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HISTORY OF THE
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
LIBRARY

by

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THE BENJAMIN FRANKLIN LIBRARY

GENESIS

The Benjamin Franklin Library is not merely one of the libraries in the Federal District of Mexico; it is the U.S. Information Agency Cultural and Research Center and as such differs radically from other libraries. Its primary objective is to interpret the United States to Mexico. In its thirty-five years of services it has occupied three different locations and changed administration the same number of times. Originally constituted as a civil corporation under Mexican laws, it added free English classes to its other services as a courtesy to Mexico.

While World War II was raging in Europe, the Congress of the United States, seeking to improve relations with the republics south of the border, assessed a considerable sum for the establishment of three libraries of American books. The first, which was to be the pilot library, would be located in Mexico City, the second in Managua, Nicaragua, and the third in Montevideo, Uruguay. The project was entrusted to Nelson Rockefeller, then Coordinator of Interamerican Affairs and the establishment and supervision to the American Library Association.

In August 1941, two weeks after the appropriation was granted, the Association sent its secretary, Carl H.

Milam, and his assistant, Mr. Marion Milczewski to ascertain whether it was convenient and desirable to establish an American library in Mexico. Having found conditions favorable and a suitable location for the library, they formed an Interim Committee* of six members representing the principal American organizations in the City of Mexico to supervise all operations and activities connected with the establishment of the new institution until further provisions could be made.

The library was named after Benjamin Franklin, the Father of public libraries, and Dr. Harry Miller Lydenberg, former director of the New York Public Library and a man of great experience and personal attributes, was appointed to direct it with the aid of a Board. He arrived in Mexico City on October 29, 1941 and was soon followed by two other American librarians, Miss Bertha B. Harris and Mr. James B. Kingsley. An outstanding Mexican librarian, Miss María Teresa Chávez, completed the professional staff.

*The Interim Committee was composed of the following members: Miss Dorothy H. Ellis representing the Junior League; Mrs. Eunice Garner representing the Pan American Round Table; Mr. Harvey A. Bashman representing the American Club; Mr. Henry L. Cain representing the American School; Mr. Floyd Ransom representing the American Chamber of Commerce and Mr. W. Sollenberger from the American Legion. Mr. Cain was Chairman and Mr. Sollenberger Secretary Treasurer.

Attention was then turned to the legal formalities. The Articles of Agreement were signed in Mexico City on December 8 of that same year before Lic. Salvador del Valle by the member of the Interim Committee and on that same date the Benjamin Franklin Library Association was formed by the organizations represented in the Interim Committee and the American Library Association.

The purpose of the Association was "to organize and establish the Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin; to provide books and other cultural materials from the United States for the use of Mexican students and others seeking information about the United States; to extend such service throughout the Republic by all means possible; to assist intercourse between that Library and libraries in the United States; to help libraries in Mexico and the United States acquire publications issued in the other country; to serve as a center for cultural activities of the United States in Mexico; to help citizens of the United States living in Mexico interpret the United States to Mexico and Mexico to the United States; to maintain and extend friendly relations between libraries of Mexico and those of the United States; to encourage and strengthen existing institutions and channels

designed for interchange of cultural materials and relations; to encourage and facilitate in every practical manner the study of the Spanish language by United States citizens; to foster and cultivate closer understanding and neighborly spirit between the peoples of the two countries." }

The Board of Directors which was to assist the Head of the Library was composed of six members elected by the organizations represented in the Interim Committee and three by the American Association. Each member served for a period of four years.

The first Board constituted on January 8, 1942 was composed of the following members:

Mr. Harvey A. Basham representing the American Chamber of Commerce	- President
Dr. Pablo Martínez del Río representing the American Library Association	- Vice-President
Mr. W. C. Longan representing the American Legion	- Secretary
Dr. Alfonso Reyes representing the American Library Association	- Treasurer
Miss Marjorie Lewis representing the Jounior League	
Mrs. W. Bolling Wright representing the Pan American Round Table.	
Mr. E. H. Skidmore representing the American Club	
Mr. Henry L. Cain representing the American School	
Lic. Antonio Correa representing the American Library Association.	
The Ambassador of the United States was named Honorary President.	

The legal formalities having been taken care of, attention was turned to the appointment of the local assistants. Mrs. Caroline Barret de Escalante was added to the staff on February 16 to direct the English classes, Mrs. Jovita T. Zubaran on March 9 as bilingual secretary to the Director and Mrs. María Luisa Giner de los Ríos on March 23 as Head of the Circulation Desk. A messenger and a janitor were also employed.

Although the building was not yet in perfect shape, the English classes began on March 1st and by the end of the month ten regular classes were in session with 115 students of all types and classes: bus conductors, carpenters, office workers, taxi drivers, etc. (One of the grateful drivers took the teacher home every day in his cab). A few months later a group of blind people requested the opportunity to study English and a new class was formed. What a stimulating sight it was to see them diligently punching away their notes in Braille;

The announcement of the free English classes brought a wave of protest from the owners of the commercial academies who felt that their institutions would be jeopardized. It was not easy to convince them that the Library courses would be given to people who could not afford the prices charged by the academies.

By the first of April the shoots of grass could be seen coming up in the small garden in front of the Library and the final details were being added to the building, but most important of all: the 3,000 books received from the New York Public Library were already on the shelves. There was no reason to wait any longer. Invitations were hurried to all the Embassies, government offices and organizations in any way connected with education and culture.

The Official inauguration on Monday April 13, 1942 was later described by Dr. Lydenberg as "an event of such importance that it merited the presence of the President of Mexico and the Diplomatic Corps." Punctually at 7:00 P.M. that evening, the President of Mexico, Gral. Manuel Avila Camacho and his wife arrived at Reforma 34 where profound silence was observed in the Auditorium by the members of the Diplomatic Corps, the Mexican officials and Embassy personnel who awaited his arrival. After a short musical selection, the President made the formal inauguration. Speeches followed by the Ambassador of the United States, the Honorable George S. Messersmith, the President of the ^{Junta} Board of Directors, Harvey A. Basham and Mr. Carl H. Milam who brought greetings from the President of the American Association, Mr. Charles H. Brown.

The musical part of the program was provided by the orchestra of Elías Breeskin, the Madrigal Chorus and the

soloist Sonia Verbitsky, altogether a magnificent performance. The entire ceremonies of the evening were broadcast by the local radio stations throughout Mexico and by the National Broadcasting Company in the United States. The Columbia Broadcasting System transmitted them to South America by short wave and newsreels were made by Paramount Pictures. The newspapers printed enthusiastic reports of the opening of the new library and everything seemed to forecast a bright future.

Tuesday the 14th was Pan American Day and open house was held for American Embassy and Consulate personnel as well as for the members of the American colony.

On Wednesday evening, Mr. Edgar H. Skiomore as presiding officer welcomed the members of the cultural organizations of Mexico. Dr. Lydenberg, acting in the name of the American Philosophical Society, delivered to Dr. Alfonso Caso, Director of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología two calender sheets and four others missing from the Tribute Roll of Moctezuma which Joel Poinsett had delivered to them in 1830 on his return to the United States after his mission to Mexico. This gesture of goodwill was especially fitting to the occasion since it had been precisely Benjamin Franklin who founded the Society.

The number of the National University, the Polytechnic

Institute and other institutions of higher education were greeted on Thursday by Dr. Pablo Martínez del Río, Dean of the Summer School of the National University and Vice-President of the Board of Directors of the Library. After visiting the installations and inspecting the collection they declared that the Benjamin Franklin Library would be a boon to students and teachers alike.

Last but not least was Librarian's Night on Friday. Lic. José Vasconcelos, Director of the Biblioteca Nacional spoke a few words on behalf of the Mexican librarians and greetings were read from Mr. Keyes D. Metcalf, Director of the libraries of Harvard University and President Elect of the American Library Association, who was not able to attend. On being informed that the Library would operate with open shelves and home loans, the librarians raised their eyebrows. Mexico was not prepared to make good use of these services.

After the close of the program each evening the guests visited the building and partook of the refreshments offered by the Library.

On Saturday afternoon films were shown in the Auditorium for the children and their parents. Fruit juices and candy were passed around. Thus ended the week of the inauguration ceremonies.

FORGING AHEAD

At ten o'clock Monday morning the Library opened its doors to the public. This would henceforth be the daily opening time with a lunch period from 1:00 to 3:00 P.M. and closing time at 9:00 P.M. Monday through Friday and 6:00 P.M. on Saturday. There were only 3,000 books on the shelves. Some of the shipments had been delayed; others held up at the Customs. Whether from curiosity or real interest, ten readers registered in the first five minutes and many more entered to browse around. By the end of the day registrations totaled eighty-seven. Notes were taken that day of some of the interesting data. The name of the first reader was J. Antonio Martínez and the books he chose were Grove's MARRIAGE and Wright's GETTING ALONG WITH PEOPLE.

Students, who formed by far the largest group of readers, consulted principally technical and scientific books in the Library but as usual, fiction was the favorite for home loans. Willa Cather was the most popular author followed by Pearl Buck, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck and Sinclair Lewis, probably because there were on the shelves translations of all their works. The novel with the highest circulation was Santayana's "Last Puritan" and the book which had to be replaced most often was the Holy Bible.

Since the start and for many years afterwards, films were shown on Wednesday nights for adults and on Saturday afternoon for the children. They were always well attended, so much so that two showings had to be given usually on Saturdays.

It was also customary to set up exhibits regularly in the Auditorium. On the day of the inauguration there was on display a collection of unusual books chosen as examples of good type, fine paper, excellent illustrations and extraordinary binding. They had been selected by Messrs. Henry Kent, formerly Secretary of the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York City; Bruce Rogers, outstanding book designer and Monroe Wheeler of the Museum of Modern Art, who acted on behalf of the American Institute of Graphic Arts. Later, Mexican engravings, paintings and sculptures were exhibited and lectures given in conjunction with the displays or a propose of contemporay events. After the President of the Board, "Judge" Basham presented the Library with a Beckstein piano, concerts were also scheduled in the Auditorium.

Less than a month after the inauguration the Library received on indefinite loan a collection of about 400 books on Mexico acquired during the latter part of the 19th century by Rev. John W. Butler of the Methodist Episcopal Church. At his death they were taken over by the church it was considered that they would be

used to better advantage at the Library. Mrs. Eva Scales also placed on indefinite loan the nine volumes of MEXICAN ANTIQUITIES, the folio collection which landed Lord Kingsborough in Debtor's Prison but which contains valuable information on Prehispanic Mexico. These publications made up the Rare Book Collection and were later given outright to the Library.

The first year was of feverish activity with Dr. Lydenberg at the helm assisted by a group of hard working staff members trying their best to make the Library a model institution. Routines were developed and services initiated by the eight members of the personnel who paid no attention to schedules but stayed on until the job was finished. The Library was really doing its best to help Mexican scholars and book lovers, but it was evident that the fine services planned for the American library could no longer be maintained with the original staff of eight.

The Children's Room was always crowded with youngsters eager to take part in the numerous activities. The story hour was an event never to be missed, sculpturing in clay was very popular and the Viewmaster, with its colorful scenes of the United States was enjoyed by all.

The Technical Department tried desperately to keep up with the work but after September 1942 when the last shipment of books was received from New York, the two

members of that department, one professional and the other clerical, could not cope with the material to be processed. The Circulation Department was also hard pressed checking out books by hand and registering hundreds of readers. Nor did the Reference Desk fare any better with its two members compiling bibliographies, Lists of New Acquisitions, preparing small departmental displays and answering questions by telephone, in person or through the mail. One by one new members had to be added to help out in the departments under the heaviest pressure.

Appreciation of the importance of the Library was shown by the large number of publications received as gifts. Donations came from publishers, institutions and individuals. The Library of Congress, the Carnegie Foundation and the Smithsonian Institution all sent their publications to the Library from the start. Dr. Pablo Martínez del Río, Mr. Paul V. Murray and other Catholic friends of the Library founded the society of "Friends of the Franklin Library" to present books on catholicism and the Catholic Church. In fact, there were months in which the number of books received as gifts far exceeded the number received through purchase. However, not all these publications were added to the collection. Those considered suitable were put on the shelves and the rest given to Mexican libraries.

As the second floor of the building was quite spacious, two deserving organizations were given space on that floor; the Junior League, whose members transcribed articles from magazines into Braille for the blind, and the Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales, a binational group striving for closer relations between Mexico and the United States, which also handled in Mexico the scholarships of the Institute of International Education.

News that the Benjamin Franklin Library was a most modern and efficient library spread to the provinces and out-of-town librarians made special trips to the City of Mexico to request technical assistance for their respective libraries. In the Federal District, professors of library science brought their students to the Library to show them the features of an efficient and well planned library. So great was its prestige that a main thoroughfare of the City of Mexico had its name changed to Avenida Benjamin Franklin at a ceremony attended by the U. S. Ambassador and the Mayor of the City.

In February 1943 the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan took over the supervision of the English classes in order to test their methods of teaching English as a second language in Latin America, although expensed continued to be carried by the Library. The

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latest techniques and teaching material were applied by a group of teachers under the direction of Dr. Albert H. Marckwardt. On their arrival, new classes were formed but the demand was so great that on Registration Day the waiting line was a block long. Such enthusiasm was created by these classes that the National University requested that one of the courses be broadcast over their radio station twice a week. Inside of a month 498 students from 18 cities in the Republic had registered and when the examination was given, 180 papers were turned in.

One of the many contributions of Dr. Lydenberg to Mexican librarians was the procurement of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for the compilation of a Union List of Serials in medical and biological fields in the libraries of Mexico City. Mr. Rudolph H. Gjelsness, Head of the School of Library Science of the University of Michigan was designated to supervise this assignment, Miss María Teresa Chávez was appointed Field Assistant and Miss Helen Ransom editor. Four Mexican assistants were engaged for the field work of sorting, arranging and listing the periodicals. This project was well on its way in July 1943 when Dr. Lydenberg resigned to accept another important post in Washington.

Just before his departure, Dr. Lydenberg had the satisfaction of receiving the Argus Microfilm Reader ordered through a grant from Nelson Rockefeller which

proved through the years to be of tremendous value both to the Library and to its patrons.

After bidding a sad farewell to Dr. and Mrs. Lydenberg who were both extraordinary people, the staff was partly comforted by the fact that Mr. Gjelsness, Head of the Union Catalog Program, with whom they were all familiar, would be left in charge of the Library. The new Director was quiet and observing, given to emphasis on details, a true technician in library science. During his administration routines were thoroughly revised and techniques perfected.

Miss Eva J. Antonnen came from the States to replace Miss María Teresa Chávez who had been transferred to the Union Catalog Project, as Head of the Children's Room.

Demands for new services were received continuously and ways and means had to be devised to meet them. One of them came from a high ranking Mexican government official who requested help in obtaining out-of-print publications not available in Mexico but of which American libraries had copies. In as much as Mexico is so close to the United States, it was possible to arrange for an interlibrary loan service with the Library of Congress and a few other American libraries whereby books were sent through the mail for a period of one month to be used in Mexico under the responsibility of the Benjamin Franklin Library. Microfilm and photostat copies of publications not available for loan were supplied at a

moderate cost.

On another occasion several letters were received from the provinces asking whether books could be sent on loan outside Mexico City. For the benefit of these people an Extension Service was established to send books through the mail for a period of six weeks to readers in the provinces who had registered previously.

Many of the students of the English classes searched the shelves in vain for books within their range of knowledge of the English language, but with the exception of those in the Children's Room, all the others were too advanced for them. For their convenience and that of the teen-agers, a new shelf with books for young people classed as easy reading was installed in the Reading Room.

There were also people who could only use the Library during the lunch period. In order that they might be able to do so, continuous service was instituted on March 20. A month later the service was extended further by opening at 9:00 A.M. and closing at 9:00 P.M. on week days and 6:00 P.M. on Saturdays.

At the beginning of 1944 the Office of War Information suggested that the Library sponsor a series of lectures on the struggle of some of the occupied countries of Europe and sent exhibit material to be used with the

lectures. The first one given on January 13 by the Norwegian Minister to Mexico was entitled "The Unconquerable Norwegians", the second by the Minister of Poland "The Unconquerable Poland". etc.

Following these lectures came the opening of one of the most commented exhibits of the year: "El Niño en la Plástica Mexicana" which was prepared by Miss Bertha B. Harris of the Library and Mr. Fernando Gamboa, art critic. This exhibit consisted of forty-two portraits and eight sculptures. The sculptures were prehispanic pieces by Tarascan Olmec and Totonac Indians and the paintings were by Carlos Mérida, Diego Rivera, Roberto Montenegro, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Pablo O'Higgins, María Izquierdo, Frida Kahlo and Jesús Guerrero Galván, all outstanding Mexican artists.

After this exhibit, a joint committee was formed between the Library and the Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales for the operation of the Auditorium. Excellent exhibits, lectures and concerts were programmed thereafter every month which brought to the Library many people who would otherwise never have even heard of it.

On the third anniversary, the Library began to broadcast another program, this time a series of lectures on contemporary American writers, with a view to increasing the reading of American books. This program continued for approximately one year under the direction of Mrs. Verna Carleton Millán, herself an author.

In September of that year the Director, Mr. Rudolph H. Gjelsness had to return to his post in the United States and Dr. Harold W. Bentley, a dynamic person whose forte was public relations and who made friends easily, arrived to take his place. His main objective was to attract scholars and intellectuals to the Library. At the same time that he directed the Library, he also supervised the English classes.

During his administration the Library increased its collection considerably with the funds furnished by the Books for Latin America Project of the American Library Association. Quantities of technical and scientific books were acquired and periodical indexes purchased. The collection of books in English on engineering grew to be considered the most important in the Republic.

In 1946 the Library, in cooperation with the Library of Congress which was anxious to obtain copies of certain Mexican documents, installed a photoduplication laboratory as part of the Library proper. The primary function was to microfilm rare Mexican documents which were in danger of being lost or destroyed, but it also made microfilm copies, enlargements and photostats for the public. By the end of 1946 copies had been made of 100 documents, including books 1 through 9 of Sagahun and all the indexes of the Franciscan papers.

The Children's Room, this special year, was a beehive of activity. With movies on Saturdays, the story hours (in English and in Spanish), a painting club and a philatelic group for boys, the room was always crowded with bustling youngsters. One of the most enjoyed activities was the presentation of a puppet show completely worked out by the children. The script was written by some of the older set and each child was taught by Mrs. Renate Crevenna how to make a puppet by the process of paper maché. All of them took part in painting the backdrops and in manipulating the puppets. Two plays were given in English: SEVEN AT A BLOW and CINDERELIA and two in Spanish: EL SUEÑO DE UN BUFON and EL GATO CON BOTAS. The afternoon of the performances the Auditorium was crowded with both children and adults curious to see what the youngsters had produced. Needless to say, the show was a great success and was enjoyed by all, especially by the young producers.

There were special years in the history of the Library when there was a noticeable turnover of employees and this was one of them. With so many university students browsing around or searching for information for their term papers or theses, it was natural that cupid should take his toll among the young feminine members of the staff. Thus the Library lost many of its assistants through matrimony that year, and had to employ and train their replacements. The policy followed in the employment of

new persons was that whenever possible, an effort would be made to accept promising persons of Mexican nationality even if they had no library training. If they were interested in the work, they could obtain practical training at the Library and with study trips to the United States might become efficient library workers.

Also in 1946, the Library participated in the Book Fair with an attractive stand in the shape of a carroussel gaily decorated with life-size reproductions of several characters in children's books and a large tree blooming with book jackets of bright colors. From the time the Feria opened there were children in the Library stand reading the beautifully illustrated books and asking questions. Every afternoon there was a story hour. The children set at the foot of the book tree and the adults listened from outside.

The English classes were at that time presenting quite a problem. They had grown to such an extent that they had 2,159 registered students and two thousand new applications for admission. It was no longer possible for the Library to continue housing and managing a noisy activity which was in no way compatible with the quiet operation of a library. The Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano presented the solution by offering to take over the English classes. It was not, however, until July 1947 that they found adequate quarters and moved to the new location.

The Library was honored in September by a visit from U.S. Vice-President Henry A. Wallace and a number of prominent political figures. They visited all the departments and chatted with the patrons, especially the children.

By the end of the year the Library had 20,000 books in its collection, of which 5,000 were in Spanish, chiefly on Mexican history, art and literature. Mexican scholars and professors continued requesting books on interlibrary loan and the number of microfilm and photostat copies of articles that had been ordered totaled more than one thousand.

In December Dr. Bentley was called back to the States before his replacement, Mr. Andy G. Wilkison could arrive. Miss Bertha B. Harris was Acting Director until May when the new Director reached Mexico.

In the meantime, the funds for the maintenance of the Laboratory were coming to an end and it was not yet producing enough to be self-supporting. A special grant from the Department of State assured its operation for at least another year. Although many important Mexican documents had been copied, there was still much to be done. It is interesting to note that in February 1947 Mr. George Smisor, Head of the Laboratory, with the help of Mr. John McDonald, developed the first Ektachrome film in Mexico.

Work on the Union List of Serials came to an end. The

Director of the Library, Mr. Andy G. Wilkison wrote the preface and introduction and turned the manuscript over to the Comisión Impulsora y Coordinadora de la Investigación Científica who had offered to publish, it. It was not, however, until 1949 that the completed volumes appeared. The local assistants in the Union List of Serials Project were incorporated into the Library as needed.

At the request of the Rector of the National University, the Embassy called on the Director of the Library to make a survey of the holdings of the Biblioteca Nacional, the Hemeroteca Nacional and the libraries of the different colleges of the University with a view to making recommendations for the Central University Library in the new University City. The important question was whether the Biblioteca Nacional and the Hemeroteca should, or should not, occupy the Central University Library building.

On Friday, September 5, 1947 the Library gave a party in honor of the child whose registration number was 4,000. Books were given to the first child who registered when the Library opened, Emigdio López and to the child with registration number 4,000, Carmen Peregrina. The 200 children who attended were given movies, entertainment by a clever magician and light refreshments.

The UNESCO Conference opened in Mexico in November 1947. Each delegate was at that time given a personal invitation to make use of the services of the Library and to visit

the exhibit prepared by the Library for the occasion. The display, which was inaugurated on November 4, consisted of over a thousand American books on all subjects and was purchased and sent to the Library by the American Library Association to be mounted during the UNESCO Conference. Visitors to the exhibit were especially impressed by the fact that when the exhibit closed, the books would be donated to Mexican libraries.

Also in November the staff of the Children's Room offered the first literary Book Tea to be given in Mexico. It was held during Children's Book Week and was organized by the Children's Librarian, Miss Eva J. Anttonen. The Deputy-Director, Miss Bertha B. Harris, was hostess at the tea table and the staff greeted the guests and served refreshments. Fifty guests were expected but more than 200 arrived. Among the most important were Magda Donato, Antonio-Robles, Blanca Lydia Trejo, Anita Brenner, Patricia Fent Ross and Salvatore Bartolozzi. Equally well represented were the publishing houses of Mexico. Everyone agreed that the first literary tea was a huge success and the Library considered it the most successful activity of the entire year.

By January 1948 it had been definitely decided that the Library would be transferred to the U. S. Department of State's International Information Administration for

administrative purposes on July 1, 1948. The Board of Directors voted the dissolution of the Benjamin Franklin Library Association but no change in the services of the Library were anticipated for the time being.

It had long been felt that the Library should open branch libraries in the principal cities of the Republic and arrangements were initiated to open one in the city of Monterrey. On February 6, 1948 the Biblioteca Franklin-Monterrey was inaugurated in the Municipal Palace which was located in the center of the city close to schools and the commercial district.

After the opening of the branch library the Director spent the rest of the month accompanying Dr. Leslie Dunlap of the Library of Congress to the National University, the Biblioteca Nacional and the Hemeroteca. Dr. Dunlap was sent to Mexico to make a study of the library problem of the National University prior to their move to the University City.

In June preparations commenced for the change to Embassy administration. Although the services would remain the same, there were certain provisions which would have to be taken. Price, Waterhouse & Co. made a complete audit of the finances of the Library, the staff was requested to take all the vacations due them and to attend to all medical treatments before July 1st. Orders were sent out for the necessary supplies, equipment and books for both the adult section and the Children's Room. Since

Embassy regulations did not permit anyone to live in the Library building, the janitor had to be dismissed and other arrangements made for the cleaning and maintenance of the Library.

On June 30 a farewell luncheon was given to the members of the Board of Directors during which Ambassador of the United States, Mr. Walter Thurston thanked them for their assistance in the administration of the Library during the previous six years.

The change of the Benjamin Franklin Library from the Benjamin Franklin Association to the Embassy of the United States took place on July 1, 1948 without any publicity or notification to the public. On that date the Library had 24,034 books in its collection.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGE

When the Library came under the administration of the Embassy, certain changes had to be made to conform to State Department regulations: book orders had to be sent to the Department for examination and approval; applicants for positions in the Library had to undergo a previous examination and be approved by the Embassy and the cleaning and maintenance of the building, as well as the guard duty, had to be performed by Embassy personnel. The Director was assured, however, that there would be no change in the services to the public.

Also, the classification of the Library employees by the Embassy resulted in lower salaries for some and the loss of the benefits of the Seguro Social for all. This loss was later partially compensated by the devaluation of the Peso and the fact that those with several years' service would have a month's vacation with pay instead of the two weeks they had previously received.

In October 1948, Mr. Andy G. Wilkison was ordered to Buenos Aires to open a new U.S. Information Library and Miss Bertha B. Harris was appointed Director of the Benjamin Franklin Library.

One of the pet projects of Miss Harris had always been to open branches of the Library in some of the largest cities of the Republic. The branch in Monterrey was giving excellent service to an appreciative public and an appropriate location was sought for a second branch. The City of Puebla was selected as a convenient site and the American School in that city offered what seemed to be adequate quarters. A small collection was placed in a previously shelved room and opened to the public in April 1949. Unfortunately this branch library turned out to be a complete disappointment as the person designated by the American School was merely a part-time assistant who did not open the library at any specified time but only when her other duties permitted. A few months later the branch was closed.

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Quite the opposite was true of the branch library opened in the Consulate of the city of Guadalajara on August 25, 1949. With two assistants and 3,000 books, this library was well attended from the very first day it opened.

Two important congresses were held in Mexico in 1949: the International Congress of Gynecology in Mexico City in May, and the First Congress of Historians of Mexico and the United States in Monterrey in September. The Library obtained on microfilm much of the material used by the Mexican doctors for the papers they presented at the Congress of Gynecology and Miss Harris prepared an excellent exhibit of United States Books on Mexico for the Congress of Historians.

A month later, October 18, 1949, to be precise, after a brief illness, Miss Harris passed away, a great tragedy and misfortune for the B.B.F. It was not until mid January 1950 that Mr. Edward G. Heiliger arrived in Mexico to take over the administration of the Library, In the meantime, Miss Marie A. Rapp, the Assistant Director attended to the most important issues.

In May 1950 a Bookmobile Service was inaugurated, using a jeep which had belonged to the Motion Picture Section of the Embassy. The translated picture books were transported by this means to the primary schools of villages in the outskirts of Mexico City and checked

out to the children for a period of one month. During that time not only the children read the books but also the fathers and mothers and sometimes even the grandparentes, after which the children exchanged them among themselves and the process was repeate. The first school to be given this service was the primary school of San Antonio Tecomitl but as soon as other schools heared of the service, they begged to be included. Thus the trips increased in number and when the Embassy heard that ten villages were being visited monthly, they contributed a station wagon to take the place of the old jeep.

One year after Mr. Heiliger's arrival, four American professional librarians reported to him for duty: Miss Jesse Taaffee who was assigned to the Bookmobile, Mrs. Mauda Sandvig who became Assistant Director after Miss Rapp resigned to accept a post with the C.R.E.F.A. L., Mrs. Deborah Currier who took charge of the Children's Room and Mr. William Parker who was made Head of the Technical Processes Department.

With the help of these four new staff members the Benjamin Franklin Library made a special effort that year to reach as many influential people as possible: members of the primary target groups, the leaders who formed opinions and high government officials. The Library users who were of all types, categories and conditions, in general had more schooling, read more books and had more culture than the average person. Undoubtedly they

too had great influence on those around them. The returned exchange students also helped considerably to improve the image of the United States in Mexico.

The Building at Reforma 34 was no longer suitable to house the collection nor to accommodate the hundreds of readers who daily visited the Library. By the middle of the year it had been decided that a new location would have to be found. In the meantime, the Embassy was confronted with much the same problem and had to move to larger quarters, vacating the U.S. Government owned building they had occupied on the corner of the streets of Niza and Insurgentes.

Despite the fact that the Chancery building with its arrangement of small offices was not the ideal setup for a library, the architects who were consulted determined that adequate space could be provided to knocking down a few walls. Based on their judgment, remodeling began soon after the Embassy moved out but was not completed until December 1951.

Moving a library is no easy job. The packing was a tremendous ordeal and the books had to be put in numbered boxes with great care and little by little. The vans did the rest but the most arduous task was to accommodate the furniture and shelve the books in the new location. Moreover, the Circulation Desk had to be assembled, the periodicals stacked in the basement and the supplies stored in cabinets. Finally, although the work was still going on until the last

moment, the building was inaugurated on January 8, 1952.

Another branch library was opened in one of the buildings of a large housing complex in the town of Coyoacán adjoining Mexico City which seemed to offer a good location. After considerable consultation and preparation, the branch was inaugurated in the Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán by Ambassador O'Dwyer and Mexican officials from the Secretariat of Education. A year and a half later it had to be closed in as much as it was not attaining its objective of reaching low-income adults.

The Library completed that year a decade of service and enjoyed the reputation of being the most efficient and technically perfect library in the City of Mexico. Some of the important services it was offering the Mexican public were: the home loan of books; a question-answering service by specially trained staff members; open shelves for the entire book and periodical collection; home loan service and question-answering facilities for children and young people; an extension service to send books through the mail to all parts of Mexico; interlibrary loan service from libraries in the United States, as well as microfilm and photostat copies; use of the catalog of the Library of Congress; Bookmobile service to the villages; book exhibits; professional library advice

to Mexican institutions; lectures on subjects of common interest to Mexico and the United States; motion pictures on American subjects; free pamphlet literature on the United States and many more.

The Tenth Anniversary celebration took place in the Embassy Residence Garden and was attended by Ambassador O'Dwyer, Dr. Harry M. Lydenberg, Mr. Luther Evans, Mr. Lewis Hanke and many important Mexican officials.

U.S. INFORMATION CENTER

The U. S. Information Agency came into being on August 1, 1953 and the Library became one of its numerous Information Centers. Although it continued to be known as the Benjamin Franklin Library and no public announcement was made of the change, it began gradually to acquire all the characteristics of a U.S. Information Center.

However, the prestige of the Library was still great, evidenced by the fact that Mexican libraries frequently asked to have their new staff members trained briefly at the Benjamin Franklin Library. Instructions and training were also given to the heads of the Library branches who were periodically called to Mexico City to attend seminars, during which routines were reviewed, recent developments reported and new policies emitted.

Extra services were added whenever possible. The Embassy published a magazine called SABER which was sent to teachers both in the Federal District and in the provinces. The Director of the Library requested that a list of some of the books on education available at the Library be published in each number of the magazine with a note that any of them could be sent through the mail for a period of six weeks to the teachers residing outside the Federal District who requested them.

Book Fairs were held quite often in Mexico. The Plaza de la Ciudadela was chosen as the scene of the one which was organized in 1954 and was inaugurated by the President of Mexico, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines. The Library was invited to participate, and with the help of the Embassy, presented an attractive stand which although small, drew a continuous stream of visitors.

In an effort to reach as many people as possible, one hundred book lockers were prepared with translations of books from normal, agricultural and trade unions which were to serve as rotating collections. They were sent to the Escuela Normal Superior where communist and anti-U.S. activities were much in evidence, The State Library of Aguascalientes, a night school, trade schools and other educational institutions.

The Librarian of the Children's Room was also busy trying to reach children all over the city. In addition to telling stories and explaining to the students of several primary schools in the city the services offered by the Library, she visited the children's ward of several hospitals and read stories to the unfortunate little inmates, leaving with them some of the translated picture books for their enjoyment.

The Library branches in Monterrey and Guadalajara moved in 1954 to new and improved quarters which resulted in a considerable increase in use. The window displays and weekly record concerts also attracted many new audiences. In that same year, the branch in the City of Puebla, which had been closed due to student disorders, reopened in a new building under the direction of Mr. Othón Martínez, a teacher of English in the University of Puebla.

On March 9, 1955, Richard Nixon, at that time Vice-President of the United States, visited the Library on his trip to Mexico. Little did the staff then imagine the tremendous tragedy that would befall the man who praised highly the work of the Library and expressed the opinion that it was more effective than all the pamphlets that could be distributed.

In addition to the moving pictures given twice a week, the Library initiated a program of recorded classical music for its patrons. It was always well attended,

especially by middle-aged and elderly people. These concerts continued until the year 1961 when they were replaced by jazz concerts which drew young folks in informal attire, the girls in slacks and the young men with beards, long hair and dark glasses.

In September 1957 the Foreign Service Institute of Washington, D. C. opened a branch school in the Benjamin Franklin Library of Mexico City to give intensive courses in Spanish to officials of the American Embassies in Latin America. The school was under the direction of Mr. Salomon Treviño with Mr. Guillermo Sagreda as Assistant Director and Miss Luz María Suárez as secretary. The teaching staff consisted of five locals: Messrs. José Luis Aguilar and José Luis Terrarán and Misses Nancy Martínez, Eugenia McGregor and Berta Gallardo. These classes continued for approximately two years and were discontinued on December 30, 1959.

By that time the main Library had a collection of about 27,000 books and 450 periodicals and newspapers. There were also 10,000 pamphlets and government documents and 500 college catalogs. Approximately 15,000 active borrowers were registered and the Reference Department answered 1,300 questions each month. Extension loans for the benefit of the borrowers in the provinces were being sent to about 18 different points in the Republic and the Interlibrary Loans with libraries in the States and Microfilm orders continued

in full force. Branches were located in Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla and a Reading Room in Tampico supervised by the American Consul in that city.

In 1960 the Library was working closely with the Cultural Section of the Embassy presenting book and art exhibits periodically which always attracted new people. In that year a new branch library was opened in Hermosillo which functioned satisfactorily until 1974 when it had to be turned over to the Binational Center due to lack of funds.

The Twentieth Anniversary was celebrated in a big way on April 23, 1962 in the garden of the Embassy Residence. The guests of honor were seated at a table on the terrace of the Library facing the Residence and the National Defense Band played the Mexican and American national anthems. Speeches were delivered by Ambassador Thomas C. Mann and Dr. Jaime Torres Bodet, Secretary of Education. Mr. James H. Webb, Jr., Cultural Attaché of the American Embassy, introduced the speakers. Also present were Don Manuel Tello, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Ignacio Chávez, Rector of the National University, Ing. Eugenio Méndez Docurro, Director of the National Polytechnic Institute, Lic. Daniel Cosío Villegas, Director of the Colegio de México, Dr. Howard F. Cline, Director of the Hispanic Foundation of the Library of Congress and many others. Music was provided by the chorus of the Institute of Fine Arts and the Madrigalistas directed by

Maestro Luis Sandi. Exhibited in a special room in the Library was an 18th century printing press similar to the one used by Benjamin Franklin.

Also in 1962 another branch library was opened, this time in Mazatlán. The results were quite promising for a few years but ultimately it had to be turned over to the Board of Trustees of the City of Mazatlán on June 30, 1970.

President John F. Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy arrived in Mexico on June 29, 1962 on a good will mission and the very next day were presented to the Embassy and Library personnel in the Embassy garden. It just so happened that due to special circumstances, that year American Independence Day was celebrated on June 30th. It was a memorable occasion for those enough to the platform to observe the appealing gestures of the President and the elegant figure of Mrs. Kennedy.

In 1963 the Secretariat of Education instituted a new course on History of the Twentieth Century for all secondary schools. The Library, in an effort to cooperate, placed a special collection in the Young People's Room with the information the students in this course were required to obtain.

By this time Mrs. Sandvig, who had been with the Library for fourteen years, was ready to retire. Misses Annadele Reilly, Margaret Hall and Dorothea Western had been for different periods of time her

Assistant Directors. During her administration, Mrs. Sandvig developed the Reference Department to its maximum. Visiting librarians from the States declared that it contained the best reference material and had a well rounded collection of books. Even before she left, the objectives of the Library had already taken a different slant from those originally planned and were then stated to be those of maintaining the prestige the Library had acquired during previous years and at the same time fulfilling the aims of an Information Center.

At Mrs. Sandvig's retirement, Miss Dorothea western became Director and Miss Alice Lage arrived soon after to occupy the post of Assistant Director. Unfortunately, only a year later she was transferred to Rio de Janeiro.

About this time the Ambassador's Residence which was next to the Library, was moved to a more convenient location and the Embassy looked forward to selling the entire property, including the grounds on which the Library was located. The building was old and needed repair, so a search began for more adequate quarters.

Notification had been received from the Agency for the closing of the Children's Room and the anticipated changes of building offered the occasion to do so. In its stead, a Young People's Room would be opened with

all the books and information that the teen-agers would need.

Finally, a building that had possibilities of being converted into a library was found. It had previously been occupied by Kodak Mexicana, S. A. and was vacated when the company moved into its own building constructed in accordance with their specific needs. The architects studied the plans of the building and laid out the changes required to convert the photographic setup into a functional library.

The twenty-fifth anniversary coincided with the move. At that time preparations were initiated to donate the children's books and furniture to the Biblioteca de México and the Rare Book Collection comprising 650 valuable publications on Mexico to El Colegio de México. The time was not appropriate for a large celebration and the festivity was postponed until the new quarters were inaugurated.

Due to ill health, the Director, Miss Dorothea Western, was obliged to leave México and Miss Garnetta Kramer came from Buenos Aires to replace her. It was she who had the grapple with the difficult job of supervising the work being done on the Kodak building, ordering supplies and new furniture - the one being used was old and antique - and directing the packing, moving and later distributing the offices and having the corresponding furniture and 40,000 volume book collection

accommodated in the new location.

Finally, on July 25, 1963 the third building for the Benjamin Franklin Library was inaugurated by Mr. Leonard B. Marks, Director of the U. S. Information Agency. A large exhibit of the latest apparatus used in the various library services including microfiche, etc. was mounted on the third floor of the building and experts described to the visitors the function of each item. A plaque was placed in the Reading Room on the second floor to the effect that the building was inaugurated "in the presence of the Secretary of Education, Agustín Yañez, the Secretary of Foreign Relations, Antonio Carrillo Flores, the Director of the U. S. Information Agency, Leonard B. Marks and the Ambassador of the United States, Fulton Freeman."

The Library occupied the second and third floors of the building on Londres 16. Due to the weight of its presses, the Regional Service Center had been assigned the ^{plant room} ground floor. Room was also found for the Embassy warehouse and for an office of the Institute of International Education on the second floor.

Since chances of obtaining an Assistant Director from the Agency were very remote, Miss Kramer recommended Miss Elvia Barberena, Head of the Reference Section for the post. The recommendation was accepted and for the first time in the history of the Benjamin Franklin

Library, a local employee was appointed to that position. Miss Barberena, a graduate librarian from USIS, gave full proof that she was fully capable of assuming the responsibilities vested in her.

In the new building the Library became a full fledged Information Center. With very few exceptions, the authors in the collection were all American as were the periodicals and newspapers. Agency pamphlets were freely distributed describing some aspect of life in the United States. Instead of the Children's Room, Londres 16 and a Young People's Room functioning principally for secondary school students although it was later expanded to include the preparatory grades.

During Miss Kramer's administration the Library took on another obligation. The translations made by the Regional Book Office and USIS were classified and cataloged. The cards were placed in a book pocket and sent to all USIS and Binational Libraries in Latin America and Spain. This service freed the libraries from duplicating the same catalog cards and enable them time to promote and publicize their book collection.

In 1972 the Regional Book Office sponsored the publication of "Notas Bibliotecológicas." The "Notas" were translations of important American articles on all phases of library work culled from professional periodicals and books. These translations, made by the Library staff, were distributed

by separate articles to libraries until they were finally published by USAID.

Miss Kramer retired in 1973 and Miss Mary Joan Collett became the next director. Just before she arrived, in May 1973 to be exact, the Cultural Center, which had been organized at the Embassy with Mr. Donal Albright as Director, was transferred to the third floor of Londres 16. The objective of the Center was to present concerts, lectures, exhibits and other cultural affairs with outstanding artists. It added an element of live art which made the Library appreciated by more people.

During the two years that Miss Collett was Director, the stacks and catalog underwent a reorganization in accordance with Agency priority themes. Colors were assigned to the different classifications and the shelves were painted accordingly. In the catalog, the cards of the books placed on the colored shelves were marked with dots in the same color to assist readers to locate the publications.

One of the services which brought prestige to the Library, Interlibrary Loans, Microfilm and photostat Copies of books, periodicals and documents found in libraries of the United States, was discontinued in 1975. On the other hand, the film library of the Embassy was incorporated into the Library. Films were then lent to institutions in the same manner as books to individuals.

The time had come to modernize the Library. Just before she left, Miss Collett decked out the Reading Room with new tables and modern, orange and blue chairs. This was just the beginning but before the task was completed she was transferred to Rio de Janeiro. When her successor, Mrs. Jesse T. Reinburg, arrived in 1976 she found herself involved in carrying out the rest of the modernization.

Mrs. Reinburg had been with the Library in 1953 in the capacity of Bookmobile Assistant and was quite familiar with México. Moreover, she had been Director of the Information Centers in Buenos Aires and Athens prior to her transfer to México, so that U. S. Information Agency procedures were not new to her.

In as much as the redecoration of the Library was rather complicated, a petition was sent to Washington requesting the services of an expert interior decorator who could make a study of the setup and recommend appropriate measures. This was approved and a few weeks later the interior decorator arrived. She and Mrs. Reinburg together decided the furniture, equipment and other articles required and placed orders with the Agency. In the meantime, the painting, arranging and other chores preparatory to redecorating were performed.

Before the shelves were arrayed in their respective colors, the technical and scientific books were withdrawn and donated to the Biblioteca de México.

Soon after, the Library lost one of its most efficient Assistants, Miss Elvia Barberena, who tendered her resignation to the post of Assistant Director effective October 29, 1976 to accept a position with the Banco de México. Mrs. Irma C. de Pérez Monroy was chosen to replace her. As a child, Irma had been one of the first to enter the Library and became an assiduous reader of the Children's Room. Her interest never waned and as a teen-ager she volunteered to help out in times of need. This interest led her to take a course in library science, after which she became a regular member of the Library staff. When the Children's Room was closed, Irma was transferred to the Information Desk, of which she later became the Head.

The remodeling did not halt the activities of the Library. Cassettes were prepared with American short stories, poetry and interviews and VTRs described in color different aspects of life in the United States. Slides on architecture, painting, sculpture and biography were already available for home loan.

Once the remodeling was complete, or nearly complete, arrangements began to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Library. The date set was the 21st of April, 1977 and invitations were sent to officials of the Secretariat of Education, the Secretariat of Foreign Relations, the National University, the Polytechnic Institute and other cultural institutions and friends

of the Library. Librarians, teachers and artists were cordially invited as were also authors and newspapermen.

When the great day arrived the Library was at its best. The turn-out was just enough to fill the Reading Room but not to crowd it. Speeches were delivered by Lic. Marcial Plehn-Mejía, Director of Bilateral Relations of the Secretariat of Education and by Mr. Willlliam A. Hayne, Chargé d'Affairs of the American Embassy, after which champagne was served.

The decorative arrangement and modern equipment were greatly admired by the guests and the staff felt proud and happy to belong to such a modern institution.

APPENDIX NO. 1

Speeches of the President of México, Gral. Manuel Avila Camacho, Ambassador of the United States George S. Messersmith, the President of the Board of Directors of the Benjamin Franklin Library Association, Harvey A. Basham, and the President of the American Library Association, Charles H. Brown at the inauguration of the Benjamin Franklin Library April 13, 1942.

SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT OF MEXICO, GENERAL
MANUEL AVILA CAMACHO AT THE INAUGURATION
OF THE BIBLIOTECA BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

April 13, 1942

Por sus altas finalidades, por su moderna organización técnica, por el deseo de relación intelectual que inspiró a sus iniciadores - y hasta por el nombre ilustre que lleva, en recuerdo de uno de los más celebrados prestigios del Nuevo Mundo - la Biblioteca que hoy inauguramos es un testimonio valioso de la amistad que liga a los pueblos de México y de los Estados Unidos de América.

La solidaridad de nuestros países carecería del sentido profundo que le enoblece si obedeciera exclusivamente a propósitos políticos o a móviles mercantiles. Las ambiciones que están acechando el porvenir de este Continente exigen de nuestra parte actos coordinados de defensa económica y medidas urgentes de seguridad militar. Incurriríamos, no obstante, en un grave error si creyéramos que tales medidas y tales actos pueden bastar, por sí solos, para garantizar la continuidad de nuestra cultura dentro del plano de la democracia en que convivimos.

El peligro ante el cual la unidad de América se confirma no es unicamente de índole material. Nuestros territorios, nuestros derechos, nuestros recursos se hallan amenazados.

Pero también están amenazadas nuestras instituciones y nuestras leyes, nuestra sensibilidad y nuestras costumbres, nuestra civilización, nuestras esperanzas y nuestra propia manera de comprender el bien y la libertad.

La lucha emprendida por los actuales imperialismos se dirige contra lo más luminoso y más puro del ser humano. En nuestra conciencia, espontánea, auténtica y libre, la que intentan sojuzgar los regímenes opresores. Y es nuestra conciencia, fuerte, enérgica y decidida, la que nos permitirá afrontar las responsabilidades que nos incumben y conservan el legado de honor de nuestro hemisferio.

Museos dispersos, bibliotecas incendiadas, templos derruídos, colegios bombardeados... Este es el espectáculo que han provocado, en Europa y en Asia, las dictaduras totalitarias. Ese, sin duda, es también el ejemplo del "nuevo orden" que quisieran imponer a la humanidad.

Contra semejantes formas de destrucción, las democracias se elevan, asociadas en el Derecho y anhelosas de aprovechar todas las oportunidades de concordia, multiplicando los nexos que las vinculan y abriendo el hombre, como en este caso, nuevos manantiales de saber y de comprensión.

Para perfeccionar el contacto fecundo de nuestros pueblos ningún instrumento mejor que el libro. El nos aproxima, en efecto, no por la comunidad de los intereses, sino por algo todavía más persuasivo y más perdurable; por la afinidad de los gustos y por la fraternidad de la inteligencia. Toda biblioteca bien hecha es una sociedad internacional, en la que los países se encuentran representados por esos plenipotenciarios excelsos que son los sabios, los poetas, los pensadores, los novelistas. Es decir: los delegados del alma de cada nación.

Con la instalación de este centro magnífico de lectura, el pueblo de los Estados Unidos nos envía una embajada permanente de buena voluntad panamericana. El esfuerzo es tanto más meritorio cuanto que se hace en una hora en que otros países, preocupados tan sólo por objetivos bélicos inmediatos, han suspendido materialmente sus actividades de género cultural.

En estos días de prueba, el establecimiento de la Biblioteca "Benjamin Franklin" constituye un acto elocuente de devoción al espíritu y de fe en el destino común de la democracia.

Al felicitar a sus organizadores - y, por su conducto, a las autoridades y a las asociaciones norteamericanas que patrocinaron la iniciativa - deseo asimismo

expresarles los votos sinceros que hago, en nombre del Gobierno de México, por que la labor de esta institución corresponda invariablemente a los ideales de amistad y de aprecio mutuo que simboliza.

México, 13 de abril de 1942.