

NOTICIAS
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The Carnegie Building in 1949 - Home of the Monterey Public Library from 1911 to 1952: Photo by Rey Ruppel

Inside: The Monterey Public Library - *Past and Present*

MONTEREY PUBLIC LIBRARY
PAST AND PRESENT

by Jeanne McCombs

Monterey Public Library was established in 1849 and was the first public library in California. Colton Hall schoolmaster, Rev. Samuel H. Willey, in his *Thirty Years in California*, claimed credit for organizing the library. Two other individuals known to have been substantially involved with its formation were Monterey's first alcalde, Walter Colton, and civic leader, Milton Little. A group headed by Little and calling itself the Monterey Library Association persuaded local citizens to purchase \$40 shares in a public library which would:

... afford amusements, entertainment, and profit to a large class of people, who without its aid would waste time in the frivolities and questionable pastimes so prevalent in our State.¹

From the sale of stock the Association raised \$1500, which was sent to Walter Colton who had returned to the East. Colton selected and purchased a collection of about 900 books, which he shipped around Cape Horn to the port of Monterey. The collection featured works of history, theology, biography, poetry, science and medicine, travel journals, legal and political writings, reference works such as *Encyclopedia Americana* and *Webster's Dictionary*, and about 250 works of fiction. Approximately one-quarter of the books were printed in Spanish.

The first library was housed in El Cuartel, which was built in 1840, as barracks for Mexican soldiers located on what is now Munras Avenue just south of Transit Plaza. It contained a reading room in which members of the public were welcome to peruse books, newspapers, magazines, maps, and government documents. Shareholders were allowed to borrow books, but others gained borrowing privileges by paying a monthly subscriber's fee of one dollar and by leaving with the librarian a cash deposit equal to twice the value of any book being borrowed. Business was generally slow, but was made slower still by a series of economic misfortunes which befell Monterey over the next two decades. In 1874, the library moved to Colton Hall where, because of lapses in the operation of local government, the library was kept under lock and key. Later, it was moved to the school near Colton Hall, which burned to the ground in 1893, destroying most of the library's collection.

In 1901, Monterey's public library reorganized under the auspices of a women's literary society. Soliciting book donations and holding fund raising events, members were able to reopen the library on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons from 2:00 - 4:00 o'clock at various locations on Alvarado Street. In 1907, the association secretary, Mrs. J. P. Sargent invited her sister, Etta Eckhardt of Gilroy, to substitute for her while she made a tour of Europe. Miss Eckhardt came to Monterey and stayed on the next thirty years as Monterey's first City Librarian.

Given a parcel of land donated by Mrs. A. M. Freitas and a building grant from

¹ Articles of incorporation are on file in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California (a copy is on file in the Monterey Public Library Special Collections section).

Andrew Carnegie, the Monterey Public Library opened its doors at 425 Van Buren Street in 1911. The new library was designed by prolific California architect, William Weeks in the Mission Revival style, and was to be the home for Monterey Public Library for the next 40 years. It featured separate reading rooms for adults and children and a basement smoking room with a fireplace for gentlemen only.

On June 30, 1911, the *Monterey Daily Cypress* predicted that a new gentlemen's smoking room would be quite popular with laborers, because the entrance was situated so that a fellow could nip in for a read and a smoke without having to dress up! Today, the Carnegie building, which has been expanded and remodelled, is the home for the library at Monterey Institute of International Studies.

During the process of selecting an appropriate site for the Carnegie building, the residents of New Monterey made a strong bid for locating the library in their neighborhood. When the decision to accept the Van Buren site in "Old Town" was made, what began as a protest by New Monterey residents sustained itself as a permanent lobby for library services in the city's outlying areas. In 1914, Miss Ella Thomas consented to act as custodian over a New Monterey Branch Library to be set up in her Lighthouse Avenue office. But, because the branch was for the exclusive purpose of circulating books, had no reading room, and was open only five hours per week, it was only partially satisfactory. After two decades of citizen persuasion, in 1931, a New Monterey Branch Library was opened at 700 Laine Street near the site of the Bayview School.

The New Monterey Branch Library was in operation for twenty years before it re-entered the limelight. In 1953, the City Council proposed to close the branch as an economic measure. The proposal met with letters of protest, petitions, and stormy public meetings, until it was finally decreed that the branch would close permanently on January 1, 1954. The Council tempered its decision, however, by announcing that a bookmobile would be purchased to provide even better library service to the people of New Monterey, as well as to those in all outlying districts of the City. Keeping good its promise, the City allotted funds to purchase and provide staff for a bookmobile, which went into service in 1956. The New Monterey Branch Library building was eventually moved to the site of Schulte Park at Lighthouse and Dickman Avenues, where the building now serves as the Senior Citizen Center.

Meanwhile, the main library had been suffering growing pains. By 1949, the Carnegie library building, originally designed to serve a population of 5000, was serving 17,500. The collection had grown from 3500 volumes to 46,000 volumes in a building planned for 20,000 books. So, in 1950, the voters passed a \$350,000 bond measure for the construction of a new home for the Monterey Public Library.

The new library was erected on an odd-shaped site located at the corner of Madison and Pacific Streets. The structure was designed in the Second Bay Tradition style by the firm of noted California architect, William Wurster. Second Bay Tradition is actually more of a philosophy than a style because Wurster's approach to architecture was highly personal. He believed that each building should be unique, not beholden stylistically to any architectural precedent; that a building should be modern in terms of arrangement of space, use of materials, and application of technology; that a building's characteristics be determined primarily by the site; and that its appearance be in close harmony with its surroundings.

As an example of the Second Bay Tradition, the he building is a complete success. It employs a system of radiating steel beams which allow for 16 foot ceilings without the use of interior support walls. Floor to ceiling windows provide natural light throughout the main reading rooms. Exposed I-beams with steel columns support the mezzanine, providing a light, airy, open effect that makes no effort to conceal the structural components of the building. To mitigate the "steel and glass" effect on the outside, a system of concrete buttresses placed at 16 foot intervals recess the steel-framed glass windows, giving a beautiful sculpted effect. The concrete walls are coated with a creamy stucco and painted white to suggest the adobe material used historically in the area. The building has long, low horizontal lines with a balcony over the entry for an effect reminiscent of El Cuartel. The awkward pentagonal shape of the site was not in any way altered to accommodate the building. On the contrary, the shape of the building takes its cue from the site, hugging the lot line along its Madison and Pacific Street borders.

Upon its opening in June 1952, the new library building received national attention and high praise. In commissioning a building of such outstanding architectural merit, the citizens of Monterey made a lasting statement about the extent to which they value their community library.

By the end of the 1970's, the library had grown beyond expectations - the combined result of increased population and contract agreements which opened the Library for use by residents of the County at large. Increases in circulation, reference services, book collections, and staff, coupled with the introduction of new material formats, a need for improved access for the disabled, and the advent of computer technology necessitated both the upgrade and enlargement of the library.

The charge to the architect was a challenging one, as he was confronted with a building designed to serve the needs of a much smaller community on a site of limited size and unconventional shape. The problem was to provide space for twice the library collection, twice the staff, three times as many borrowers, twice the circulation materials, and a volume of reference service ten times that of the original capacity. The most stringent of the requirements was that the architectural integrity of the building be maintained. The design was undertake by Paul E. Davis, of Davis, Jacobowsky, Hawkins Associates of Monterey, whose efforts successfully met these difficult criteria.

In 1983, construction began on the expansion and remodelling project, which added 7500 square feet to the library and provided alteration to another 3500 square feet. A ten foot bay was added to the south end of the building; the rear patio was partially enclosed to create new study areas; the shelving area of the mezzanine was approximately doubled. A climate-controlled room was created for collections of rare books, a public elevator was installed, and staff work space was increased. Other improvements include the addition of a fire protective sprinkler system, replacement of the cedar shingle roof, and the addition of restrooms designed for disabled people.

At the time of the \$1.5 million project, the library interior was redesigned under the direction of Linda Lamb, who assisted the staff with selection and arrangement of carpets, upholstery, and furnishings. Key to the interior design scheme was a plan for display of the library's fine art collection, featuring works by distinguished

California painters including Francis McComas, Gene Frances Baker McComas, Abel Warshawsky, Ferdinand Burgdorff, Tulita Westfall, Henrietta Shore, Richard Lofton, and Helen Gapen Oehler. Fifteen months of construction-related upheaval ended with the library's reopening in July 1984.

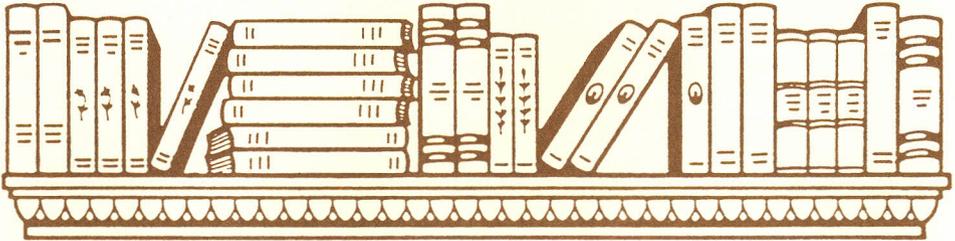
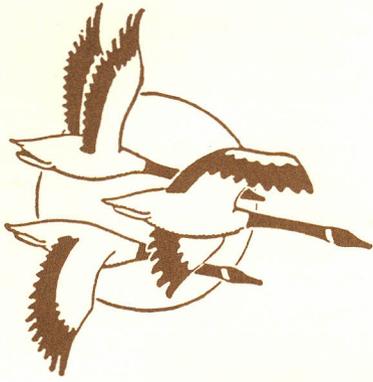
Meanwhile, another library project was in the making. For several years, the cost of operating the bookmobile had come under scrutiny each time the annual budget was prepared. In 1982, citing the prospect of someday having to replace the 26 year old vehicle and a preference for reallocating the bookmobile's staffing resources to the main library, it was decided to suspend the service. The decision met with strong public opposition which took on proportions similar in size and intensity to the 1953 debate over the closure of the New Monterey Branch Library. The City Council finally resolved the matter in 1985, by approving the expenditure of \$92,000 for the purchase of a new bookmobile. For the next year, the library staff worked with a citizen's advisory committee to plan for the reintroduction of bookmobile services. In July 1986, after a four year hiatus, the Monterey Public Library bookmobile was back on the road.

Today, an average of one thousand people of all ages and backgrounds, with a wide range of interests and needs, visit the Monterey Public Library each day. On an average day, the library answers hundreds of reference questions, checks out over a thousand items, and maintains the tradition of offering specialized services such as reference and reader's advisory for youth, bookmobile and outreach services, and a regular schedule of cultural programs for people of all ages. As a place of beauty and learning, the historic Monterey Public Library remains today a lively and integral part of the community's dynamic educational and cultural life.²

Revised February 1995

Jeanne McCombs
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Monterey Public Library

² NOTE: The Monterey Public Library and the Monterey History and Art Association are currently exploring collaborative projects which will draw on our mutual resources to present educational and cultural programming.





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