

Obituary

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald (Mac) Partridge was a great man — a visionary, an activist, a mentor, an educator and a librarian. Born in Adelaide on 25 August 1912, his younger years were spent in South Australia. He gained a master's degree in political science from Adelaide University and was a leader in the Student Christian Movement before he married Nan Fletcher in 1945. The following year the two travelled to Rhodesia as missionaries and here Mac was appointed as the director of schools and was in charge of teacher training at Hope Fountain Mission near Bulawayo.

It is a reflection of Mac's vision, integrity and energy that, in a political climate where it was difficult and rare for white people to be outspoken about the needs of their black compatriots, he achieved his goal. Mac steadily and successfully gathered local and international support and funding for a United College of Education in Bulawayo — a college for blacks only, staffed by a dedicated international team of talented lecturers. In 1967 Mac was appointed principal, leading an institution that encouraged all students to develop to their full potential and to formally translate what they had learnt into the practical education of young people. Mac believed that education is far more than transmitting knowledge — it involves stimulating thought and changing attitudes. One of his favourite pieces of advice for new

student teachers was: 'stop teaching and let the children learn'. Several of the United College students were destined to become leaders in their country's struggle for independence, including the first prime minister of the independent state of Zimbabwe.

It is also typical of Mac that, recently retired from his post at the college, and approaching 70 years of age, he returned to Australia to complete his formal qualifications in librarianship in order that he might assist in the development of libraries in Zimbabwe. This was the time when I first met Mac and as a young librarian I was inspired by his enthusiasm, vision and practical approaches to social needs. In time Mac became a mentor — a role which he played unstintingly, over and over again, for so many people of all ages across the world.

Mac was passionate about libraries and the education of library staff. He lamented the poor image of librarians and lack of leadership in the profession. Mac saw the potential for libraries to be 'spectacular' showcases that preserved the essence of people's cultures and he advocated for their pivotal role in the foundation of education systems. Not surprisingly Mac wrote a book about his views and their practical applications. Published by the Library Association, *Low budget librarianship: managing information in developing countries* develops

these themes through stories, using the 'case studies' of librarians from Ghana to Sri Lanka. With an alert eye for practical solutions, Mac was also quick to see the potential relevance of library technician courses to developing countries. With the support of staff at Adelaide Institute of TAFE, Mac drew on Australian library technician training materials to meet the needs of trainee librarians in Africa.

In 1989 another chapter began; Mac's daughter Mem Fox wrote *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* in honour of her father. The book tells the story of a small boy, Wilfrid, who lives next door to an old person's home and befriends one of its residents. She has lost her memory and so Wilfred sets out to find it. Ironically, just a few years after this book was published, the real Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge returned to Adelaide and slowly started to fade as he began to lose his memory...

However, like his small namesake in the storybook who discovered the essence of a memory, the essence of Mac will continue to resonate in the minds and hearts of an international community, from his beloved Africa to Australia and far beyond.

Mac died peacefully in an Adelaide nursing home on 27 February 2002.

Heather Brown, manager, Preservation, State Library of South Australia

First global reference service established

Brisbane City Council Library Services in Queensland, Richland County Public Library in Columbia, South Carolina, USA and the Somerset County Council Libraries, Arts and Information Service in the United Kingdom are partnering to provide what is thought to be the first twenty-four-hour global reference service.

Answers now — all the time, across the world, an online, real-time reference service, will expand the available information resources for each of the three communities. Each library will be responsible for eight-hour increments, allowing constant, twenty-four-hour reference service to customers in all three service areas of the world. The service will be launched in October this year.

To access the service, customers simply log on to one of the three libraries' websites and click on the *Answers Now* icon. They will then be able to interact with a reference librarian online, gaining access to information and resources twenty-four-hours a day. The service provides answers to customer 'ready reference enquiries' of seven to ten minutes duration online.

The service will use *Virtual Reference Desk* software de-

veloped by Library Systems & Services, LLC (LSSI).

Brisbane City has an established sister library relationship with Richland County in the United States. The Richland County Public Library also has established a sister library relationship with the Somerset County Library.

Christine Mackenzie, manager of the Brisbane City Council Library Services says, 'By working with others and using the available technologies we were able to solve the problem of efficient extension of services for our customers. The partnership has provided significant cost and resource sharing benefits. The venture strengthens our links with these overseas libraries and allows us to share knowledge and expertise globally in areas such as marketing, staffing as well as online reference services.'

'This connection allows the three libraries to truly become global resources of information in a unique, innovative way,' said David Warren, executive director of the Richland County Public Library (RCPL). 'We find this most exciting.'

Contact Christine Mackenzie on 07 3403 4255 or mls@brisbane.qld.gov.au for more information. ■

