

HISTORY OF THE
VERMONT SQUARE BRANCH LIBRARY
1913 - 1936

The Vermont Square Branch was opened to the public on March 1st, 1913, in the first library building to be built by the City of Los Angeles. This was the first of six branch buildings constructed with funds from a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. Unlike four of these branches, this library had not already been established as a small branch in rented quarters. Miss Helen T. Kennedy, supervisor of branches, had taken great care in the selection and purchase of a foundation book collection for the new branch, but when the library was opened the 2,000 new books which were ready for circulation made a scant showing on shelves planned to accommodate 16,000 volumes. Nevertheless, the community received the new library enthusiastically. The building was literally jammed for the simple ceremonies on the opening night. At the end of the first month the book collection totalled 2,285 and the circulation was 3,769; 710 cards had been issued and the card-holders numbered 1,061. At the end of the first fiscal year, four months later, the book collection had increased to 4,008; card-holders had also doubled, numbering 2,013, and the circulation for the month of June had reached 5,086, outstripping from the first many older branches.

Branch Personnel

Caroline M. Brittan was taken from the University Branch to be the first branch librarian at Vermont Square. Veva Hart was her assistant. With this staff of two, the library hours were 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. week days and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Sundays. When Miss Brittan left the library in 1916 to be married, she was succeeded by Elizabeth C. Riddell. Though she held the position of branch librarian, Miss Riddell, who had been first assistant in the children's room at the Central Library, was really sent to Vermont Square to build up the children's work. When, during the fiscal year 1915-16, children's librarians were first added to branch library staffs, Clara E. Purdum had been sent to Vermont Square but she left the library. Therefore, the branch librarian took entire charge of the children's work until 1917 when another children's librarian, Miss Rosalind Greene, was appointed. Miss Riddell still kept her interest in the children's room, because from the very first the juvenile work was a most important factor at this branch.

During the year 1918-19, Miss Riddell left the Los Angeles Public Library to take charge of the Long Beach city schools library. Miss Veva Hart, her first assistant, was appointed branch principal, a position she retained until October, 1920 when she was transferred to the Lincoln Heights Branch. She was temporarily succeeded by Mrs. Emilie Jackson who stayed only three months until the Wilshire Branch opened in December, 1920. Mrs. Jessie I. Cavanaugh, who was then in charge of the Moneta Branch, was appointed principal of Vermont Square and remained in this position until July, 1929, when she was transferred to the new Felipe de Neve Branch. Her place was taken by the present librarian, Helen Spotts.

Branch Personnel (continued)

As this branch always has been well-staffed and in the hands of capable executives, the work has been well organized and the branch consequently served for many years as a supplementary laboratory for the library school and as a training station for new staff members coming here from libraries in other cities. A large proportion of present and past library staff members have worked or practiced here. In looking over the accompanying table of branch personnel, one sees many names which have become prominent in our library organization. Department heads are represented by Mrs. Betsey Foye Veazey, now department librarian in charge of branches, and by Annabel Learned, department librarian in charge of stations. The following branch librarians had part of their early experience as senior attendants here: Mrs. Ione Morrison Rider, Mrs. Lulah Meyers Lloyd, Mrs. Eunice Watkins, Mrs. Minnie G. Miller, Miss Bess Markson, Miss Ora Neely and Miss Anne Becker. Miss Louise Holmes, who became a branch librarian and Mr. Oak Amidon, who became first a branch librarian and later a department librarian in charge of the Sociology Department, have both passed on. Miss Veva Hart, the first senior attendant, became our third branch librarian and later was librarian of the Lincoln Heights Branch. Upon becoming Mrs. Powell she resigned. Mrs. Emilie Jackson, who had been head of the Periodical Department, was here for a short time before becoming the first librarian of the Wilshire Branch. She later opened the Washington Irving Branch, and has since retired. Miss Mary Gertrude Hart, well known and much loved in our system, came here as assistant branch librarian in 1930 and stayed until her death in the spring of 1935.

Our Library a Community Center

From the very beginning this library was a community center. The Vermont Square Improvement Association, which had been instrumental in securing a branch for this location, took a paternal pride and interest in the new library and held regular meetings in the auditorium twice a month. Its members planned the program for the opening reception and appeared in formal evening dress to accept the library from the Board of Library Commissioners, also in full dress. The Manual Arts High School orchestra furnished the music. Dr. Dennett, pastor of the Pilgrim Congregational Church, was active in working for the library, which he hoped would help to break up a gang of young men and older boys who were meeting in the little park where the library is located. The library was successful in accomplishing this. The first year a girls' dramatic club was organized with a membership between fifty and sixty. Although it was most successful it had to be dropped the next year owing to the small library staff. The library auditorium was used frequently throughout the first twenty years by music teachers for piano recitals. The condition of the piano has made this use impossible during recent years.

Soon after the branch was established, the West Ebell Club was organized and held weekly meetings in the auditorium for a number of years. This club, which has become the largest women's club in the district and one of the largest in the city, now owns its own clubhouse, but before leaving the library its different sections were using several rooms in the building on two or three days of each week. In 1917, the Vermont Square Improvement Association and the West Ebell Club united in

Our Library a Community Center

presenting the branch with a motion picture projection machine. Part of the money for this gift was raised by a lawn fete in the library park in which the library took an active part. The librarian's report on the month in which it occurred ended with the moral, "Never staff a lawn fete." On July 6th, the machine was used for the first time. "The auditorium was well filled for both performances. The picture was 'The Prince and the Pauper'.... The Vernon Branch borrowed the machine and used the same picture on the evening of this eventful day." So states the report.

Throughout the war, the branch hummed with patriotic activity. On July 30, 1917, the Local Exemption Board of District #6 made our Story Hour Room their headquarters and remained for twenty months. On July 30th, 1936, just nineteen years later, a man came into the library in search of the records of this exemption board. For weeks at a time, they used the store room and auditorium also. Four Red Cross auxiliaries were organized at the library. One out-grew the space and moved elsewhere, but the other three remained, using the auditorium and sometimes the storeroom on Monday evenings, and on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from ten in the morning until four or five o'clock in the afternoon. The library was used as headquarters for Red Cross drives in December and in May; for a book drive for camp libraries; and for a food conservation drive. The Women's Council for Defense gave food demonstrations in the auditorium, and met there on Monday afternoons for sewing and relief work. The Home Guards organized and met here for several weeks, and the War Saving Stamp Societies for three precincts made this their headquarters. The West Evell Club continued its meetings, took charge of most of the community "drives", held a reception in the park for the first group of draft-selected soldiers to leave the district, and, at the library's request, gave a community Christmas tree in the park, putting on a Christmas pageant. During the year 1917-18, there were 368 meetings in the auditorium. One report states that "Monday morning was the only time in the week free for the tuning of the piano."

Other organizations which held regular meetings in the library auditorium at various times were: The Women's Council of Community Service (met and sewed in the Story Hour Room three Tuesdays each month); the Southwest Realty Board; The Girl's Woodcraft League; The Boy's Woodcraft League; Camp Fire Girls; Boy Scouts; Girl Scouts; Young Continental Club (boys from ten to sixteen); Girl Reserves; Western Rangers; Community Singing Group; Teachers' Club of Trades and Industries; Americanization Class of Jewish Women; El Hogan; An Aircraft Club; a Stamp Club; The Southwest Book Review Club; and the Monday Night Forum.

Our Building

The general design of this first branch library building has proved most satisfactory throughout the twenty-three years it has been in use. The adult reading room, being separated by a glass partition from the noise of the charging desk may be kept quiet. The inevitable noise in the children's room does not disturb the rest of the library because it is also separated by a glass partition. The building is adequately lighted,

Our Building (continued)

compact and saves steps. Its only drawback has been that a library administration used to branches in small rented store buildings could not foresee the size which the use of this branch would soon make necessary. The lovely spacious building of 1913 soon filled up. Before the first decade had elapsed, both the shelving and the seating capacity were taxed. As early as 1922 reports stated that high school students were sent into the office to study because the reading rooms were full. In 1924, as a means of gaining a little space for adult non-fiction books, the 370's were moved into the children's room. It was hoped that teachers would find them convenient there and look them over when visiting the library with their school classes. In 1925, four floor stacks were installed behind the charging desk. In the annual report for 1925-26 the following paragraph appeared:

"It is impossible to know what will happen in the future, but if Vermont Square Branch continues to grow in circulation and number of patrons, we are going to find it necessary to enlarge and rearrange our building."

The thought at that time seems to have been to separate the work with children from the rest of the branch, installing a charging desk in the children's room and cutting an outside entrance into the room on the west side of the building. The office, which had served up to this time as a librarian's office, work-room, restroom and lunchroom was most inadequate. An addition to the building on the north was recommended to provide additional staff and workroom facilities, and more stackroom for the growing adult book collection. Nothing was done about the crowded condition, until the next year, though the need was mentioned in many reports. The next summer the coal furnace was replaced by a gas furnace which eliminated the necessity of a large storage room for fuel. After the first of January, 1928, work was started on rearranging the basement. The former coal room was converted into a rest room and kitchen for the staff, and the story hour room was converted into a work room with desks for four workers. About this time, closed cupboards were installed around the walls of the auditorium to house the bound magazines. The moving of this large collection from the reference room did much to relieve the congestion of the shelves. The following winter, two more floor stacks were added behind the desk, filling all the available space there and leaving such a small passage way between desk and stacks that it was almost impossible to get through at busy hours.

When the present librarian arrived in July 1929, she was much disturbed by the confusion caused by lack of room at the charging desk. The next fall, the slipping trays were moved into the office. This permitted much more freedom at the desk and greater ease in handling the large volume of business then being carried on. A small charging desk, for use during busy hours, was placed at the head of the steps opposite the main desk. Though the condition was much improved, having the book checks away from the desk seemed far from ideal. The next year the charging desk was moved forward two and a half feet, and the slipping trays rearranged. This permitted slipping to be done at the desk again and allowed more space in the aisle behind the desk for our patrons. The months before these changes were made were indeed hectic. Every evening there were from twenty to forty more people in the

Our Building (continued)

reference room than there were chairs. One high school boy was overheard saying, "Gee, we ought to bring our own chairs when we come here"; while another, vainly attempting to follow the reference librarian who had slipped through the crowded aisle into the space between two floor stacks to get the book he was requesting, called across the intervening crowd, "I guess we'll have to try a forward pass."

In March, 1933, the building suffered some damage from earthquake. The chimney fell taking part of the ornamental terra cotta cornice with it. Many large and unsightly cracks appeared in walls and ceilings inside and there was evidence of bricks being thrown out of line on the outside of the building. Though the chimney was repaired at once, it was not until the next summer, 1934, that the interior was redecorated. New lighting fixtures were installed at the same time and, as the walls and ceilings were painted a soft ivory, the lighting has been improved both by day and by night. In the spring of 1934, the last juggling of furniture which it seemed possible to make was attempted to gain a little more room for books and patrons. The current and circulating magazines which had always been kept in the adult reading room were moved into what had here-to-fore been the librarian's office. The desk for the first assistant librarian was moved into the basement work room, but the branch librarian's desk remained upstairs. She now shares her office with the public instead of the staff. The pamphlet files were also moved into this room, as well as a small table and four chairs for public use. The additional shelving proved useful, of course, but such shifts are at best only makeshifts. The addition to the building, necessary ten years ago, is still a necessity and one which must be supplied if this library is ever to become a regional branch for the Southwest district.

Our Work With Children

No history of Vermont Square would complete without some specific reference to the work with children. When the first children's librarian was sent here in 1915 she found a fertile field. Indeed when the branch first opened it was reported that the children lived in the library all day long. The community was a new one with nice bungalows housing young couples with growing families. Baby buggies were parked thick around the front entrance in the early years. Schools were crowded and there were no playgrounds in the district. Children had few of the distracting interests of today.

In addition to the four public schools which this branch still serves, Normandie, Fifty-Second Street, Menlo and Western Avenue, it served Manchester, located at Manchester and Hoover (classes actually came to the library from this school), Budlong at 60th and Budlong Avenue, and the Santa Barbara School at Western and Santa Barbara Avenues. When junior high schools were established it also served John Muir and James A. Foshay Junior High Schools. It was always considered Manual Arts High School's own branch even though there were other branch libraries almost as close to the school. Much pioneering with children's work has been accomplished at Vermont Square. The instruction of school classes in the use of the library was begun here and many children's clubs were organized which flourished until they had served their purpose. When the burden of children's work became so heavy that it taxed the staff, book collection and facilities for handling it, other branches were opened in this vicinity. The opening and growth of Angeles Mesa and John Muir Branches helped to relieve the pressures in our children's room. Henry David Thoreau, the last branch to be established,

Work With Children (continued)

was built across the street from Santa Barbara, one of our largest schools and eventually took over service to Foshay Junior High School just as John Muir Branch had already taken over John Muir, our other junior high school. These factors, together with a gradual change in our community, have reduced Vermont Square from the head of the branch list in children's circulation and convinced us that our future growth will depend entirely upon service to adults. The children of twenty years ago are grown now but they are bringing up their children in newer communities. The immediate neighborhood has become a district of older people with a sprinkling of the tenant class who are mostly of foreign extraction. Eventually there will probably be a large enough proportion of this type of family to fill our children's room again but at the present time we are in a transition period. All our schools have lost in enrollment.

Circulation Records

Vermont Square has experienced the same ups and downs in circulation as have other branches due to conditions which are general everywhere. For example, during World War I the branch librarian reported: "Everyone is so busy with knitting and Red Cross work that it seems unpatriotic to urge them to read." An unusually large circulation gain in the winter of 1919, marked by heavy rains, was attributed to people not being able to do anything else but stay home and read. It is surprising to note that unemployment is suggested as a reason for slight losses in 1927, a year we are apt to regard as being near the crest of our prosperity. For the year 1928/29 Vermont Square led all branches in the system in circulation. During the next year it was first several ^{MONTHS} but dropped back into second place by the end of the year, a position it has maintained ever since. In common with other branch libraries Vermont Square rose rapidly in circulation during the first of the "depression years", reaching a high of 403,756 for the year 1932-33. The largest circulation for any one day was on May 31, 1932 when 2,700 books were issued, and the largest week was 8,859 in November 1932 while the largest month was May 1933 with a circulation of 37,210.

Eighteenth Anniversary Party

The only unusual activity of the past few years was the celebration of our eighteenth anniversary in 1931. Assuming branch libraries to be feminine, we announced our "coming of age" and invited the community to our coming out party. As at our opening ceremonies many years before, music was furnished by Manual Arts students. The Board of Library Commissioners was represented by Mrs. Zahn who spoke delightfully. She was accompanied by Miss Althea Warren, then First Assistant City Librarian and Supervisor of Branches. The speaker of the evening was Miss Alice Ames Winter, who gave fascinating reminiscences of the literary lights of old Boston. The community response was gratifying and we treasure the many letters received in appreciation of our eighteen years of service.

ROSTER OF PERSONNEL (continued)

CLERK TYPISTS

Heyde, Ruth	2/9/42-7/11/52
Geiger, Florence (Mrs.)	7/1/46-8/1/49
Varela, Michael	5/23/49-9/19/49
Winninghoff, Elizabeth	5/27/49-3/1/52
Hagest, Arline (Mrs.)	6/16/52-7/19/52
Kilcourse, Frances	8/1/49-8/1/50
Zana, Charlotte (Mrs.)	11/21/49-11/3/50
Copeland, Winn Helen (Mrs.)	9/22/50-2/17/58
Lefors, Margaret	2/1/51-8/15/52
Churchman, Carolyn	4/16/51-2/4/52
Weisel, Isabelle (Mrs.)	/53- /53
Windrow, Carolyn Forrow (Mrs)	7/17/52-8/31/55
Edwards, Rosa Lee (Mrs.)	8/25/52-2/1/56
Weisjohn, Rhyllis	9/16/53-2/3/58
Wells, Jerelene (Mrs.)	9/19/55-6/8/56
Saldivar, Juliet	4/9/56- to date
Hannah, Helen (Mrs.)	7/2/56-3/1/57
Beidleman, Johnnie (Mrs.)	3/4/57-6/2/58
Giffin, Dixie	2/17/58-6/13/58
Maxwell, Carmelithyra	9/24/57-9/8/58
Taylor, Doris (Mrs.)	2/5/58- to date
Himelfarb, Gertrude	6/3/58- to date
Waggoner, Loretto J. (Mrs.)	10/14/58- to date

VERMONT SQUARE REGIONAL BRANCH ROSTER

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For Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1959

Matthews, Miriam	Principal Librarian
Rehse, Mathilde H. Mrs.	Senior Librarian
Coro, Mary Mrs.	Librarian
Clemens, Nan B. Mrs.	Children's Librarian
Himeifarb, Gertrude	Clerk Typist ($\frac{1}{2}$ time)
Saldivar, Juliet	Clerk Typist
Taylor, Doris Mrs.	Clerk Typist
Waggoner, Loretto J. Mrs.	Clerk Typist
Bomser, Heidi	Messenger Clerk (10 hours)
Goodlow, Joyce Ann	Messenger Clerk (10 hours)
Hawkes, Carolyn	Messenger Clerk (10 hours)
Jones, Myvonne	Messenger Clerk (15 hours)
Young, Jane	Messenger Clerk (15 hours)
Hill, Prentice	Janitor (22 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours)

Personnel Changes from July 1, 1958-June 30, 1959:

Moore, Barbara, Senior Librn.	7/21/57 - 4/13/59
Grosse, Kathleen Mrs., Librn.	8/8/56- - 9/22/58
Stjernquist, Alike, Chil's Librn.	5/5/58 - 6/12/59
Saito, Ellen M., Librn. Trainee	8/5/57 - 8/22/58
Weisjohn, Rhyllis, Librn. Trainee	2/3/58 - 8/18/58
Hulach, Charles R., Librn. Trainee	9/2/58 - 5/1/59
Maxwell, Carmelithya, Clk. Typist	9/24/57 - 9/8/58
Goodlow, Juanita M., Mess. Clerk	7/28/58 - 10/1/58
Pleasants, Olivia F., Mess. Clerk	10/7/57 - 7/19/58
Copeland, Helen Mrs., Clerk Typist	4/4/59 - 5/15/59