

## HISTORY OF THE WILSHIRE BRANCH LIBRARY.

The Wilshire Branch Library was opened on December 6, 1920 in a small store building at Second and Hobart streets. This building was the smallest ever occupied by any branch being 12x24 feet in dimensions, with the length unbroken by doors or windows, and affording shelf space for approximately 1000 books. A tiny work room six feet square at the end of the room, leaving a jog eight feet in length for the children's section with about 300 books, comprised the quarters where books were loaned and the public served for over three years. Then came the removal to better, more commodious quarters on Western Avenue.

When the branch was started the librarian (Emilie Jackson) selected all the books, this being before the days of "minimum essentials", with the assistance of the children's librarian at the Central Library. The Central Library departments were most generous with their loans, which was all that saved us from collapse, for the 900 volumes with which we began soon melted away.

Mrs. Jones of Hollywood from out of her abundant stock sent us nearly 200 volumes of non-fiction, so that we managed to struggle along. The annual appropriation was \$1000, and as that started immediately, after the initial appropriation had been used, we soon began to feel that we were really accomplishing something in our tiny branch. The building being on a corner had large windows on both sides, so that it was a cheerful place, always well patronized.

Across the street was the Cahuenga School,

which insured the patronage of the children, although not to the extent which prevailed at many other branches. The children in this neighborhood had so many diversions that reading was a side and unimportant issue with many.

For the first few weeks the librarian held the fort alone, then had the help of a fourteen year old boy for one hour daily. The library was opened three evenings a week and closed on Friday afternoon. In those days the librarian arranged the hours herself, at least this librarian did. I well remember that when I announced that the branch would be open on Saturday evenings that Miss Kennedy expressed surprise, but did not oppose or question the wisdom of such an arrangement.

Before opening, the names of the residents in the district were obtained by the librarian from the voting lists kept in the Hall of Records so that we were able to send notices to all the people about us. This resulted in our becoming very well known, so that at first we had many callers, who ceased when they saw how limited was our supply of books.

It was in November, 1922 that we were given the help of a senior. In bringing the subject of our need before Mr. Perry I well remember his saying "I think you have been getting on by yourself long enough", and appointed Miss Louise Bischoff right there and then. She took charge of the work with the children and every soon our work increased, so that we could boast of a circulation of 1000 a month.

About this time experiments were being begun to compare and evaluate each branch. When the first turn-over was made, we shared honors with Vermont Square in having the largest.

In March 1924, the librarian obtained a leave of absence because of illness. This lasted until September, when an attempt was made to return and take up the work again. But after three weeks it was found necessary to resign quite definitely and thus ended the connection with the Wilshire Branch, which had been a most pleasant, stimulating and enjoyable experience.

(Signed) Mrs. Emilie Jackson.

Mrs. Cora Porter was appointed in charge following Mrs. Jackson's resignation. Mrs. Porter resigned after a short year on June 30, 1925.

Mrs. Anna-Marie Hook took charge July 1, 1925. The little branch with its pale green walls tinted the shade of pistachio ice cream and several large windows was fairly bulging with its many patrons who "trode" over each other and its growing book collection. The book collection was an unusually fine, if small one. At this time the reports "pled" for larger quarters and another assistant on the staff. The burden of the reports was of the heavy load of clerical and routine work which encroached on the professional time. Yet throughout these early reports like an ever recurring theme in music coming out "piano fortissimo" in every report and as a continuous harmony throughout each one is the great joy of working, even under handicaps, in a branch growing by leaps and bounds. This branch grew amazingly fast and it was no wonder that before long it burst all bounds. The reports during this time convey the thrill and joy which the activity of the busy branch lent to the work.

We find an entry in the April 1926 report of a series of story hours conducted by students from the University story telling classes. The entry here, even at this early date, speaks of the poor attendance at these story hours which finally led to their discontinuance. All during the years the story telling groups and the clubs for children have been meagrely attended. These special activities have not been considered a source of advertisement, circulation, or worth the effort put into them.

The reports from January to June 1926 contained many a plea for an added senior assistant and comments on a proposal to move the branch into larger quarters. As the branch was to have a new building everyone hoped that it would not be necessary to move a short time before the branch building was completed and then again into the regular building. But finally things reached such a pass with the crowded conditions that the branch had to move even if it was going to move into its own building the following year. A large double store building was selected on Western Avenue near Council Street and the branch moved the last few days of July and the first few days of August, 1926. With this move into more commodious quarters and to meet the needs of the rapid growth of the number of active patrons and the caring for increasing numbers of books, a full time senior, Mrs. Freda Mettler, was appointed to the branch to aid in this additional work. This allowed half time of the other senior assistant to be devoted to children's work and children's needs. This had been asked for frequently in the reports as scant attention could be given to their needs outside of a few talks given by any assistant, Miss Louise Bischoff, who was appointed shortly after the branch was established, to the children of the Cahuenga School. But even with the little time and attention the juvenile circulation was thirty-two percent as compared with the eighteen to twenty-two percent circulation in re-

cent years. This showing conclusively that when there are the children and they desire to read no artificial stimulus is needed. And it should be remembered that an artificial stimulus always wreaks havoc in the years to come. In the meantime several rooms in the nearby schools were closed and today there are many more counter-attractions for children.

Here on Western Avenue the branch grew and expanded in ample quarters. From the September 1926 report we find that many signs recommending books and the branch library's location were posted in windows of the shops along Western Avenue. This is an interesting note because it recalls the very nice community feeling in this section before it became part of a big metropolis. With many merchants moving in who had not helped boost the Wilshire and Western Avenue district this patriotic feeling and the feeling ~~for~~ of mutual helpfulness vanished. Too, within the last few years rents for the shops along Western Avenue have been so high that no merchant feels he can give up any available space. But particularly sad is the passing of that community spirit of helpfulness. This, I suppose, is one of the penalties for growing "bigger and better". But is it worth it?

By November 1926 more help was requested to care for the ever swiftly increasing circulation. Within three months after a full time senior assistant was appointed the circulation was growing so rapidly that the staff seemed inadequate to take care of the healthy gains. The gains at this time were a thousand and two thousand each month. "Every book, including bound magazines and all reference books, circulated  $6\frac{1}{2}$  times" during the month of November!

On July 28, 1927 the doors were closed at the Western Avenue location and the moving began to the branch's own building. The year during which the building was being constructed the

public and the staff lived in anticipation of this event. On August 1, 1927 an "at home" for the public was held in the new building. At the "at home" held on August 1st from three to nine-thirty in the evening welcoming the patrons to the new building, several gallons of punch was served. This was donated for the occasion by the Western Avenue Business Men's Association. Good sized crowds came all day long, or so it seemed to those who had to see that there were clean glasses all the time. A delightful short talk was given by Mr. Orra Monette. Mr. and Mrs. Perry and many other library "folk" were there. Lovely flowers were received from other branches and patrons. The "at home" was quite successful.

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The Wilshire Branch building is "Italian Renaissance" in style; it is of stone tile in the natural color with tufa stone trimmings. The three large windows are each set off by a richly carved stone balcony of individual design, copied from Twelfth Century Italian originals. The entrance door is based on the design of the portal of Costanzo in Perugia Cathedral with an elaborate pattern of mythological animals. The interior of the building has walls of a light dove gray and richly colored ceilings, blue in the large rooms, Pompeian red or old gold in the staff quarters. In the adult's reading room is a hooded fireplace bearing the inscription: 'Nec nimis prope ne nimis longe' (neither too near, nor too far)." The effect of the building is that of serenity and dignity due to the beautiful architectural lines, the high ceilings and the soft, rich colorings. There are many beautiful details which materially aid in achieving the air of richness which makes this branch interior distinctive.

When the branch moved into its own building it became necessary to have a full time janitor. Jack Brown was appointed. There are some individuals who regardless of station are always remembered as individuals; their fineness and courtesy and unselfishness make them individuals

The first loss in circulation in the history of the branch occurred in April 1932. A loss of 110 loomed up. The second loss occurred about a year later in February 1933. Two branches, Felipe de Neve and Memorial, had been established nearby and as their backround collections grew this branch was hard put to it to maintain its previous circulation. But it kept up unusually well. It should be noted that the circulation was excellent throughout the four years of the depression when other branches were losing. In September 1933 an arrangement was made to take the half time which the children's librarian was giving to adult work and use it to develop the juvenile circulation. This took away really a half time worker from that phase of the work which has a future in this branch and gave it to a phase of the work which has never been important here and probably never will be an important phase of the work done by this branch. (Important in circulation.) This was a tragic thing for it lessened the floor work which almost immediately brought a loss in circulation which has continued.

At this time the branch librarian was asked to discontinue leading the discussion for the book club. The attendance at the meetings dropped to ten or twelve. The average attendance now in 1936 is about eighteen as compared with the average of forty-eight before the change in the plan.

With the branch settled in its own building and getting its stride nothing outstanding happened until the years of the depression occurred. With cuts in book budgets, and inadequately staffed personnel, losses in circulation finally came to this branch although the circulation maintained a high figure longer than most branches were able to during the depression. This loss again brought about a cut in staff. The page who worked nine hours a week was taken away from this branch ~~almost simultaneously~~ <sup>almost a year later</sup> when the extra time was taken from adult work and given to the children's work. This branch has consequently had a terrific backset to struggle against.

to be remembered. Jack Brown was such a one. All of the staff members who knew him remember him with genuine affection. Here we should pause and pay tribute to that beautiful quality of the negro race who adopt you as "their white folk". Like a mantle this kindliness and thoughtfulness enveloped the whole building. When Jack Brown died many of the public missed him and inquired about him expressing sincere sympathy.

At this time a trained children's librarian was appointed. Miss Louise Bischoff, who had been doing excellent work "pinch hitting" as a children's librarian, was transferred to the Jefferson Branch. Mrs. Rowena Drake was appointed as a half time children's librarian and as a half time assistant for the adult work.

"Through The Year With Books" was a series of book notes published twice a month in the local paper/during 1926 and 1927. This was followed by another series "Favorites In The Book World" including favorite books of ~~great~~ people of ~~im~~-portance and this brought into prominence some of the older books.

When the branch moved away from the Cahuenga School the juvenile circulation began to lose. In the October report we find the notation: "Invitations were sent out for a tea which will be given to the teachers from the nearby schools. We have had so little cooperation from the schools in this district that for the past two years we have <sup>striven</sup> and still are striving desperately to interest them in the library. It was planned to invite the teachers of these schools to a talk and tea. The children's librarian will present ideas and material helpful for Children's Book Week and anything of interest to the teachers that might help them motivate their work. Then the branch librarian will review a few adult books and after that tea will be served in the staff quarters. It was hoped that this three-~~fo~~ fold plan would be attractive to each kind of teacher; to those who would not come unless tea

There have been very few changes in the personnel of this staff in the many years and the majority occurred during 1935. Mrs. Rowena Drake resigned August 30th. Mrs. Drake was the children's librarian appointed when the branch library moved into its own building in August 1927. Mrs. Drake resigned to rest and keep house. She was beloved by all on the staff and the public and many have missed her bright cheerfulness as well as her keen mind. Mrs. Freda Mettler, appointed to this branch in 1926, was transferred to the Fiction Department on October 31st, 1935. Mr. John Humphreys resigned September 1935 to write and to do odd jobs which paid him more. He is now in the scenario department at RKO.

Miss Zada Taylor, the new children's librarian, was appointed to take Mrs. Drake's place October 1st, 1935. Miss Taylor did some of her practice work at this branch several years ago while attending library school.

Miss Martha Jamison was appointed to take Mr. Humphreys' place October 1st, 1935. Miss Jamison had worked at this branch previously, <sup>later</sup> when she resigned her full time work to attend college.

Mrs. Eleanor Vivion, the new librarian, was appointed to take Mrs. Mettler's place December 1st, 1935.

was served; to those who would not come just for something to motivate their work but would be attracted by the tea plus the adult book reviews; to those who are always eager for anything which will make alert teachers and bring breadth of vision to their work." The sad result was that only eight attended! Other conflicting educational conferences combined to make for the disheartening results. Comment after comment occurs in the reports of this period of fruitless effort to interest the teachers and the children in the branch library. One report speaks of "up-hill work". The situation of the branch, placed on a street only a few blocks long, off from the general traffic, hedged in on all four sides by heavily travelled thoroughfares was somewhat unfortunate.

In October 1927 the branch began to take its place as a cultural unit. Miss Darlow was engaged to give her delightful book reviews on the fourth Fridays of each month.

Other lectures ~~lectures~~ were scheduled in the club room. One of the colorful events was the young aviator who spoke in the club room packed full of wiggling boys of grammar school, junior high school and high school age---a hundred and twenty-five of them. He had the nicest attitude toward the boys. "He was the soul of tact and gentleness. Each question and questioner received the utmost consideration. When he started to go he reached out his hand to shake hands with some of the boys near him and instantly out shot about twenty-five or thirty more hands--he shook them all in the most leisurely and gentlemanly fashion as though he had all the time in the world to shake hands with the hundred and twenty-five boys although he was anxious to get away to pilot a plane that night. This aviator outrivaled Lindberg in the hearts of the boys here at that time."

Mrs. Grace Bush gave several fine lectures accompanied by musicians to illustrate these lectures.

Ralph Einstein, a college youth, was considered an expert amateur stamp collector. He talked to the boys in the club room three times. For many months following his talks there was an extra, extra flurry for the stamp catalogues.

The notation announcing a talk to the boys and girls on Indians by Dr. E. C. Bull causes a smile to flicker over our faces. We had never seen Dr. Bull and most naturally concluded that he was an Indian who had become a doctor. This bit of conjecture was used extensively to advertise his talk and visit. A large group of boys and girls and several sisters from the parochial school nearby brought their classes to hear Dr. Bull. When Dr. Bull arrived the branch librarian and the children's librarian were sure some mistake had been made! In walked a tiny man, undersized, with blue eyes, wearing a badly fitting boy scout's uniform and his face lit up with a genial smile instead of the haughty, fierce look of an Indian! Never conjecture as to names!

Mrs. Florence Hart Allen's humorous take-offs given to a packed club room each time were screamingly funny. The two programs which she gave were balanced with harp solos by Miss Fern Staben.

A series of orthophonic concerts managed by Mr. Drake were given at this time. The Columbia Kolster was loaned through the courtesy of the Platt Music Co.

Due to a request from Mr. Perry, the City Librarian, that all branches start adult reading clubs, during December 1928 a notice was posted inviting the adult patrons interested in a book club to leave their names at the desk. Mr. Perry felt keenly that branches should take their places as cultural units and requested that clubs be started if possible. After many delays one was started here and limped along. As we were loath to start it the date was set ahead in the spring. But the requests from the public were so numerous that the club was finally started April 9, 1929.

With the September meeting of 1930 the plan for the book club was changed. At each meeting some special country was to be the topic for study and discussion, and the branch librarian began to lead the discussion. This was done because the discussions without a leader were aimless and new specific information was not brought to the group to discuss. This evolving was a gradual thing which took form. None of the members could do it at that time as exemplified by their reviews. This plan made for a well knit discussion group which grew quickly from 18-25 in attendance in 1930 to 45-60 in attendance in 1933.

The California Adult Education Department then offered a series of philosophical lectures in 1930. Mr. Wiener conducted these. The average attendance was ten. Mr. Wiener read his papers and that is not conducive to spontaneous discussion. Probably the subject made people somewhat shy about attending.

At intervals during these few years Miss Helen Haines gave reviews to a full club room. She was the most successful outside speaker and always drew a good audience.

When Mr. Wiener's series was concluded another series was offered by the California Adult Education Department. This series sounded more intriguing. Mrs. Lucy Wilcox Adams' series was titled "Modern Political Experiments and Their leaders." These began in March 1931 and continued each week for six weeks. The average attendance was twenty-five. The response was satisfactory and as a consequence four more of these lectures were given.

An interesting item is Mrs. Doris Cerf's use of the club room for a group who engaged her to give them book reviews each month. Shortly after this Mrs. Cerf became the official reviewer for the Broadway Department Store. Mrs. Cerf was one of the original members of the adult book club when it was established several years

before and found her gift of reviewing when she was asked to be on several of the programs. Mrs. Cerf and her group used the club room each month during 1930 and for several years until the depression brought curtailment in family budgets and the women felt they could no longer pay for book reviews when they could hear them free at many places.

1929 showed heavy gains. Each staff member worked three nights a week and was snowed under with work. An extra junior needed for each night except Fridays was requested in June 1929.

The discipline problem was especially bad these years. Ever since moving into the new building this branch has had a difficult time with the discipline problem. This ugly note recurs in the reports. It is a sad commentary on the ruthlessness of the young people undisciplined by authority at home or school. Respect for principles would seem to be a better equipment for life than so much academic training.

A page assistant to work nine hours a week was appointed during October 1929 to meet the need of an extra person at night. During the fall of 1929 and 1930 one junior position was converted into two half time positions so that each assistant could work three nights. This is not a satisfactory solution but did meet this temporary need.

The metal truck to hold the check trays arrived February 1930. This facilitated the work and took much strain off the work at the desk.

Tragedy of tragedies! The floor of the juvenile room caved in from dry rot during the spring of 1930. About three-fourths of the floor underwent an operation. For two weeks the ripping up of the old floor and the laying of the new entailed much loud hammering; fine dust flew everywhere and the pungent odor of creosote pervaded every nook and cranny.

The Detroit Charging System was launched in December 1930. This innovation has saved much time and energy which would otherwise have been devoted to clerical work.

This branch is situated in the center of a cultured community and because of this fact the work is different from that done elsewhere. The patrons expect the librarians to guide them to the best and the worthwhile because in their minds people appointed to such positions are capable of guiding and selecting enjoyable books. Therefore it is essential that the staff members here should have a good background, the ability and wisdom to select books for specific and varied tastes, and a socially gracious background. This type of public makes floor work a necessity. And following 1930 the floor work increased tremendously.

A repercussion followed a drastic cut in pay fiction expenditures in February 1933. Within a few months this caused heavy losses in pay fiction circulation for about eight months or a year.

During 1932 and 1933 all staff members lived in a state of constant fear. Doors were to be guarded! The hunt was on for staff members who dared let a patron abscond with a book uncharged. Patrons resented being watched and a very irritable feeling welled up in the attitude of the public. But the poor staff members were caught between Scylla and Charybdis. But one proved to be the stronger and the staff members continued scrutiny of the public with as disarming a smile as they could muster. Persons were sent out from the Central Library to steal branch library books and woe to the staff member who was at the desk when the book was stolen! This was a bad policy for it brought out unhealthy traits in the ones sent out to bring a fellow worker into grief and added terrific pressure to certain nervous temperments while they were responsible at the desk.