

# BUILDING UP LIBRARY SYSTEMS, 1947-1997

## Africana at Northwestern University

Hans Panofsky, Curator of Africana Emeritus at Northwestern University Library writes:

### *How the Melville J Herskovits Library of Northwestern University began*

The bibliographic array for the study of Africa and African scholarship has reached proportions which were unthinkable fifty years ago at the birth of African Studies Programs. Not only has the bibliographic coverage marshalled material in all areas of research but this coverage is readily available at the click of a computer in most corners of the globe. In an ideal world the actual resources would also be accessed with ease and digital speed. Indeed much research material is readily obtained in microfilm, microform, and CD-Rom format. However the bulk of retrospective, archival, ephemeral, and manuscript literature is to be found only in a few selected centres often far removed from students and scholars, especially those based in Africa.

One such centre and perhaps the largest and most complete of all, is the Melville J Herskovits Library of African Studies located in the Northwestern University Libraries, Evanston, Illinois. The history of how and why such a major library was created and developed uncovers a great deal about the economic, political, social and scholarly needs which grow out of a new thought orientation and direction.

Northwestern University was founded in 1851 at the onset of the development of the 'Northwest Territories' and the city of Chicago. In 1926, the year Lord Lugard established the International African Institute of African Languages and Cultures (now the International African Institute or the IAI), Melville Herskovits, an Institute member from the beginning, was asked to join the Department of Anthropology. His work in the field of African Studies proved to be a turning point in the study and perception of the African world and its diaspora. A new conception of African humanity emerged from his scientific research and more importantly it helped create the most innovative connections between African and African-American studies. Herskovits saw African Studies as 'a challenge to intellectual provincialism' and was convinced that 'always out of Africa not only comes something new but something that renders necessary a reappraisal of accepted generalizations which are drawn from data gathered in other parts of the world' (Herskovits 1964).

Herskovits soon came to see the need for a modern and comprehensive Africana collection as pre-eminent companion to African Studies and even before founding the interdisciplinary Program of African Studies in 1947, he was concerned with the growth of the collection and continued to be so until his death in 1963. But even his indefatigable efforts would not have been sufficient to build what was to become a home for African Studies large enough to include the visions of people such as Dubois, Woodson and all those 'inextricably tied to Africa in ways cultural as well as historical' (Stuckey 1973) had it not been for a convergence of opinions, people, resources and effort over many years.

A small core of books on Africa had been part of the Natural Sciences Library and Orientalia tellingly housed in a cavernous basement room. New Herskovits acquisitions were added to this core until, by the middle 1940s, Africana at Northwestern required the

management of a fulltime librarian. For a while the Assistant University Librarian tried to fill that role until a decision was taken to employ a Curator. The Curator's job description was simply 'to build the best and greatest collection possible and acquire everything printed on Africa and in Africa'. The University, with the help of Foundations and of the Federal Government provided the most generous funds for acquisition, cataloguing and personnel. Later, the University policy to build on these strengths assured an adequate budget at all times. And the collection was also conceived in the spirit of Antonio Panizzi's British Museum Library that is open to all who need access to its material and services. In the case of Africana at Northwestern its services to African and African-American scholars and colleagues have remained at the centre of its commitment. Providing opportunities for scholarly visitors in need of funds is still an important goal for the Herskovits Library.

In the 1950s acquisitions proceeded apace mainly through acquisition trips in Africa and networking on the African continent, through orders from antiquarian catalogues and later through cooperative projects like the Cooperative Africana Microform Project (CAMP). Government documents, at least those from countries of the former British Empire, were obtained through deposit accounts with the Crown Agents in London. Today most African government printers permit deposit accounts. Since 1989 all acquisitions have been greatly facilitated by the Africana Books Collective founded by African publishers to promote their books in Europe. Situated in Oxford, the organisation provides catalogues, billing and shipment thus allowing for efficient and quick distribution (see Foreword to *Africa Bibliography 1992* by Mary Jay of the African Books Collective).

The staff acquisition trips of old, however, though inefficient in some ways, allowed for a much broader perspective on the part of the library staff and that kind of human interaction necessary for building ties among scholars and colleagues otherwise divided by distance and culture. Many African librarians were thus able to exchange with European and American librarians for periods of research, study and in-service. For building such links, the meetings of the International Congress of African Studies, the (US) African Studies Association, as well as the American Library Association, were invaluable. Despite the absence of a school of Library Science at Northwestern, Africana has complete runs of the many African library journals and of publications of agencies such as those of the Sub-Saharan Africa Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In the 1950s, as the major centres of Africana concentration developed, it became imperative to exchange information on holdings and recent acquisitions. Prior to that the IAI had issued its reliable bibliography, beginning in 1929 and continuing up to this day albeit in different formats. The bi-monthly publication *Joint Acquisition List of Africana (JALA)* was initiated by Northwestern in 1962. *JALA* is an ongoing compilation of Africana titles published in the preceding five years acquired by the major Africana collections in the US. Today, a complete machine-readable version of *JALA* is available to internet users. 'Afr' is the name of the African file, accessible under the 'Indexes' section on MIRLYN's first menu of the library system at the University of Michigan. With more than 111,400 records available researchers can find information about Africana materials and where they are located. In the early 1960s and then in 1972, the *Catalog of Northwestern Africana* was published in two parts. In 1973, the IAI catalogue was issued. The catalogues contain introductions outlining the history of the Northwestern Africana and the IAI libraries respectively.

### ***The library today***

The Melville J Herskovits Library for African Studies is situated on the 5th level of the East Tower of the University Library. It stands as a separate body in a circular space holding

the shelves, the reading facilities, and staff offices and seminar rooms. Patrons are always within a few feet of their material although an increasing amount must be housed in compact storage for lack of space. Africana at Northwestern is a virtually complete collection in the social sciences and humanities pertaining to Africa in the major European languages. Linguistics and literature may be considered relatively late comers to the collection. Overall the collection comprises 245,000 volumes, 2,500 current serials and 300 current African newspapers. It is an international resource attracting over 1,000 scholars in 1995 from the US and 26 different foreign countries. In addition to its rare books, archives, photographs and a growing video collection with its own published Guide, the collection includes books in over 300 African languages. An increasing number of volumes are publications emanating from Africa which may or may not be concerned with Africa. Much effort has gone into the often fragile ephemera collection, an important component since the early days.

Complementing the collection are materials situated in the Northwestern Library Archives and the Law, Music and Transportation libraries. The Northwestern Library Archives hold the bulk of the papers of Melville J Herskovits (the rest are to be found at the Schonberg Center for Research in Black Culture, part of the New York Public Library in New York City). To these must be added the Asante Collective Biography Project material and newer additions: the Papers of Polly Hill and those of Mervyn Hiskett.

Africana has a large staff, not only involved with acquisitions but capable of giving expert reference service at various levels of complexity. Relying not only on the conventional resources of the very large bibliographic collection, they make increasing use of electronic resources. These last include the database of Africana Conference Papers Index (AFRC) now available via telnet and containing records of 61,096 papers from 3,272 conferences. Africana's Ephemera File of 45,000-50,000 records is a future project. A recent addition in CD-Rom format is a complex of catalogues and nine other databases from the National Inquiry Services Centre in Grahamstown, South Africa.

Africana, which became electronically accessible before the rest of the University Library is now accessible on-line including *JALA* at the following site:

<http://www.library.nwu.edu/africana>.

In addition to the in-house staff several cataloguers in the catalogue department are concerned with Africana. They have done pioneering work in the arrangement and processing of the material and have recently published a bibliography on Zaire and are working on one on Mali.

In addition to Northwestern University Library, there are several good Africa-oriented collections, often supplementing areas not particularly strong in Northwestern itself. One example is that of map libraries. Northwestern is not particularly strong in this area, but the American Geographical Society Collection (formerly in New York City) is now in the Golda Meir Library at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, in easy reach of Evanston. And CAMP (the Cooperative Africana Microform Project) is part of the Center of Research Libraries in nearby Chicago.

## References

- Abdullahi, Ismail (ed.) 1992. *E. J. Josey: an activist librarian*. Metuchen, N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press.
- Amadi, Adolphe 1981. *African Libraries, Western Tradition and Colonial Brainwashing*. Metuchen, N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press
- Benge, Ronald C. 1984. *Confessions of a Lapsed Librarian*. Metuchen, N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press.

- Bischof, Phyllis B. 1991. 'Publishing and the book trade in Subsaharan Africa: trends and issues and their implication for American libraries', *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 16 (6): 340-7.
- Chartier, Roger 1993. 'Libraries without walls', in Howard Bloch and Carla Hesse (eds) *Future Libraries*. pp.38-52. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Easterbrook, David L. 1989. 'The Archives-Libraries Committee and the Cooperative African Microform Project: a brief history', in Julian J. Witherell (ed.) *African Resources and Collections*. pp. 18-38. Metuchen N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press.
- Finnegan, Gregory A. (comp.) 1983. *African Archives in Microform*. Evanston: Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University Library.
- 1995. *Africana Librarians Council Directory*. Cambridge, MA.: Tozzer Library, Harvard University.
- Gosebrink, Jean E. (comp. and ed.) 1986. *African Studies Information Resources Directory*. Oxford: Hans Zell Publishers.
- Guyer, Jane I. 1996. *African Studies in the United States: a perspective*. Atlanta, GA.: African Studies Association Press.
- Henige, David 1990. 'Are bibliographers like shortstops? Gresham's law and Africana bibliography', *History in Africa*, (17):157-169.
- Herskovits, Melville J. 1964. 'The development of African Studies in Europe and America', in Lalage Bown and Michael Crowder (eds) *The Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists*, Accra 11-18 December 1962. pp.29-45. Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press.
- Hunwick, John and Nancy Lawler (eds) 1997. *The Cloth of Many Colored Silks: papers on history and society, Ghanaian and Islamic, in honor of Ivor Wilks*. Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press.
- Jay, Mary 1993. 'African Books Collective: its contribution to African publishing', Foreword in *Africa Bibliography 1992*, pp.vi-xviii, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute.
- Jolly, David 1959. 'Northwestern University Africana Collection', *African Studies Bulletin* 2 (1):9-12.
- Kagan, Alfred 1996. 'Sources for African language material of anglophone Africa', *IFLA Journal* 22 (1).
- Kuntz, Patricia S. 1994. 'African Studies computer resources', *College and Research Libraries News* 55 (2):68-73.
- Levey, Lisbeth 1993. *A Profile of Research Libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa: acquisition, outreach and infrastructure*. Washington DC.: American Association for the Advancement of Learning, Sub-Saharan Africa Programs.
- Limb, Peter 1996. 'Black access to electronic research services in South Africa: problems and prospects of real change', *African Studies Review and Newsletter of Australasia and the Pacific* 18 (1):13-17.
- Lindfors, Bernth 1995. *Long Drums and Canons: teaching and researching African literatures*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.
- Maack, Mary Niles 1990. 'Scholarly resources for the study of the Third World: the case of Africa', in Phyllis Dain and John Y. Cole (eds) *Libraries and Scholarly Communication in the United States*. pp. 111-33. New York and London: Greenwood Press.
- McIlwaine, John 1996. 'Current state of publishing and bibliography of African materials' in *Proceedings of the Conference of the South African Association of Bibliographers*. Cape Town.
- Malanchuk, Peter 1991. 'African acquisitions: strategies to locate and acquire current and retrospective Africana', *Library Acquisitions: practice and theory* 15:453-61.

- McCarthy, Constance 1985. 'The faculty problem', *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 11 (2):142-5.
- Miller, Edward 1967. *Prince of Librarians: life and times of Antonio Panizzi of the British Museum*. London: Andre Deutsch. [new edition 1988. London: British Museum]
- Olden, Anthony 1995. *Libraries in Africa: pioneers, policies, problems*. Lanham, MD.: and London: Scarecrow Press.
- Paden, John N. and Edward W. Soja (comps and eds) 1970. *The African Experience*. vol.III A: Bibliography, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Panofsky, Hans 1988. 'African Studies in the United States', in Patricia M. Larby (ed.) *New Directions in African Bibliography*. London: Standing Conference on Library Materials on Africa (SCOLMA).
- Patrikos, Helga Atkinson and Lisbeth A. Levey 1994. *Survival Strategies in African University Libraries: new technologies in the service of information*. Washington DC.: American Association for the Advancements of Science.
- Pearson, J.D. and Ruth Jones (eds) 1970. *The Bibliography of Africa: proceedings and papers of the International Conference on African Bibliography*, Nairobi 4-8 December 1967. Foreword by Daryll Forde. London: Cass for the International African Institute.
- Priestley, Carol 1994. 'Publishing and library support for Africa: an update', Foreword to *Africa Bibliography 1993* pp.vi-xv. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute.
- Schmidt, Nancy J. 1995. 'African resources for undergraduates a bibliographic essay', in Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara (eds) *Africa*. pp.413-34. Bloomington: Indiana University Press and London: Currey.
- Shayne, Mette (comp.) 1995. *African Newspapers currently received by American Libraries*. Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Library.
- Sternberg, Ilse and Patricia M. Larby (eds) 1986. *African Studies Papers Presented at a Colloquium at the British Library, 7-9 January 1985*. London: The British Library in association with SCOLMA.
- Stuckey, Sterling 1975. 'Melville J. Herskovits, a pioneer in African-American Studies', *The Opening of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies*. Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Library.
- Sturges, Paul and Richard Neill 1990. *The Quiet Struggle: libraries and information for Africa*. London and New York: Mansell.
- Vansina, Jan 1995. 'Historians, are archaeologists your siblings?', *History in Africa* 22:369-408.
- Widenmann, Elizabeth A. 1989. 'Recent developments in Africana cataloging in the United States, 1973-1988', in Julian J. Witherell (ed.) *African Resources and Collections*. pp. 39-61. Metuchen N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press.
- Wise, Michael and Anthony Olden (comps and eds) 1990. *Information and Libraries in the Developing World I. Sub-Saharan Africa*. London: The Library Association.
- Witherell, Julian J. (ed.) 1989. *African Resources and Collections: three decades of development and achievement. A festschrift in honor of Hans Panofsky*. Metuchen N.J. and London: Scarecrow Press.
- Zell, Hans M. and Cecile Lomer 1996. *Publishing and Book Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: an annotated bibliography*. Oxford: Hans Zell Publishers.