

island resources

F O U N D A T I O N

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE IRF LIBRARY COLLECTION

Historical Development

An underlying premise for all of the Foundation's work has been the recognition that, in small islands, **information** is the basis for informed decision making about the environment. Thus, when Island Resources was first organized in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands in the early 1970s, a key priority became the acquisition of documentation focused on environmental topics related to small islands, especially those in the Caribbean. Dr. Edward Towle, founder of Island Resources Foundation, was also the "father" of the Foundation's library, nurturing the development of this unique reference collection from the Foundation's earliest years to his death in 2006.

Over time, in excess of 10,000 documents, books, unpublished reports, maps and photographs were assembled at the Foundation's headquarters in St. Thomas — on such diverse subjects as insular ecosystems, historic and scenic places, tourism, coastal resource management, marine pollution, land use management, parks and protected areas, marine recreation, beaches, coral reefs, coastal erosion, environmental impact assessment, environmental planning, and species and other resources undergoing change.

In addition to collecting documentation on priority subject areas, at both an island-specific and Caribbean-regional level, each of the almost 300 projects the Foundation developed and implemented over time has involved the assembly of vast amounts of more detailed data and information, significantly adding to its library holdings year by year, island by island, project by project.

As the Foundation's library became better known among neighboring islands, regional institutions, government agencies and international bodies, and as the Foundation developed its own publication series, exchange arrangements became possible, which also added to the Foundation's ability to acquire new materials for its library collection.

To help keep track of this expanding collection, in the early-1990s the Foundation, in cooperation with the **Eastern Caribbean Center at the University of the Virgin Islands**, catalogued a part of the Foundation's library using CDS-ISIS library cataloguing software (from UNESCO via ECLAC licensing). Materials catalogued at that time primarily focused on the Caribbean geographic collection and included approximately 40 percent of the extant shelved materials.

By the mid-1990s, the Foundation's library collection in St. Thomas had totally outstripped the organization's ability to properly house it at its facility in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Foundation began to explore options for the future development of its unique and valuable library and to address the immediate problems of housing and access.

The solution lay across the Sir Francis Drake Channel in the British Virgin Islands where a partnership emerged between the Foundation and the **H. Lavity Stoutt Community College** in Tortola. In 1997, the Foundation donated its regionally recognized library to the College and transferred it to Tortola.

For a decade, the **Island Systems Environmental Information Centre** (as the reference collection was initially called) continued to be managed by the Foundation at a facility provided by the College on Main Street in Road Town. In 2007, the collection was relocated to its permanent home at the College's new Learning Resource Centre at its Paraquita Bay campus. At a dedication ceremony held on the College Campus on January 12, 2010, the library was formally renamed as the **Dr. Edward L. Towle Island Systems Environmental Collection**. A series of photos (circa 2015) of the shelving arrangements for the Collection at the Learning Resource Centre can be found online at: http://j.mp/ELT_Collection.

The third library maintained by the Foundation since the mid-1980s was the Washington DC Annex Working Library. As suggested by its name, this Library was set up at the Foundation's office in the US capital to provide support for research and general reference. Its establishment coincided with the Foundation's opening of its DC office in 1984. By 1997—with the primary Collection maintained by the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in Tortola—the DC Annex emerged as the major working library for IRF staff for production of Foundation reports and publications. A series of photos of this Library as it existed in 2015 can be found at: http://j.mp/IRF_DC_Annex. To a considerable extent, the DC Annex Working Library duplicated the materials held in Tortola, but it was a smaller version of the primary collection at the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College. Many of the documents in this collection were donated to the Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York in 2016, along with the files and administrative records constituting the institutional history of IRF (see: <http://www.irf.org/archival-collection/>).

What Makes the Towle Reference Collection at the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (Tortola, BVI) Distinctive?

- Its unique SMALL ISLAND focus.
- Its use of environmental issues, resource problems and development planning needs as a focusing device.
- Its interdisciplinary scope and open architecture.
- Its emphasis on ecosystems as an organizing framework.
- Its emphasis on access to historical data for setting environmental baselines, tracking environmental indicators and quantifying environment change.

How Does the Former IRF Library Support the Overall Development of the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College?

- The collection's strong emphasis on marine resources and on coastal and marine resource documentation on islands in the wider Caribbean region supports the applied marine studies program at H. Lavity Stoutt Community College.
- The collection's organizational structure makes it user friendly for students, faculty, external consultants and visiting researchers alike.
- The collection's holdings on island systems, carrying capacity, pollution control, natural resource management and human resource development constitute a unique array of environmental planning tools for both public and private sector leaders and development practitioners in the British Virgin Islands; the accessibility of these materials supports the College's public service role.

How Is the Reference Collection Organized?

The shelved materials fall into two major categories:

- **Caribbean Geographic Group** consisting primarily of the countries and territories of the wider Caribbean, with a primary emphasis on the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the Eastern Caribbean.
- **Caribbean-specific or Island-generic Subject Matter and Topical Documentation** grouped as major themes or issues, for example, tourism, marine pollution, coastal resource management, planning guidelines, coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass, lagoons, beaches, sand mining, monitoring, watersheds, climate change.