

FRANK CUNDALL

by H. P. Jacobs

The name of Frank Cundall was for an earlier generation synonymous with that of the Institute of Jamaica: Mr. Cundall was the Institute. But he was not its first moulder: he did not arrive in Jamaica till the Institute was more than ten years old. He did not start the Library: as early as 1887 the Library had reached its characteristic position of being too large for the space available. The Museum took shape before Cundall's arrival under the hand of Mr. J. J. Bowrey, the Island Chemist. The one original contribution of Cundall, at first sight, seems to be the art collection. None the less, when Cundall died after forty-six years' service to the Institute of Jamaica he had left his mark on it and on the intellectual life of the country. Indeed, almost everyone would admit that the creation of the West India Reference Library was a new departure, quite different from the casual accumulation of a few books on Jamaican history and on scientific work in Jamaica, such as had gone on before. Most people would admit that the state of the West India Reference Library when Cundall died in 1937 pointed to the steadfast performance of a long and arduous task. But very few people really grasp its magnitude.

Still less do they realise that during the time that Mr. Cundall was Secretary (1891-1937), the Institute was deflected from its original purpose. Was this due to his deliberate choice, or circumstances? In the late 'thirties' there were people who realised that the Institute no longer had the broad (perhaps over-ambitious) aims of its founders. Their criticisms were taken by Mr. Cundall in a personal sense, and it was inevitable that the critics would use phrases which must wound Mr. Cundall. Yet, primarily, these attacks were inspired by the feeling that what had been intended as a great and inspiring educational institution had gradually become a library of popular literature, with the West India Reference Library as a preserve for a few people such as the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Mr. H. G. DeLisser, Editor of the Gleaner and General Secretary of the Jamaica Imperial Association.

Attempts to organise scientific and literary societies on a voluntary basis, with libraries and public lectures, went well back into the 19th century: some of them even had museums. Such people as Dr. James MacFadyen, the eminent botanist, Baron von Ketelhodt, and Edward Jordon belonged to these bodies.

Soon after Crown colony government began, there were people who thought it would be a good idea for the central government to help: but it was not till 1879 that the Institute of Jamaica was founded.

It is obvious that some good work was done by Bowrey, as Curator, and by a number of other's connected with the Institute, in the next few years. But it is not clear that the Secretary and Librarian, Mr. Henry Priest, contributed much in a positive way to the evolution of the new organisation. It was eventually decided to bring a Secretary/Librarian from abroad, and Mr. Cundall took up the post in February, 1891.

He was then thirty-three years of age, already an author and with a marked interest in art from 1876, when he began work with his father Joseph Cundall as joint editor of the 38-vol. Illustrated Biographies of Great Artists. Before he came to Jamaica, he was author of The Landscape and Pastoral Painters of Holland, as well as Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition.

It was perhaps his connection with Exhibitions, particularly those of an international character, which attracted to him the attention of the Government of Jamaica. From 1833 to 1890, he was involved in the organisation of six Exhibitions, including the British Section of the 1889 Paris Exhibition. The Institute had been specially concerned with the representation of Jamaica at such Exhibitions.

In view of his interest in art, it is not surprising that he quickly organised an Art Gallery at the Institute, while the historical slant of his work on art makes it natural that the Gallery should have had an historical slant. It is less easy to see how Cundall's interests, as time went on, came to be so predominantly historical. So far as the aboriginal period is concerned, he may have been influenced by J. E. Duerden, who was appointed Curator a few years after Cundall's arrival and did work on Arawak remains, publishing a book in 1897. Through Duerden Cundall was no doubt in contact with such people as Prof. A. C. Haddon, the Cambridge anthropologist, to whom some of the aboriginal relics found at Halberstadt were sent.

But while we may thus understand how Cundall came to be attracted to a particular period of Jamaican history, the astonishing thing about his historical work is its broad sweep, the all-embracing character of his interests, and the rigid consistency with which he collected every kind of material for a wide range of purposes. By the end of the century, he had made a beginning of collecting books on Africa, and he seems at a very early date to have realised that his

work must be in part West Indian in scope. He collected everything - printed books, newspapers, manuscripts copies of manuscripts, pictures, photographs, maps, account books. He accumulated data from letters of enquiry. He studied the mysteries of heraldry. He obtained from Spain typescripts of the old official documents about Spanish Jamaica, and a century and a half of history took on a new aspect.

This tremendous task was accomplished, for all practical purposes, without money. After the earthquake, the Institute had been provided with a reasonably good building to replace the old mansion (later a lodging-house) in which it had been inconveniently housed; and as a Government institution it enjoyed certain privileges, such as free postage, which reduced its expenses. But the fact remains that with practically no funds Cundall obtained an accumulation of material now worth millions. As late as the mid-'twenties, the Government grant to the Institute was about £3,000 annually.

Of course in those days material did not command high prices in London or New York. West Indian history had really not been discovered, and Cundall, like Columbus, with the Arawaks, must have struck many a good bargain with the second hand book trade. But it is difficult to take advantage of the most attractive bargain if you have no money at all, and that must often have been Cundall's position, unless some private benefactor came to his assistance.

In fact, Cundall obtained a good deal of his material free. He would persuade his friends to present spare copies, or even the only copies they had, to the Institute. After the death of anyone with a library, he might rather have been called Condor than Cundall, for he would swoop down on the relatives and suggest a transfer to the Institute of the West Indian volumes which the deceased, and no one else in the family, had treasured.

Yet this incredible activity was accompanied by ceaseless writing of articles, writing and editing of books. It cannot be said that Cundall's publications involved the Government of Jamaica in any great expense.

It was the West India Committee in London which financed the publication of Cundall's two great series of lives of the Governors - works which, while marked by grave defects, such as lack of references, and the absence of any real thread narrative, were important contributions to a more exact knowledge of the first hundred years of Jamaica's history as a British colony.

The West India Committee also financed the publication of Historic Jamaica, a work of very unequal merit, the west of the island being in particular very scrappily treated. It has been neither reprinted nor replaced, to the great loss of the country.

The West India Committee also financed the publication of Lady Nugent's Journal, the most successful of Cundall's works. Mr. Philip Wright, who is responsible for the wholly new Institute edition of the Journal, has in his preface paid proper tribute to Cundall's work on this diary.

The SPCK printed his life of Archbishop Nuttall. Cundall was an active Anglican, who served both on the Diocesan Council and the Diocesan Financial Board: he must have possessed a wealth of information about the Church and the Archbishop. In some ways, therefore, the biography of Nuttall is the most disappointing of Cundall's works, for so much remains obscure - the book raises questions in the reader's mind which it does not answer.

Of his more important works, only Jamaica Under the Spaniards, written in collaboration with J. L. Pietersz, was actually financed by the Institute - but apparently out of private contributions.

A man who hammered away for half a century in a colonial backwater at a job of this sort, and left behind him so much for others to use, would be regarded today as a sort of academic blackleg. But at least no one would regard him as responsible for the failure of the Institute to be a centre of light and culture to the community at large. We should be disposed to say, 'How much more was the man expected to do?'

As I have said, the critics of the Institute in the late 'thirties' did not attack Cundall as the man responsible for the submergence of its other aims beneath a sea of historical data. They felt that the Board of Governors, and in particular Mr. DeLisser, had left Cundall to do as he pleased because they were not ready to try to extract money from Government for other purposes.

Yet it remains a real question, whether Cundall deflected the Institute from its full purpose because there was nothing else to do, or because he preferred to concentrate on history. Given his experience before he came to Jamaica, and his interest in art it seems unlikely that he willingly narrowed the scope of the Institute. It is noteworthy that as late as 1927 he published a second edition of Jamaica Negro Proverbs and Sayings, which he had produced along with

Dr. Izett Anderson: while this has historical importance, it is clearly intended as a presentation of local culture. I think we may say that Cundall's narrow concentration increased not only with his age, but with the decline in the country's willingness to take seriously the broad cultural objects of the Institute - a decline which was closely linked with the growing weakness of the Crown colony system.\*

When the present writer came to Jamaica in 1926, Cundall was three-quarters of the way through his career at the Institute, and all the major works mentioned above had been published apart from the Lives of the Governors. It was clear that the impact of the Institute on the general life of the country was nil except in so far as it provided an all-island general library service. Cundall was regarded as a man who knew everything about the past, but no one was very interested in his West India Reference Library. This, people said, was entirely the preserve of Cundall and a favoured few. They stressed Cundall's 'hoggishness', by which they meant that he kept the WIRL to himself, was jealous of anybody else who wanted to study the past, and displayed general bad manners.

My own limited observation does not confirm these charges in any respect. He appeared to me very conscious that he might have made mistakes, and was glad to be given references to sources he had overlooked on particular points. Once, without my asking him, he broke one of his rules and sent me a WIRL book to my address in the country when he found I had been trying to get it from the open shelves, in the General Library, from which it had been removed. I found that the Kingston Athenaeum, a large private subscription Library which had under the law the privilege of affiliating its members to the Institute, regarded Cundall as unreasonable in his attitude towards this: but I found that the crux of the matter was that if one of the members of the Athenaeum ceased to be a member, he might have borrowed a book from the Institute which he failed to return. I found that as long as we took this seriously, Cundall did not complain.

\* It is beside the point for the purpose of this argument to ask whether Cundall's great work could have been done if the Institute had attempted to carry out its full cultural objectives. If Cundall could have obtained money and staff, the scope of the work could have remained wide without interfering with his special activities. For years the post of Curator remained unfilled, and Cundall was himself titular Curator, working with the the help of volunteers, Dr. Grabham, E.S. Panton, and C. Taylor.

This last case is important because it shows that people were simply disposed to say that Cundall was wrong when he was right. And I think that this was connected with the general decline in intellectual interests. Cundall had laid up the treasures of knowledge in the West India Reference Library, but people did not want the trouble to study. Yet they knew they ought to be using the Library. Accordingly, they affected to believe that Cundall had hidden the key of knowledge.

I do not doubt that Mr. Cundall was sometimes grumpy and disagreeable in those last years. He was old, and had lost many of his friends. He had no disciples - he had two competent and devoted assistants in the West India Reference Library, Miss Helena Morris and Miss Violet Nash, but there seemed to be no group of young people likely to make effective use of the Library. Interest in the past seemed to fade in proportion to the accumulation of material about it. There was less and less interest amongst the general public as all energies were increasingly concentrated on money-making. There was no sense of urgency, no sympathetic interest, on the part of Governors as there had been in the days of Swettenham. A man like Astley Clerk, who had even less to be pleased about, might contrive to be tolerably cheerful in the 'thirties,' but he had rather an exceptional temperament.

Extract from Jamaica journal, March 1968, vol. 2 No. 1.  
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Jamaica journal is published quarterly by the Institute of Jamaica.

The Institute of Jamaica was established in 1879 during the governorship of Sir Anthony Musgrave "for the encouragement of Literature, Science and Art". Its headquarters always has been on East Street in Kingston. Its first home was an attractive 18th century building known as Date Tree Hall which stood where the present Library building is now situated. The libraries of the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council, which bodies had been dissolved in 1866, were transferred to the Institute to form the basis of the first library.

Today the Institute of Jamaica, is a cultural centre comprising a General Library; two Junior Centres; the West India Reference Library; a Natural History Museum and Reference Library, Art and Exhibition Galleries; a Lecture Hall; the Jamaica Folk Museum at Spanish Town; Arawak Indian Museum at White Marl; and the Jamaica School of Art, with headquarters at the DaCosta Institute in Kingston Gardens; a museum of traditional African art and crafts at Devon House.

Several other museums are now in various stages of preparation including a gallery of historical exhibits based largely on the West India Reference Library's collection of maps, prints, manuscripts, supplemented with other historical memorabilia to be opened in April; a museum of the Spanish period (at Seville in St. Ann); an Armed Forces Museum; a site museum for archaeological excavations (in Spanish Town behind the facade of the old Kings House); a coffee museum (at Chester Vale); a fishing museum (at Port Henderson); and several museums in Port Royal, the first being in Fort Charles.

THE GENERAL LIBRARY was established in 1879. It was at one time virtually the only public library service for Jamaica. Apart from the main library in Kingston there was a network of deposit libraries in Elementary and Secondary Schools, literary clubs, and community centres throughout the island to which boxes of books were circulated at intervals. Purchase of books for these deposit libraries was made possible by the generosity of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Books were also sent to individuals by mail. With the establishment of the Jamaica Library Service in 1949, the library concentrated more on reference functions, and in 1958 handed over light reading to the Jamaica Library Service. Today it is gradually being converted into an Arts Library specializing in subjects in which the Institute of Jamaica is otherwise interested and concerned with, such as fine arts,

performing arts, music, history and literature along with a complementary reference stock.

The Library has a stock of 29,931 books, subscribes to 129 current periodicals, maintains an illustration file and a collection of University, College and Technical Schools prospectuses. Included in the book stock are books in the French and Spanish language; a 70 volume work of the Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada and a compact edition of the British Museum Catalogue of printed books to 1955. The collection of art and history books is particularly strong. Airmail editions of the London Times and the New York Times are available, with back numbers dating from 1951 and 1952 respectively.

The library is also a deposit library for United Nations Documents and British Standards.

During the past 15 years the United States Information Service Library (Alexander Hamilton Library) has been associated with the General Library. A stock of 2,332 books and 29 current periodical titles is maintained within the general library.

THE WEST INDIA REFERENCE LIBRARY was established by Frank Cundall in 1894 during his term as Secretary and Librarian of the Institute.

The Library collects and preserves all types of material on all the Caribbean Islands with greatest emphasis on Jamaica (for which it functions as the national collection) followed by the English speaking islands, Guyana and British Honduras; then the non-English speaking islands and countries bordering the Caribbean Sea. There is also a selection of books on West Africa.

The West India Reference Library has a stock of 22,654 books and pamphlets, subscribes to 43 current newspaper titles, 1,346 current periodical titles, which include government annual reports. There is also a collection of approximately 20,000 manuscript maps, 9,775 photographs, a large number of manuscripts (collections and single items), prints, microfilms, gramophone records and tapes.

Among the many items of interest in the West India Reference Library collection are the manuscripts of the Radnor estate journal which records the daily work performed by the slaves on that estate in the Blue Mountains; a manuscript atlas on vellum with



decorative coloured maps relating to the occupation and sale of the Dawkins family estates from 1655 to about 1760 placed in the custody of the Institute of Jamaica by the Sugar Manufacturers Association (of Jamaica) Ltd; collections of official and other letters of some Governors of Jamaica such as Roger Hope Elletson, Lieutenant Governor, 1766-1768, General Sir George Nugent 1801-1806 and the Marquis of Sligo, 1834-36; Sir Hans Sloane's attractive and valuable VOYAGE TO . . . JAMAICA with its illustrations of Jamaica plants and animals. Sloane came to Jamaica as physician to the Duke of Albermarle in the seventeenth century and in 15 months collected a large number of botanical specimens which became the nucleus of the British Museum.

Very valuable to the research student is the newspaper collection which contains runs of 18th, 19th and 20th century titles in addition to those titles received currently. The earliest in the collection is a photocopy of an issue of the WEEKLY JAMAICA COURANT for 1718; the original is in the British Museum. This is the earliest Jamaican newspaper known to have been published. THE GLEANER began in 1834. / the library has it continuously from October 1865. Since the early 1950's the library collected newspapers from all the other English speaking islands and from Guyana and British Honduras.

JAMAICA HISTORICAL RESEARCH PROJECT which is based in the West India Reference Library is abstracting for computer storage, information on Jamaica's social, economic and political development from 1937-1962. Material is being abstracted from The Daily Gleaner, the Hansards, Public Opinion and Plain Talk. The project began in 1967.

THE SCIENCE MUSEUM LIBRARY was established in 1944. Coverage is strong in both zoological and botanical sciences, but the latter has been more highly developed, especially in conjunction with the growth of a pan-Caribbean herbarium now containing more than 85 000 preserved specimens of plants. The taxonomic literature, mostly housed in the herbarium section, comprises botanical journals, monographic works dealing with particular groups of plants, and floristic works dealing with all or many of the plants of particular regions. The latter are arranged in a geographic sequence, and include literature on most areas of the world except temperate Asia, with particular emphasis on the West Indies, Central America, and northern South America. Many basic taxonomic works on botany, both pre- and post-Linnaean, are also housed with this collection. Index Kewensis and the Gray Herbarium Card Index are important bibliographic tools kept with the taxonomic books.

The zoological collections are strong in W. I. birds, fish and in Herpetology of Jamaica.

USE of the libraries is free to all persons. The West India Reference Library is extensively used by school, college, university and research students. Enquiries are handled in person, over the telephone and through the mail.

The General Library has a membership of 7,477. The periodicals and newspapers are well used by workers in the down-town area, especially during the lunch periods.

The Science Museum library collection is frequently used in conjunction with the specimen collections in the Science Museum. Individuals and groups (student researchers) are assisted by subject specialists (botanist and entomologist).

SPECIAL SERVICES offered by the libraries include photocopying and photographic services. Selective indexing of some periodicals is done in both libraries. A subject index to the Daily Gleaner is maintained in the West India Reference Library and there are also extensive clipping files with the same subject headings as the index.

Subject bibliographies based on the libraries' collections are prepared in answer to specific requests.

Exhibitions mounted by the libraries have included some done specifically in answer to requests from organizations and schools. One exhibit SLAVERY TO EMANCIPATION was on display in a number of schools both in Kingston and in other parts of the island and in Miami, Florida,

PUBLICATIONS include Frank Cundall's BIBLIOGRAPHIA JAMAICENSIS: a list of Jamaica books and pamphlets, magazine articles, newspapers and maps, most of which are in the Library of the Institute of Jamaica, published in 1902 (with supplement 1903) and his BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE WEST INDIES published in 1909 (also based on the Institute of Jamaica collections) and reprinted by Johnson in 1971. These two now no longer a comprehensive listing of the library's holdings - are the only published catalogues that exist of the Jamaican and West Indian collections.

**THE JAMAICA NATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY:** a list of current publications on, about and by Jamaicans, which is compiled from the annual acquisitions of the West India Reference Library, the University of the West Indies, Mona and the Jamaica Library service. A 7 year cumulation (1964-1970) of this bibliography is now in preparation.

**JAMAICA GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS:** a bibliography compiled from the periodical collection in the West India Reference Library.

**CARIBBEAN LANGUAGES:** a bibliography from the collection of the West India Reference Library collection 1970.

**CARIBBEAN FICTION:** 1900-1969 in the West India Reference Library collection 1970 (English and American imprints only).

**A GUIDE TO JAMAICA REFERENCE MATERIAL IN THE WEST INDIA REFERENCE LIBRARY** by Rae Delattre, 1965.

Between August 1969 and August 1970 the Institute's librarians contributed a series of articles on aspects of national culture and world wide topics known as "Book Power", to the Daily Gleaner. These articles appeared on Wednesday each week. They were aimed at encouraging Jamaicans to make use of the wealth of materials in the Institute's libraries and at promoting reading generally.

**INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA PUBLICATIONS SECTION.** This section is responsible for the Institute's publishing activities. Reprinted recently were Cundall's Historic Jamaica and Bibliography of the West Indies. These were done jointly with Johnson Reprint Corporation. In preparation are official biographies of Sir Alexander Bustamante by Sylvia Wynter and Norman Washington Manley by Vic Reid. A new series on Cultural Heritage will include works on history, biography, art and literature. One title in the series, The life of George William Gordon by Ansell Hart, has been published: histories of Jamaican literature, Jamaican art and Performing arts in Jamaica are in preparation.

Twenty one titles have been published to date in the Institute's Science bulletin series.

**THE JAMAICA JOURNAL** a quarterly publication - provides an attractive presentation of cultural activities in Jamaica covering the wide range of the interests of the Institute.

The Junior Centres of the Institute of Jamaica were founded in 1940 as cultural centres for young people of the corporate area.

The main building at East Street, Kingston, was erected through the generosity of the late Denzil Callahan M. D. and the Jamaica Welfare, and was extended one year later with funds donated by the British Council. The Centre in St. Andrew is situated in the old Court House at Half Way Tree.

At that time there were no public libraries for children apart from a few shelves in the adult library of the Institute of Jamaica. Each Centre therefore concentrated on the establishment of a library to serve young people up to the age of eighteen years. These were the first free libraries in Jamaica, and for many years remained the only public libraries for the children of the Island. In addition a number of schools, both in the rural and corporate areas were supplied with boxes of books purchased with a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. This service was administered by the East Street Centre until the Jamaica Library Service was established.

Each Centre has the library as its nucleus or focal point around which a number of cultural activities are created. Art, Creative dancing, Music, Sewing, Handcrafts, Home Economics, Nature Study and Spanish are some of the main activities.

The objective of the Centres is to seek through the medium of their libraries and activity groups to awaken and release potential talents in young people. This is done by making it possible for them to participate actively in a creative way in various forms of cultural expression, and in doing this to help each participant to become a well integrated human being.

The field is, of course, limitless, but the budget has its bounds. With the formation of an island wide public library service the Junior Centres were able to give increased attention to a multiplicity of activities.

## ART

The birth of the Jamaican art movement had taken place in the late 1930's, largely nurtured by the Institute of Jamaica. Soon after its opening day, the East Street Junior Centre began playing its role in this movement by the formation of free Saturday Art classes under Miss Nan Youngman, a specialist in Child Art from Cambridge University, further motivated this group. A three week course in the Centre's lecture Hall opened new vistas on the Art with children, and

a small experimental class formed to demonstrate the course was carried on, conducted by members of the staff of the East Street Centre. Today there are 300 children participating in Art at the East Street Centre, and two classes were begun in January of this year at the Half Way Tree Centre.

### DANCING

Classes in Creative Dancing began under the voluntary tutorship of Miss Ivy Baxter, and over the years have been carried on by voluntary help from such people as Eddie Thomas and Alma Mock Yen. For the past eleven years these classes have been conducted by Monica McGowan a member of the National Dance Theatre Company, who had herself been a member of the Junior Centre Creative Dance Group. At the present moment there are two classes on Friday afternoons and over fifty children participating in this activity. This group can claim to be the starting place of people known in the field of dancing such as Clive Thompson, Frank Ashley, Frederica Byfield, and Monica McGowan herself, who is one of the National Dance Theatre Company dancers.

### MUSIC

Children are taught to read music and to play on melody instruments such as recorders, violins and tuned percussion instruments. There are also classes in Guitar playing and Drumming.

### HOME ECONOMICS

This is a group comprised of over thirty girls between the ages of nine and sixteen years. They learn the simple rules of Home Economics and as there is no kitchen available at the present time, concentration has been on such subjects as nutrition, the preparation of dishes which do not require cooking, and the making of drapery and effects to beautify the home. Classes in crochet and sewing are also conducted. Young children, many under twelve years, learn the basic stitches in crochet which will enable them to interpret more complicated patterns on their own.

### NATURE STUDY

This is a small group of children, most of whom live in downtown Kingston. The classes are designed to make them more aware of their natural surroundings and to supplement their Natural Science studies at school.

## SPANISH

The necessity exists to introduce children at a fairly early age to languages other than their own. The first of our language groups is Spanish. Children are taught to construct simple sentences and the correct pronunciation of everyday words. This, we hope, will be helpful in their introduction to Spanish later on in school.

## ACTION CLUB

There is a Teenage Action Club comprised of members of the Libraries and activity groups. This club has a member of staff as its honorary chairman but the executive committee plans all meetings, seeking advice when necessary. Self organisation and self control are encouraged and emphasis is placed on recreation as a constructive activity.

Members show an active interest in social issues. There have been discussions and visits to places of interest, such as radio stations and recording companies.

All these activity groups are free except Art and Dancing for which a small fee of twenty-five cents (25c) per term is charged in order to help defray the cost of materials. Most of the classes have to be limited in size and there are waiting lists for all the groups.