



10

24 MAY 1989

53

21

# World's Largest Children's Library

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THE largest children's library in the world is in Munich in West Germany. It receives 19,000 volumes a year from all over the world.

Among the visitors are many from foreign countries as well as from all over Germany. They include teachers who want to set up a library; librarians who want to get to know about new trends; authors who are searching for translators; publishers looking for successful ideas; students and graduate students studying for doctorates, who are seeking advice or who need rare books; scholarship-holders who are specialising in children's books; and, of course lots of children.

The library is housed in Blutenburg Castle, a moated hunting-lodge, dating from the 15th century, which has been painstakingly renovated.

Variously-shaped, massive, complex buildings enclose two inner court-yards. Under the largest with an old linden tree and a young apple tree there is the subterranean centre of the library, warehousing accommodation for 460,000 volumes in more than 100 languages.

Sixty-thousand of the volumes make up the "Historical Collection," publications dating from the 16th century to the 20th.

There are rooms for catalogues, lending and offices where an international crew of 35 work, and a reference library.

There is an inter-library loan service, a media room, a department dealing with autographs, a tape-recording archive, a collection of photographs and a wealth of sketches by famous authors of children's books.

Three rooms are used for congresses, specialist seminars and research conferences. In the fortified tower

there are study rooms. The gateway tower is named after Erich Kastner.

There is a castle restaurant and a chapel with famous woodcuttings from the Middle Ages where one can meditate - for instance about the notorious Lola Montez. She spent the night in these rooms, before revolutionary students hustled her off to America.

Agnes Bernauer, wedded to Duke Albrecht III of Bavaria, about whom Friedrich Hebbel wrote his play given her name, spent a short happy time in the castle.

Yella Lepman, a jewess born in Stuttgart, had the idea for a library of children's and young people's books. After the Second World War the Americans invited her to leave her London exile and go to devastated Munich as an adviser on educational matters.

She suggested that "in order to straighten out this completely crazy world a start should be made with the children."

Children could understand, tolerate, learn to like all races cultures, continents through the medium of the book.

She wanted to create a "children's book bridge" stretching all round the world - the title of her autobiography.

The publishing houses to which she wrote were mainly in countries where until recently Germany had been at war. But books arrived.

In July 1946 an international exhibition of books for young people took place in the Haus der Kunst in Munich. A record number of visitors turned up for this event.

In 1949 the International Youth Library was opened in a small villa in the Kaulbachstrasse in Munich.

Eleanor Roosevelt, a group of

prominent people including Erich Kastner and the Rockefeller Foundation contributed to the new institution - the Rockefeller Foundation gave guarantees of \$22,000 annually.

Yella Lepman had unbelievable energy. She worked with the "determination of a regiment of sharpshooter," as Carl Zuckmayer put it.

Any number of cases of books came from Unesco in Geneva, originating from the League of Nations. Many private collectors parted with some of their treasures.

On the ground-floor of the villa in the heart of Munich's Schwabing borough, close to the State Library, children in patched clothes romped about. Rhymes and songs could be heard from one room. Adults talked about foreign-language literature in another, close by young people crouched over their books deep in Alice in Wonderland, Pinocchio, Emil and the detectives or Tom Sawyer.

Yella Lepman resigned from heading the library in 1957, and travelled to countries in the Third World on behalf of Unesco, to do research into children's books in developing countries.

She initiated the International Committee for Books for Youth, the International Youth Book Conference, and the Hans Christian Andersen Medal award to the world's best authors and artists.

She remained loyal to her self-imposed tasks until her death on 5 October 1970 at the age of 80.

Walter Scherf, a well-known expert on fairy-tales and myths, headed the library for 25 years, years of intensive expansion. He stepped up cooperation with countries in the East Bloc.

Books for young people were col-

lected with meticulous care from all over the world, catalogued and made accessible on loan internationally.

The most important catalogues of the library's collection have been published in a series brought out by the Hall Publishing House in Boston.

Scherf also attracted a new category of young visitors to the library - the children of guest workers and immigrants.

He did a lot to make up for their lack of cultural facilities, procuring books from their home countries and urging German writers to write for them and about the special conditions they had to face up to in this country.

More and more visitors from all over the world came to the library, where they were hemmed in between bookcases and piles of books. They met each other and discussed children's books.

The villa in Munich's Kaulbachstrasse became too small. Inevitably, the library had to move.

Andreas Bode and Lioba Beiten took over the library when it moved to Blutenburg Castle in 1983.

The library's interests in children's books were extended to include activities with children, and a "model library for multi-cultural activities" was set up including 15,000 children's and young people's books in 12 languages.

In the 40 years of its existence the library has contributed a great deal to raising the standards of literature for young people, leaving behind the well-meaning, the old-fashioned and the paralysis of cliches.

Indeed many children today prefer reading to watching television. Knowledge about people and conditions in the world can only be obtained directly via books.

(Courtesy: The German Tribune)