

CHAPTER II
EARLY LIFE WITH FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The Dart Family

Mrs. Susan Dart Butler adopted a philosophy, which was also held by her father, that restrictions placed on the educational facilities for Negroes are damaging from recreational, cultural and economic viewpoints. The contributions made by Mrs. Butler to the development of library service for Negroes in Charleston, South Carolina, are interwoven with the life and work of her father, the Reverend Mr. John Lewis Dart, who was a pioneer in the field of education for Negroes in the South.

Reverend Dart was born a free Negro in Charleston, South Carolina in 1854 and attended school there. He was graduated from Avery Institute as valedictorian of its first graduating class in 1872. Avery Normal Institute, as it was called, was founded in Charleston, South Carolina in 1865 by Francis L. Cardozo under the auspices of the American Missionary Association.ⁱ After graduation Reverend Dart taught school in Sumter, South Carolina and saved enough money to pay for two years of college study at Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia. With the assistance of friends in the North he was able to complete his college work at this institution in 1879. He next attended Newton Theological Seminary in Newton, Massachusetts and was graduated in 1882 with the Bachelor of Divinity degree.ⁱⁱ He was then ordained in Newton as a Baptist minister. After teaching and preaching in the North and in Georgia, he returned to

Charleston, South Carolina in 1886 to become the pastor of Morris Street Baptist Church. In 1887, during the early years of his ministry, he married the former Julia Pierre of Washington, D.C., who had been a teacher in the public schools of that city.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Darts lived in the parsonage of the Morris Street Baptist Church and it was here that Susan Dart was born in 1888. She was the first of five children (two boys and three girls). A boy and a girl died in early childhood. The Reverend and Mrs. Dart spent much time doing general community work as well as church work. In the Dart family there was something more to the family religion than morning devotions together. Home life was saturated with the reality and practice of love for each other and for one's fellow man. The chief source of amusement was reading. The father, always avidly interested in libraries, maintained an excellent collection of books in his home for himself and his children. In addition to the books for his family, as a part of his service to the community he equipped a room next to his study to be used as a library by the young men of his parish.^{iv} The mother had a "gift" for selecting and telling stories about pioneer life in the forest, stories of olden times, of Indians and best of all, Bible stories. Books became an indispensable part of the life of the entire Dart family.^v

In about 1895, Susan Dart was a first grade pupil in a private school of Charleston, South Carolina. The public schools for Negroes were very overcrowded; therefore, in order to help provide for the children who

could not be accommodated by the public schools, Reverend Mr. Dart erected, on his own land on Kracke Street, a six-room building known as Dart Hall which accommodated about 150 children. Here a kindergarten was maintained and the older girls were taught plain sewing while the older boys were instructed in the blacksmith trade. Four years after the first building went up Reverend Mr. Dart purchased six adjoining lots and upon them was built what was considered a large and beautiful building at the corner of Bogard and Kracke Street. For the creation of the building he received some financial help from his fellow citizens, but the bulk of the money was donated by friends in the North who also contributed funds for the maintenance of the school. The name of this school was The Charleston Industrial Institute.

About 1905, Reverend Mr. Dart became editor of the Southern Reporter, and purchased the Reporter's printing plant and the newspaper. Instruction in printing took the place of the blacksmith trade in the school work. The same building which housed the school now houses the Dart Hall Branch of the Charleston County Free Library.^{vi}

The Dart family gave help and inspiration to Reverend Mr. Dart as he went about his educational, church and charitable work but a situation developed in Washington, D.C., which necessitated a temporary separation in the family. Mrs. Dart was called back to her native Washington to care for her aged parents. She took the three children to

Washington in 1896 where they stayed, about three years, until the grandparents' deaths.

Education and Marriage

Prior to the stay in Washington, D.C., Susan Dart attended Avery Normal Institute as did her sister and brother. While in Washington, however, they attended the public schools of the city and little Susan completed the fifth grade in Washington. In 1899 the family moved back to Charleston and the children again attended Avery Institute, from which each of them was graduated. Then Susan attended Atlanta University (normal department) in Atlanta, Georgia, and later the McDowell Millinery School in Boston, Massachusetts. She lived in Boston from 1908 to 1912.^{vii} She also received some training in library science at Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia. Susan's parents were sincere in their attempts to give her guidance in choosing her life's work. She made a conscientious attempt to carry out her mother's wishes that she take up millinery as a vocation and for five years she was a successful milliner. She was quite an artist in the business and worked at it until 1920.^{viii} Her father's interest in and enthusiasm about library work, however, were uppermost in her thinking and planning for a future profession. Thus it was that she attended Hampton Institute during the summer of 1932 for training in library work. The greater part of her library training was of an informal nature. In 1931 she worked in the Dart Hall Library under Miss

Julia McBeth who was a trained librarian. To Susan this was in many respects similar to a year in school.^{ix}

During the winter of 1912 Susan was married to Nathaniel Lowe Butler, a native of Boston, Massachusetts, who was engaged in the real estate business. After marriage the couple made their home in Charleston. Three years after this marriage, in July, 1915, Mrs. Butler's father died at Saratoga Springs, New York. In 1918 the first and only child was born, Nathaniel Lowe Butler, Jr., and as he grew, he was in many ways an inspiration to his mother. Like his mother he loved books and on many afternoons he brought the neighborhood boys into his home to look at books and pictures. If the boys did not read well he would ask his mother to read to them. At an early age he learned to read and discuss authors and their styles of writing. Mrs. Butler enjoyed the companionship of her son only a short time because when he was twenty years of age he died from an injury sustained while swimming.^x

Work With Social and Civic Organizations

Not only did Mrs. Butler feel that service to mankind could be rendered through one's profession but she volunteered her services to educational, civic and religious organizations among which were the Librarians' Section of the South Carolina State Teachers' Association, the Young Women's Christian Association and the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women. This latter organization (still functioning and a very

important civic organization) had its origin in the year of 1909 and Mrs. Butler was one of the founders of the Charleston Federation of Women's Clubs. The Members of the Federation are women who work to improve community life especially as it concerns the youth of South Carolina. Today Mrs. Butler is still an active member of the Federation having served as its state and city historian. She has also held membership in organizations connected with the Congregational Church of Charleston and has assisted with scouting organizations for girls and boys. At present she is still affiliated with the above mentioned groups but in addition to this she is the only Negro member of the Charleston County Board of the American Red Cross and a member of the board of the Robert Gould Shaw Boys' Club, Inc. which is affiliated with the Boys' Club of America.^{xi} She is a member of the board of directors of the Wilkinson (Girls' Home) Orphanage in Cayce, South Carolina.

It was the desire to secure first hand information on the organization and administration of library materials that prompted Mrs. Butler to travel from place to place to see how various libraries were organized. She had heard of a few outstanding libraries in the South and since she was determined to change the reading room which was started by her father into a public library for Negroes in Charleston she thought it wise to visit some libraries. She visited schools and libraries in Atlanta, Georgia, Washington, D.C., Hampton, Virginia, and Tuskegee, Alabama. Such travels proved very rewarding and offered many opportunities for

Mrs. Butler to develop in her prospective profession. She met many important people in the library field; a profession which, at that time was in its infancy as far as Negro librarians were concerned. As her career unfolded she came to know that she would be in the main stream of library development in the South. She also realized the need for formal training and the limited possibilities for receiving the same. Mrs. Butler was aware of the fact that there was, in existence for 25 years prior to 1927, a group of public-spirited women including Mrs. Butler's mother who had been trying to convince the citizens of Charleston county of the great need for a public library.^{xiii} This was of necessity the first step to take, that of focussing public attention on a problem long in need of some solution. As she thought of the situation in Charleston and what she had learned during her travels, Mrs. Butler was determined that she would become a part of the library movement which was evidently about to get started.

ⁱ George Brown Tindall, South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), p. 224.

ⁱⁱ A.B. Caldwell (ed.), History of the American Negro, South Carolina Edition (Atlanta, Georgia: A.B. Caldwell Publishing Company, 1919), II, p. 210.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tindall, op. cit., p. 205.

^{iv} Statement by Mrs. Susan Dart Butler, personal interview, November 25, 1955, Charleston, South Carolina.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Caldwell, op. cit., p. 212.

^{vii} Letter from William A. Dart, Attorney-At-Law, Brother of Mrs. Susan Dart Butler, July 9, 1958, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

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

^{xi} Statement by Mrs. Albertha Johnston Murray, personal interview, July 1, 1958, Charleston, South Carolina.

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