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National Library of South Africa (NLSA)

Until 1 November 1999, for historical reasons, South Africa had two national libraries, the South African Library, founded in 1818 in Cape Town, and the State Library, founded in 1887 in Pretoria.

During the 1990s the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology began a review of legislation under its jurisdiction, including the National Libraries Act, No 56 of 1985. The Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology in 1996 appointed a Working Group on the National Libraries to advise him on the future of the two national libraries. The most important recommendation of the Working Group was that the two national libraries be amalgamated to form a dual-site (Cape Town and Pretoria) national library, to be known as the National Library of South Africa.

The Pretoria Campus came into being thanks to a donation of books from the Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde. These books consisted mainly of Dutch literature and arrived at the Library in 1883. In 1887 the Transvaal government approved the constitution of the Staats-Bibliotheek.

The Cape Town Campus is the oldest library in South Africa. Its origins date back to 1818 when Lord Charles Somerset, Governor of the Cape Colony, issued a proclamation launching the South African Public Library.

The Library's first significant acquisition was the collection of Joachim Nicolaus von Dessin, who bequeathed his books to the Dutch Reformed Church in 1761 to serve as the foundation of a public library. In 1820 the Dessinian Collection was given to the new library. Other notable donations followed over the years, including the personal library of Sir George Grey. This collection presented to the Library in 1861 included valuable medieval and renaissance manuscripts, many rare books including a Shakespeare First Folio, and rare South African publications.



Exhibition Events June/ July at the National Library

Both the Pretoria and Cape Town campuses have exhibitions mounted on the history and development of soccer in South Africa. The exhibitions highlight the wealth of published material that is available to researchers.

The Centre for the Book is a part of the National Library of South Africa. Its mission is to promote a South African culture of reading, writing and publishing in all local languages, and easy access to books for all South Africans.

The Centre advocates the importance of reading for the nation and is involved in coordinating, promoting and encouraging book related activities in South Africa in all local languages. The Centre also coordinates various events and functions such as poetry readings, conferences, book launches, writing groups and writing workshops for teachers, youth and children.