

FRANK CUNDALL, O.B.E.
Secretary and Librarian of the Institute of Jamaica
1891 - 1937.

(From a broadcast given on May 7th, 1952, by Miss Beryl Fletcher).

My only claim to attempt to pay tribute to Mr. Frank Cundall, lies in the fact that I was privileged to serve him as his Clerical Assistant and to have seen him at work for some years. This was an inspiration. One could not help catching some of his enthusiasm for research, and for me, there was the conviction that the work of the Institute of Jamaica was thoroughly worthwhile. Through his policy and efforts, there was always a chance of learning something new and of hearing or meeting some interesting person were he artist, author, musician or statesman.

Frank Cundall was born in London on the 17th of January 1858 and was educated first at private schools and afterwards at Kings College, London, which he left in 1875. His father, Joseph Cundall, was a writer and editor of Art works, and was assisted by his son in many of his publications.

In 1879, Sir Anthony Musgrave, then Governor of Jamaica, founded the Institute of Jamaica. At a special meeting of the Board of Governors of the Institute of Jamaica held in December 1890, Mr. Frank Cundall was appointed Secretary and Librarian and he arrived in Kingston on the 6th of February, 1891 and thus began a busy life devoted to the Institute of Jamaica with particular emphasis on historical research in the West Indies.

With amazing foresight Mr. Cundall very soon set himself the pleasurable task of building up a Jamaican collection of books, manuscripts, newspapers, portraits, maps, plans and engravings and subsequently he expanded the idea of the special collection to include other West Indian islands, as well as Central America and West Africa, because of their early associations with Jamaica.

He had many friends overseas who assisted him considerably in collecting the material comprising the West India Reference Library which continues to serve as the recognised source of information in the Western Hemisphere for all engaged in historical research on the Caribbean. His work in the field of historical research is very well-known and time and again scholars pay tribute to his work and to the Library.

Mr. Cundall was an ardent churchman and for many years he was a Churchwarden of the St. Andrew Parish Church and a Lay Representative of the Synod of the Church of England in Jamaica.

He was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians and of the Royal Historical Society; an Honorary Corresponding Member of the Institut Historique et Heraldique de France, the American Antiquarian Society, the American Jewish Society, the Hispanic Society of America, the Ontario Historical Society and the Academie des Jeux Florimontains. In 1929 His Majesty King George V was pleased to confer on him the O.B.E.

As a man he was extremely humble, methodical, witty, a good organiser and a great scholar. He could be stern at times, and his humour was not always understood or fully appreciated.

He was twice married and there were two children, one by each marriage. His daughter, Mrs. Frances Wiehen, is the wife of Mr. Guy Wiehen, the Second Master of Munro College, Malvern, and his son is the Hon. J. Leslie Cundall, Q.C., Attorney General of Jamaica.

Nearly fifteen years ago Mr. Cundall passed from our midst. He actually died on the 15th of November, 1937. Many who knew him, will remember him with a sense of respect and admiration. He was untiring in his efforts to accumulate material to further historical research in connection with Jamaica and the Caribbean area.

Two plaques have been erected to perpetuate his memory in this island which he made his home. One is in the St. Andrew Parish Church, Halfway Tree, and the other is on the walls of the Institute of Jamaica inside the main Library

building facing East Street.

His publications were many and the following may be of interest:-

"The story of the Life of Columbus and the Discovery of Jamaica"; "Historic Jamaica"; "Lady Nugent's Journal" which he edited in 1907 and 1934; "Jamaica Negro Proverbs" with Dr. Izett Anderson; "Jamaica under the Spaniards" with Mr. J.L. Pietersz; "Life of Archbishop Nuttall". Three important bibliographical works are "Bibliographia Jamaicensis"; "The Bibliography of the West Indies and its supplement" and "The History of Printing in Jamaica". With Mr. J.C. Ford, he was co-editor of "The Handbook of Jamaica" from 1907 and sole editor from 1920 until his death.