

CITATION

presented to

National Library of Jamaica

JOHN ALEXANDER AARONS

On his leaving the post of Executive Director of the National Library of Jamaica

By this citation, the Board of Management and staff of the National Library of Jamaica pay tribute to you JOHN ALEXANDER AARONS, and record sincere gratitude for your sterling contribution to the advancement of the library during your tenure which spans twenty three years of service, ten years of which saw you as head of the institution.

You first joined the staff of the then West India Reference Library (WIRL) of the Institute of Jamaica in 1976 as Senior Librarian. You progressed up the ladder at WIRL to the position of Deputy Director, Research and Reference and when in 1979 WIRL became the National Library of Jamaica, you remained in the position of Deputy Director and Head of the Collections Development and Conservation Department, staying in that position until 1992 when you were appointed Director and later in 2001 Executive Director when the post was reclassified.

You came to the library well qualified for the job. You had an Honours First Degree (History major), a Post-graduate Diploma in Archives Studies from the University of London and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Library Studies from the University of the West Indies. You came with experience in a related field as you had been employed as the Assistant Archivist at the Jamaica Archives from 1971 until 1976.

Not content with these educational achievements, you recognised the important role which the National Library must play in the preservation of our national culture. You were also aware of the need to continually upgrade your competencies to fulfil the position you held and to equip yourself further with additional management skills. In 1985, you successfully completed the General Management Course conducted by the Administrative Staff College of the Ministry of the Public Service and later in 1998, followed a programme leading to the award of the M. A. (Heritage Studies) degree at the University of the West Indies. Further, your expertise in Archival and Conservation work was strengthened by the short term fellowships and attachments you were awarded by the OAS and UNESCO to observe practice at institutions renowned for their work in this area. Attachments with

the National Library of Venezuela, the Library of Congress and the University of California, Berkley in the United States of America as well as the Public Record Office, London assisted you in increasing your knowledge and skills in pertinent fields.

Overall, the Board was satisfied with your management of the Library and commend you for your devotion to the task. There are several areas of endeavour in which you have left an indelible mark on the development of the National Library. Highlights are now reiterated for the record.

When it was decided that the National Committee on Libraries, Archives and Documentation Services (NACOLADS), later National Committee on Libraries, Archives and Information Services (NACOLAIS), would cease to operate, you assiduously fought to save that element of this body known as the National Information System. Already firm in operation, you continued to drive the specialist networks under the direction of the National Library. With great commitment to the added workload on the National Library, you engineered the creation of the Advisory Committee on the National Information System (ACNIS) and have sought to make it vibrant in the continuation of this valuable undertaking, holding together and integrating developments including the Jamaica Agricultural Documentation and Information Network (JADIN) and the Audio-Visual Information Network (AVIN).

Probably the most significant contribution you have made to the National Library is the work you have done towards realising autonomy for this institution to become an independent Statutory Body as stated in the letter of February 26, 2002 from the Ministry of Education which reads, "Cabinet has given approval for the granting of full autonomy to the National Library of Jamaica". Your efforts included researching the environment of national libraries and national library law, leading to the drafting of the formal submission, piloting it through this Board and on to the Institute of Jamaica Council for submission to the Ministry. And now that the drafting of the relevant law has been taking place, you have seen to the provision of documentation to facilitate this process.

Closely associated with this effort is the role you have played in advancing the passing of two other laws which will have profound effect on the role and work of the National Library. Your unstinting endeavour regarding the Access to Information Law passed in 2001 and the Legal Deposit Law passed in 2002 is recognised and acknowledged. Of note is the fact that over the years you continued to put your best efforts forward to keep these two potential laws on the front burner of the legislative calendar until they were effected.

Another noteworthy contribution you have made to the growth of the National Library has been your understanding and willingness to promote progressive development in areas important to the library although they do not belong within the forte of your expertise. Two such areas stand out: (1) The application of Information Technology which includes both the provision of the infrastructure (automated networking and equipment) and support for the application in the library and in the National Information System. (2) The development of the Audio-Visual Archives - here not only infrastructure and application but engendering the necessary networking among stakeholders which has to be key if national control is to be achieved.

You are to be commended for your work with staff. They are still loyal, hardworking and committed to the service of the National Library. Your own commitment to staff development has been outstanding and the number of staff members who have advanced in knowledge and skills during your term of office bears witness to your efforts in this regard. It is acknowledged that much of this work has been achieved by a number of officers and committees but under your leadership and with your facilitation.

The position of Director, now Executive Director, of the National Library of Jamaica requires a leadership role in the library community nationally, regionally and internationally. You did not fail us in this regard. Over the years, you have given unstinted service to the library and information profession at all levels. You have served on many Committees and Boards in the fields of Information and Culture. You have at various times and in various capacities, served on the Executive Committee of the Jamaica Library Association (JLA), now the Library and Information Association of Jamaica (LIAJA) and distinguished yourself by achieving the singular feat of being elected to the Office of President for two consecutive years.

At the regional level, you have been convenor of the ACURIL Special Interest Group on National and Public Libraries and at the international level you have been a member of the Conference of Directors of National Libraries. Under your leadership, the National Library of Jamaica assumed responsibility for serving as the focal point of INFOLAC (Regional Programme for Strengthening National Information Networks and Systems for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean) and in 2001 you were elevated to membership of its Executive Committee. In 2000, you were appointed by the Secretary General of UNESCO to serve as Vice Chairman of the Regional Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean Memory of the World Programme and subsequently elevated to Membership of the International Advisory Committee of the Memory of the World Programme when you attended the 5th Meeting of the Committee held in Cheongju, South Korea. The many workshops you have given and the seminars and conference papers you have

presented on a variety of topics relevant to your work such as the role of national libraries, cultural policy, paper preservation and disaster recovery methods both here in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean, are further evidence of your expertise.

On a personal note, you were nurtured by parents who displayed a lasting interest in the library and information profession and who played a significant role in the development of the Jamaica Library Service. It was not surprising that you ended up choosing a career in this profession. In the same context, you were a devoted son to these parents, Mr. R. L. C. and Mrs. Monica Aarons. You have also been a supportive and loving husband to Elsie your wife, and here we interject that being a goodly woman herself and in the same profession, she in turn gave you the same love and support. We acknowledge with deep appreciation the "behind the scenes" bolstering which she gave you and which has made your service so successful and rewarding. Not to be ignored, you have also been a caring father to David Andrew. A devout and active churchman and loyal friend to many, your life has been exemplary.

History will record that your career has come full circle, for in saying farewell at this function, we note and congratulate you heartily on your recent appointment as Government Archivist. We commend you most sincerely on your successful career and wish for you God's richest blessings in all your future endeavours, for you are indeed a JOLLY GOOD FELLOW.

March 26, 2003