

HISTORY  
OF  
WASHINGTON IRVING BRANCH LIBRARY

Prepared June 30, 1936

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The initiative in establishing a branch library at this location was taken by the West Washington Improvement Association which was organized on January 31, 1922.

On October 9 of that year, the corner lot of this site was purchased by the library board at a cost of \$4750.00. It became evident that more ground would be needed and three years later, on October 12, 1925, funds having been made available through a successful bond issue, a lot across the street was purchased for \$9000.00. This lot was then exchanged for one on which stood a house next to the corner lot previously purchased for the library. The moving of the house on this adjoining lot to the newly purchased lot across the street cost approximately \$1300.00, making a total cost for the branch building site of \$15,050.00. [The above information was obtained from a paper read by Dr. F.H. Latterner at the formal opening of the branch building on January 10, 1927.]

The architects chosen to plan the building were the well-known firm of Allison and Allison. The cost of building, equipment and furniture has been given as \$37,063.00. The building is of hollow tile-stucco-brick with dimensions 80' X 64', floor space of 3,918 square feet and volumes capacity of 25,000. The interior of the library proper is of the rectangular plan with charging desk dividing main and children's rooms. There is a club room which holds about fifty persons and is used for story hour, school classes and neighborhood cultural gatherings. Staff quarters at the back consist of a rest room with couch and easy chairs, and a small kitchen; then in the rear also are the branch librarian's office and the work room.

To quote the description of the building as given in Handbook of the Branch Libraries, Los Angeles Public Library, 1928: "In the design of the Washington Irving Branch Library the long, low roof line, characteristic of Latin American and other architectures of Mediterranean origin, has been adopted. (The exterior treatment is a combination of brick and plaster. The brick banding, extending between the windows, reminiscent of a treatment frequently seen in the brickwork of Lombardy and Tuscany, affords a simple, inexpensive means of securing a color contrast.) The long paved terrace, with its metal railing, extending the entire length of the building, gives entrance from both streets and affords a cordial invitation to enter the building. (On the interior, the reading room proper is treated in simple manner with exposed wooden trusses, and rafters decorated in black and gold. The walls of this room are covered with acoustic plaster and the floor with heavy linoleum, all calculated to produce a quiet, restful atmosphere suitable to the purposes of the room. Aside from the ceiling, the most important architectural element is the apsidal bay window at the east end of the room, counting as an interesting architectural note both from within and without.) A fireplace adds to the comfort of the club room."

The suggestion of WASHINGTON IRVING as a name for the branch is attributed to Mr. Guy Bowerman of the Security Bank, and this being the unanimous choice of the Improvement Association, adoption was asked of and granted by the library board.

The building was open for service on December 13, 1926, but the formal opening program was given on January 10, 1927.

The location is an old residence section where many of the people own their homes and have lived for years. An active business center extends for a few blocks east and west on Washington Boulevard, the street one block south.

Mrs. Emilie Jackson served as branch librarian from the time of opening until September 1933 - almost seven years. In her first annual report as of June 1927 she says there were at that time, besides herself, a librarian, a children's librarian (both full-time), a half-time page and a full-time janitor. The number of books belonging to the branch had reached 4273, of which 1681 were juvenile. Fortunately the Central Library departments could lend to a new branch quite generously and there was, besides, the Interlibrary Loan Department to draw upon. By March 1927, three months after the branch opened, the month's circulation was 10,039. As the work increased, more

WASHINGTON IRVING BRANCH LIBRARY, History, cont'd.

members were added to the staff.

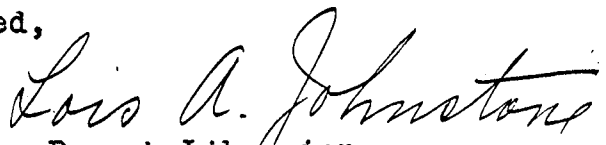
The greatest monthly circulation which the branch ever attained was 20,064, in August 1932, which was probably at the peak of our six years depression when more people had more time to read. During 1933, the 20,000 figure was reached three times. In 1934, 19,307 was the largest and has not been reached since. The average circulation during the fiscal year just closed was 14,690. The number of volumes at present is 16,318.

Very probably there have been several contributing causes for this drop in circulation. In as far as there was a nation wide experience among libraries similar to this, some of it may, certainly, be attributed to better economic conditions - more people employed with less time (or less inclination) for reading. But Washington Irving Branch had a local situation to deal with for two new branches had been established farther west in growing sections of the city. In January, 1929, La Cienega Branch was opened just south of Adams Street on La Brea, and in April, 1930, Memorial Branch, on Country Club Drive just across from Los Angeles High School, began work in its new building. These two libraries developed rapidly and must, naturally, have gotten much patronage that Washington Irving would otherwise have had; for, as an early monthly report says, "Our territory extends to the western limits of the city."

There is much to be said, however, for having branch libraries near enough together so that the majority of patrons at any one branch may be within walking distance. This tends to enhance the idea of the library's being a center of interest in the community and is, practically, "taking books to the people".

Mrs. Jackson, retiring from library service September first 1933, was followed by Miss Lois A. Johnstone as branch librarian October first of that year and she is still in charge. The remainder of the staff consist of a librarian, a children's librarian, two clerical library aids (all full time), a half-time page and a three-quarter's time janitor.

Signed,

  
Lois A. Johnstone  
Branch Librarian  
Washington Irving Library