

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1941 Dr. Eliza Atkins Gleason stated that a public library is established with the basic idea that its use should be free to all residents of the community on equal terms, but the Negro is not always included in these broad terms. He has special status in regard to library use as in so many places in American life.ⁱ Library service for Negroes in the South has followed the familiar pattern of the dual system of institutions for the two races. With a few exceptions library units for the Negro population are separate in housing and service, although not necessarily in administrative control.ⁱⁱ As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the period from 1900 to 1910, a number of public libraries in the South extended service to the Negro reader. In the main, this service was made available either by restricted privileges at the main library or by the establishment of a separate branch to serve the Negro patron. The number of libraries offering service to the Negro did not seem to increase rapidly or uniformly during the period 1910 to 1920. The growth could be described as sporadic and limited mainly to comparatively large urban areas. In contrast the growth in facilities from 1920 until the present has been far more even and consistent.ⁱⁱⁱ This growth has been due in part to

individuals and groups having both an interest in library development and a cognizance of the presence of a racial dualism in the south which necessitated the leadership of capable Negroes in the library field.

What has happened in the first half of this century in libraries in the South is the result of a combination of efforts, primarily on the parts of enlightened and devoted citizens and librarians, aided by funds given by such philanthropic foundations as the Rosenwald, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Phelps-Stokes, Jeanos, Slater and Peabody.^{iv} One such devoted librarian is Mrs. Susan Dart Butler of Charleston, South Carolina. From her childhood she was possessed with a desire to provide library service to the Negro people of Charleston.

Fully conscious of the problems of the region and the needs of her community, Mrs. Butler served the people of her community and state by providing the leadership needed in 1925 when the Julius Rosenwald Fund was one of the outstanding philanthropic organizations which included in its program the giving of assistance to the development of public libraries for Negroes. She received information concerning this fund from Mrs. Celia P. McGowan who in the fall of 1925 had attended an interracial meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.

As chairman of an interracial committee of the Young Women's Christian Association of Charleston, South Carolina, Mrs. Butler organized and conducted a survey to ascertain the need for library

facilities for Negroes in Charleston, thus showing a need for assistance from the Rosenwald Fund which was realized several years later.

From 1931, the year assistance was secured from the Rosenwald Fund for libraries in Charleston, until 1952 three large rooms on the first floor of Dart Hall were made available by the Dart Family at virtually no cost to the people of Charleston. Here a branch library designed for the exclusive use of Negroes was maintained. Dart Hall is considered a landmark in the Negro community.v

In May, 1957, Mrs. Butler retired as librarian at the Dart Hall Branch of the Charleston Free Library. After her retirement, however, she immediately began assisting a group of citizens in Dorchester County, South Carolina to develop a library; she is engaged in this voluntary endeavor at the present time.vi

The library profession can justly be proud of the contributions made by Mrs. Butler, as founder and organizer of a small reading room which has grown into a large branch library with an annual circulation of 157,101 books among 5,000 regular borrowers.vii A written account of Mrs. Butler's life and work as a pioneer librarian constitutes a record of prime importance both for the present and for future generations.

Purpose and Significance

A survey of available material on Negro pioneer librarians and the history of the Charleston Free Library reveals little on the life and work of Mrs. Susan Dart Butler. This inadequacy should not exist. This thesis is an attempt to remedy this and to add to other studies made concerning Negro pioneer librarians. Until Lillian T. Wright made a study of Thomas Fountain Blue,^{viii} such studies had received relatively little attention.

Scope

This study records for the first time the contributions made over the years by Mrs. Susan Dart Butler to the Charleston community. The founding and growth of the Dart Hall Branch of the Charleston Free Library under her leadership and her contributions to library service for Negroes in the south will be of chief concern.

Methodology

1. Library literature was examined for works by and about Susan Dart Butler.
2. Trips were made to Charleston, South Carolina, for interviews with Mrs. Butler.
3. Trips were made for interviews with:
 - a. Librarians who worked with Mrs. Butler.
 - b. Librarians at the Charleston Free Library.

- c. A representative group of persons served by the Dart Hall Branch Library.
4. Letters were written to Mrs. Anna P. Bronseaux, of New York City, the sister of Mrs. Butler and Attorney William A. Dart of Atlantic City, New Jersey, the brother of Mrs. Butler.
5. Newspaper clippings concerning Mrs. Butler were studied.

ⁱ Eliza Atkins Gleason, The Southern Negro and the Public Library (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 66-67.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 184.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., pp. 18 ff.

^{iv} Robert H. Lester, "The Carnegie Corporation and the Library Renaissance in the South" (Paper read before the American History Round Table, at the American Library Association Conference. Miami Beach, Florida, June 19, 1956).

^v Susan Dart Butler, "Making a Way to Start a Library" (Paper written for the League of Women Voters of Charleston, 1952).

^{vi} Statement by Mrs. Susan Dart Butler, personal interview, November 2, 1957, Charleston, South Carolina.

^{vii} Charleston News and Courier (Charleston, South Carolina), December 17, 1952.

^{viii} Lillian T. Wright, "Thomas Fountain Blue, 1866-1935; Pioneer Librarian," (unpublished Master's Thesis, School of Library Service, Atlanta University, 1955).