was faced with raising the shortfall and it seemed to seal the fate of the library. They (the trustees) decided to ask the Town Council for permission to build the library on the current spot. Meanwhile during the discussions, the cost of the project continued to increase and stood at £19,000. It was 1952 and the library operational estimates were reduced from £9,477 to £ 2,500 (St. Lucia Public Library. Minute Book 1948-1952).

After June 1952, no mention of the library was made in any of the meetings of the Trustees and this is verified by the Chairman, Mr. G.H. Gordon who commented in the May 12th minutes of the Trustees meeting that the library had been removed from the Castries Town Council's contract. He asked the members whether the Board should take any action in the matter. Board members suggested that they wait to see what would happen.

Advocacy

Although no further progress had been made with plans to rebuild the library, public support for the project on the part of George Cooper, prevailed. He was an avid political activist and had sent numerous letters to the Editor of the Voice newspaper decrying the Town Council's inaction regarding plans for rebuilding the library.

The Voice newspaper of January 6, 1957 reported on a legislative meeting where the Minister of Works, H. B. Collymore added his voice in support of rebuilding the Library.

The construction of the Library is now long overdue. No modern community should be without an up-to-date library and this provision will be used to restore what was once the best library in the Windwards. The old site has been the subject of several and loud discussions which have culminated in the decision to use the existing walls for reconstruction (*Voice* January 6, 1957, 7).

George Cooper had written a series of letters to the newspaper outlining his concerns regarding the continued closure of the library. His submissions to the Voice took the form of conversations between (him) George and the existing walls of the library. His letter-writing campaign continued until February 22, 1958 with a final letter entitled, 'My Last Conversation.'

Old Coops: Well! My dear friend! I hope you are now satisfied. You see what a nice girl I have made of you? You remember how you called me a bluffer.

The Library (blushing): Old Boy! You are a Trojan. I must confess if it was not for you I would have been a store instead of a University, for after all what is a library but a University?....

Old Coops: I am glad old girl you are happy. But there is one little mistake that great contractor Collymore made and I told him so. The bottom floor should not have been partitioned. The bottom floor should have stayed as one permanent platform on the eastern side of you so that the people coming home from work could just walk in and have a read at the paper etc. What do you say?

The Library: You are perfectly correct. Not only that but in the event of a meeting held on the Square in rainy weather, the people could resort to me and I would welcome them.

Old Coops: I am glad that you agree with me. I will consult the Minister for Communications and Works and will place our views. I am sure he will agree with us; it is not too late. The same materials they have used for this useless partition is also used for the horseshoe table for the people to read on.

The Library: You remember Mr. Salmon had the reading room upstairs and anyone wishing to go upstairs had to leave a dollar! You remember how you kicked against this and got the people's reading room downstairs? And that was done until the fire.

Well we can't have a recurrence of that again, let us therefore have an open reading room in my downstairs (*Voice* February 22, 1958, 5).

The Library is (Re)Built

Unfortunately, Cooper died in April 1958 just before the library reopened in July the same year. He had kept the topic of the rebuilding in the media and the public was always made aware of what was going on. On July 28, 1958, the *Voice* reported on the reopening of the library. It read,

Slightly ten years after the holocaust of fire swept across Castries to destroy one of the best libraries in the British Caribbean, the Right Honourable The Earl of Asquith, Administrator, formerly opened St. Lucia's Central library building ... Attendees were: Representatives of the government, Churches, Educationalists, the Castries Town Council and the community. The building was handed over to the Honourable A. M. Lewis, Chairman of the Board of Trustees (*Voice* August 2, 1958, 1).

As Cooper had requested and lobbied for, the building had been reconstructed on its former location. The old wall of red stone, first erected in 1924, allowed its original architectural features to be preserved. Mention was made of Cooper's lobbying efforts. The paper reported that,

A group of citizens, led by the late Mr. George Cooper agitated for the restoration of the building. He started a series of letters to the Editor of the *Voice* called Conversations between the library Walls and Mr. Cooper. This helped to shape public opinion towards the use of the existing walls" (*Voice* August 2, 1958, 1).

The administrator noted that the structure was perhaps the only public building which preserved a link between the old and the new Castries. That sentiment is borne out in French's book, *History of Architecture in St. Lucia* who wrote,

After the 1948 fire, only two structures – The Peter & Co. building and the Carnegie Library, both of which had been gutted – were rebuilt according to the original plans. Thus they look now as they did before the fire. This in the light of hindsight, proved to be a very crucial decision as they are all now surrounded by Modernist buildings (French 1988 52).

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