

# McMillan Library: A galaxy in middle of Kenya's capital

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An image of McMillan Memorial Library, on Banda Street in Nairobi, captured on July 17, 2019. It has records of proceedings from the time Parliament was formed to date. PHOTO | FILE | NATION MEDIA GROUP

## In Summary

- Upon the death of Sir McMillan in 1925, his wife proposed to the Nairobi Municipal Council to have a library built in his memory.
- It was not until 1962 when the library was handed over to Nairobi City Council that people of other races were allowed to use it.

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If books are worlds in their own right, then McMillan Memorial Library, which boasts a collection of more than 400,000 tomes, is a galaxy larger than the Milky Way.

The one-storey building on Banda Street, Nairobi, has an assortment of books, periodicals and newspapers. It also has records of proceedings from the time Parliament was formed to date.

The library was the idea of Lady Lucie McMillan, the wife of Sir Northup McMillan.

Upon the death of Sir McMillan in 1925, his wife proposed to the Nairobi Municipal Council to have a library built in his memory.

With financing from Carnegie Foundation, the first stone was laid by acting Governor Sir Jacob Barth in 1929.

On June 15, 1931, the building designed by Raund Overy and Maxwell Architects was opened to Europeans.



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#### IMMORTALISED

Determined to protect the memory of her husband who built Kabete Technical School for Africans and financed a battalion of the Royal Fusiliers during World War I, Lady McMillan ensured that the building was protected by an Act of Parliament.

The law protected the land from grabbers and limited the library use to white people.

It was not until 1962 when the library was handed over to Nairobi City Council that people of other races were allowed to use it.

The building has three sections: the main reading area, the African section and a newspaper area.

The main reading area, with a sitting capacity of 200, is on the ground floor. It has several bookshelves.

The African section on the first floor is dedicated to books about the continent; while the newspaper section has the country's major newspapers, with the oldest being the *East African Standard* dating back to January 6, 1906.

#### ART

At the entrance of the magnificent building are two sculptures of lions that were donated by Sir John and Lady Harrington, who were cousins of Sir McMillan.

Apart from books, the library also has sculptures by Cesare Lapini, a famous Italian artist.

Additionally, there are exquisite paintings of friends and relatives of the McMillans that are in gilded frames.

The library is open to the public from Monday to Saturday and charges an annual membership fee of Sh1,000.



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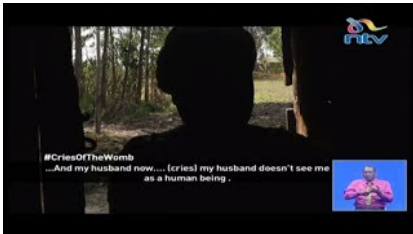
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