

On the move from Pretoria to Cape Town: case studies at the National Library of South Africa

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Abstract:

At both campuses of the National Library of South Africa library moves were undertaken in 2006, 2008 and 2015. Another move is planned to take place in 2017. In 2006 the newspaper collection was moved to storage at Cape Town Airport Industria. In 2008 the whole library at Pretoria Campus was moved from two sites to a new building. Towards the end of 2015 new premises were leased for off-site storage at Cape Town Campus. Approximately 8 300 meters of stock were moved consisting of Africana, periodicals, official publications and news clippings. In April 2017 the Cape Town Campus will again move its newspaper collection from Airport Industria to off-site storage in the Cape Town CBD. The role of contractors will be discussed ranging from official removal companies to transport contractors and outsourced storage with daily deliveries. A progress report will be presented on the move that is planned to start in April 2017.

Keywords: Library moves, transport, contractors, off-site storage, newspaper collections.

The National Library of South Africa (NLSA) is situated at two campuses in Cape Town and Pretoria. The two campuses have similar collections measuring approximately 50 km of stock consisting mostly of books, periodicals, newspapers and maps. The original buildings at both campuses date back to the beginnings of public library services in South Africa. As such little growth space was provided for stack rooms. After acquiring the status of legal depositories more space was needed for growing collections. Over the years accommodation was leased in and around Pretoria and Cape Town and the collections were moved around as leased property was sold or when more space was required.

A purpose built library for Pretoria Campus was completed in 2008 with growth space for 15 to 20 years . For the first time it became possible to house all the Pretoria collections in one building. Till then most collections were housed in a warehouse on the industrial outskirts of Pretoria. Collections were simultaneously moved from two sites to the new building in the Pretoria CBD.

The NLSA Cape Town campus is situated at the foot of the green hart of the city. The building that originally housed both a library and the natural museum, has little space for stack rooms. Even after extensions were built, and some collections are housed at the nearby Centre for the Book. Collections were distributed over an number of sites including industrial warehouse storage at the Cape Town International Airport. Recently accommodation (Matrix House) was leased for the library in the Cape CBD with enough space to centralise the collections of the NLSA.

The situation at hand resulted in a number of library moves. In recent years four moves were undertaken:

- January 2006: Cape Town (from Mercantile Centre in Bree Street to Metrofile at the Cape Town Airport Industria)
- September 2008: Pretoria (from the old Library in town and a warehouse in Pretoria West to the new library in the Pretoria CBD)
- December 2015: Cape Town (from the Slotzboo building at the back of Centre for the Book to Matrix House)
- May 2017: Cape Town (from Metrofile at the Cape Town Airport Industria to Matrix House)

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the role of contractors. Contractors were hired for various purposes including project management, the dismantling, relocation and installation of shelving, and the physical move of collections.

The January 2006 move

After years of accommodation in Mercantile Centre in Bree Street the lease was ended. With little storage on offer in Cape Town at the time, it was decided to outsource the stack management and delivery function for the collections involved. The services offered by Metrofile included data capturing, bar-coding, storage, circulation, and daily deliveries. The lease costs were much lower then hiring a complete building. The Library only paid for storage bays used plus a monthly management fee for deliveries. Costs would increase as more bays were required. The green building approach seemed attractive. Climate control was minimal: no air-conditioning, no electricity, no wet systems. The climate in Cape Town is moderate: not too dry and not too hot.

The Library's newspaper collection, being the larger of part of the collection at Bree Street, would be transferred to Metrofile. The actual move was sub-contracted by Metrofile. Approximately 35 000 bound volumes had to be transported over a distance of 19 km. From the onset it was clear that the sub-contractor had under-estimated the challenges of handling large and heavy bound volumes and the volume of work as such:

- Bound newspaper volumes would not fit in boxes or crates
- Due to weight and instability only a minimum could be stacked in a truck
- Some bindings were loose or damaged

One of the benefits working with a document warehouse was that the volumes were captured on a computer system and bar-coded. With limited information on the binding cover and numerous newspaper title changes the metadata needed double checking by library staff. To

the surprise of the Library the volumes were stored at random which resulted in newspaper titles, years and months being split.

The September 2008 move

Ample time was available to plan a much bigger library move, while the new library was built at Pretoria Campus. All collections were being measured (approximately 26 km) and each allocated space in the new building. Specifications for the library move were drafted and tenders invited. These included the following:

- the provision of labour, transport and equipment in order to complete the library move within a given period of time
- undertake the physical packing and labelling of crates, following instructions of supervising library staff
- unpack the books under supervision of library staff to ensure that the correct sequence is maintained
- make provision for the move of fragile materials and unbound periodicals and newspapers
- take all reasonable care to prevent damage of any kind to new building, including floors, carpeting, shelves, lifts, etc.
- attend bi-weekly meetings of the library move committee and participate in test runs

A project manager was appointed on contract to take on the following tasks:

- monitor move of collections undertaken by removal company.
- monitor daily progress and workflow through packing, transit and unpacking stages.
- daily reporting of progress and statistics report per move plan.
- attend move planning meetings by library management.
- communicate with removal company and library management.
- daily inspections at various packing and unpacking points.

The needs of the library were well understood by the removal contractor. As huge volumes had to be moved daily a creative solution was found to move collections in the right sequence without working in reverse mode. Ordinary removal trucks have doors in the middle or at the back creating challenges on accepting collections in the right sequence (not unpacking backwards from the end of the collection). A truck with separate wooden containers was used. Each container with a front lid that could be removed and closed during transit. Thus enabling the transport of smaller batches on a single truck, making it much easier to shelf collections in the same sequence they were removed and packed.

The December 2015 move

The move from the Slotzboo Building at Cape Town campus created a challenge that both collections (approximately 8 km) and shelving had to be moved at the same time to the new site. Additional new shelving was also procured, of which the delivery date could not be confirmed. Instructions were however received from the landlord that the building be vacated by a give date. The library move had to take place. No further delays were possible. Separate contractors were appointed: one for the dismantling, transport and installation of shelving; and one for the move of the collection as such.

A professional shelving company was used to do the shelving. Due to the time it took to re-built shelving, the removal contractor ran out of boxes as collections could not be unpacked as planned. It was not possible to recycle boxes as planned. Another means of transporting books had to be found. After some hesitation it was agreed that plastic wrapping seemed the only solution. Wrapping stations were set up on different floors as time was running out for the library to vacate the building. The only lift in the building was not operational, resulting in shelving and collections being carried down five floors down the stairs simultaneously.

All the work was done under supervision of library staff indicating the sequence in which collections were to be packed and removed. With fewer staff available during the end of year holiday period, contractor staff took over more of the decision making process. With shelving not ready or not delivered large quantities of wrapped collections took up space on other floors in the building. The unpacking and shelving had to be completed by library staff at a later stage.

The May 2017 move

The 2nd phase of the move to Matrix House involved the transfer of the newspaper collection from Metrofile at the Cape Town Airport Industria. Approximately 40 000 bound newspaper volumes were to be relocated. The move was different in the sense that it was done by way of daily deliveries being offered by Metrofile under its existing contract with the Library. Approximately 150 volumes were delivered daily. This process involved the permanent withdrawal of items from Metrofile which required some administrative procedures. Each volume had to be handled and removed from the system. The move was expected to take at least 10 months.

The picking process took time as items were pre-selected for retrieval in title-year-month sequence from different bays in different parts of the warehouse. For the library to accept collections, the sequence had to be restored. Datasheets were compiled and printed by the Library indicating the order in which the volumes were to be delivered. For the physical handling and transport stackable plastic crates were found that would fit most sizes of bound volumes.

Working with contractors

Library moves are complicated projects involving contractors and other external service providers operating within their own environment with their own limitations. Even with careful planning the actual move may cause unpredicted happenings that were not to be foreseen:

- unforeseen excavations for cabling at the entrance to buildings
- library moves extending over a holiday period or the end-of-the-year closure of contractors
- building contractors still around while moving in
- building excavations starting while moving out
- electricity being cut off while moving
- lifts not maintained while moving
- contractors going bankrupt or not able to deliver
- communication challenges between Library and contractor staff
- limited or no signals in parts of buildings for phone or radio contact

One of the golden rules for any large or complex project is flexibility. For library moves this applies to both library management and contractors. In all moves that were reported in this paper, creative means were found to complete projects under sometimes challenging conditions. Regular communication with all involved was critical important. With the loyal commitment of library staff and dedicated contractors it happened. graphs should be single spaced, with space between paragraphs (instead of line indentation).

References

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