

STENOTYPE POOL

The Stenotype Pool had its genesis in 1963 with the introduction of the use of the Stenograph Machine to replace pencil shorthand. Applications were invited from Secretaries to undergo the course of training for one year and six (6) Secretaries were accepted to attend at the Government Training School, at that time located at Lady Musgrave Road. The course was a very gruelling one to attain the necessary speed and at the expiration of the period, only four (4) stuck it out to the end, three (3) of whom elected to go to the Supreme Court and the fourth graduate, Mrs. Donaldine Cooke, stayed behind.

The following year saw a second batch being trained, seven (7) in number, and on completion of the course, the graduates, joined by Mrs. Cooke, were housed at the Colonial Secretary's Office, Headquarters House, under the supervision of Mr. Earl Madden. While accommodation there was extremely cramped and manual Imperial Typewriters were the norm at that time, nevertheless assignments were covered and notes reproduced with despatch.

When the Colonial Secretary's Office was split, the Personnel Section along with the Stenotype Pool was removed to 2F Camp Road and

named the Office of the Services Commissions and the Pool was put, first under the supervision of Mr. Oscar Grant and then Mr. George Martin. Training continued and as the staff complement increased in successive years, Mrs. Donaldine Cooke, who was from the first batch and now deceased, was the first Supervisor drawn from the ranks.

Government Departments had now become more and more aware of verbatim reporting and assignments became more challenging and diversified as requests for coverage of conferences, meetings, enquiries came in from the length and breadth of the island; regional conferences, for example, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association were covered in the Cayman Islands, and the Bahamas; also international conferences such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association held at the then University College of the West Indies which lasted for two weeks; the Caribbean Heads of Governments; Preparatory meetings at the University College of the West Indies for the establishment of CARICOM, a Royal Agricultural Conference attended by His Royal Highness Prince Phillip; the Maurice Bishop Trial in Grenada which lasted six months, just to name only a few.

In 1975 the Office of the Services Commissions along with the Stenotype Pool was again relocated to the Citibank Building in New Kingston.

In 1976 when the Gun Court was established on South Camp Road and upgraded to a High Court, eight writers were assigned to cover Courts 1 and 2 and on the 5th of October, 1998 when its location was shifted to the Supreme Court, King Street, the same service obtained and writers covered whatever courts required their services up to the present time.

By 1979 or thereabout accommodation became tight as the staff complement had grown to 32 writers, so the Pool by itself was relocated to a building almost next door to the Citibank. Such a move was short-lived as the premises proved most unsuitable and in November of 1980, the Pool was eventually comfortably housed at the Jamaica Mortgage Bank Building under the supervision of Mrs. Yvonne Jenkins until she retired in August 1993 and was succeeded by Mrs. Lilleth Haughton.

In April of 2001 the Pool was again brought under the same roof with the Office of the Services Commissions at the Ministry of Finance Building, National Heroes Circle. As the years went by, the attrition rate

became pronounced as improvement in salaries and working conditions were slow in coming due to financial constraints and the staff complement dwindled to fourteen. However, under the supervision of Mrs. Lilleth Haughton up-to-date equipment including a few computer compatible shorthand machines were acquired as well as the opportunity to upgrade the equipment as funds became available. Mrs. Haughton subsequently retired in 2009 and her successor, Mrs. Dorothy Ramsay, now heads the team since January, 2010.

In spite of all the many challenges and difficulties experienced in the past and up to the present time, the members of the Stenotype Pool remain a group dedicated to execute their duties with a high level of commitment and professionalism.