

Leafing through the history of Philipsburg Jubilee Library

Philipsburg Jubilee Library was founded on 23 November 1923, the year in which Queen Wilhelmina celebrated her silver jubilee. Hence the name Philipsburg Jubilee Library. The initiative to set up a library was taken by W.R. Plantz, C.M. Darrell, C.C.G. Philipszoon, A.C. Wathey and C.A. Beaujon, who recognized the necessity and importance of reading by all. The first books were purchased with money donated by some of the wealthier people on St. Maarten. A big problem was the absence of a permanent building. Time and again the library was moved around in order to make room for offices, schools, etc. In these early days the library was run exclusively by volunteers.

Some time in the late 1950s or early 1960s the St. Maarten Cultural Centre started a Dutch children's library, also run by volunteers. When a qualified librarian, Blanca Hodge, moved to St. Maarten in 1967, the then lieutenant governor, Mr. Jappa Beaujon, decided the two libraries should merge, keeping the name Philipsburg Jubilee Library. The new library was to be run by a board consisting of members of both libraries.

Mrs. Blanca Hodge started her new job in January 1968 by making quite a few changes. She catalogued the books and merged the members' records from the two separate libraries. At the time the library was housed in the same accommodation as the courthouse, where marriage ceremonies were also often conducted. Though sometimes interesting, this was hardly ideal. This situation ended in August 1968, when the library moved to a new building, together with the St Maarten Cultural Centre. In 1974 an extra member of staff was taken on and from 1978 the number of employees grew to the current number of 13.

Vision and mission

Vision of the Philipsburg Jubilee Library is to be the gateway for information in the St Maarten society and to provide basic conditions for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of individuals and social groups in our society.

The following **key missions** are at the core of the service of the Philipsburg Jubilee Library:

1. creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age;
2. supporting both individual and self conducted education as well as formal education at all levels;
3. providing opportunities for personal creative development;
4. stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people;
5. promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations;
6. providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts;
7. fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favoring cultural diversity;
8. supporting the oral tradition;
9. ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information;
10. providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups;
11. facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills;
12. Supporting and participating in literacy activities and programs for all age groups, and initiating such activities if necessary.

The following figures serve to give an impression of the **library's development throughout the years**:

employees	collection	members	books checked out
		1958 : 50	1958 : 900
	1959: 1,300		
1968: 1			
	1969: 2,000	1969: 250	

1979: 4	13,000	1,500	44,700
1983: 10	24,300	3,100	75,000
1987: 12	35,000	3,000	76,610
1997: 12	58,746	4,479	71,784
1998: 12	61,223	4,513	67,785
1999: 12	62,396	4,668	97,129
2000: 12	64,877	4,838	120,675
2001: 12	68,807	5,497	120,011
2002: 12	69,338	5,475	114,908
2003: 12	60,710	5,169	114,090
2004: 12	64,085	5,269	117,789
2005: 12	58,273	5,269	118,251
2006: 12	53,834	5,377	118,591
2007: 12	59,348	5,115	91,536

It is obvious from these figures that quite soon the "new" library of 1968 became too small. As early as 1978 plans for a new building were emerging, but it took until 8 April 1983 for Miss Berthilde Carty and Miss Clemmy Carty, both pioneers in library work on St. Maarten, to lay the corner stone for the new premises. On 10 March 1984 the library moved to its new building on Ch. E. W. Voges Street, which was more than 20 times the size of its previous accommodation. The new library opened its doors to the public on 2 April 1984. From then on the card catalogue was superfluous as Philipsburg Jubilee Library became the first library in the Netherlands Antilles to be fully automated. In 1997 the internet found its way into the library, making it possible for every library member to become familiar with this medium, and on the occasion of its 75 jubilee, the library could be found on the World Wide Web.

(From: Philipsburg Jubilee Library website, retrieved 5 August 2009,
http://www.stmaartenlibrary.org/library_history.htm)