

Highlights Of The Jefferson Branch Library History 1912-1985

1912-13

The Jefferson Branch Library began as a station in a drug store at 2100 W. Jefferson St.

1915

As a result of a petition from the community, led by a local realtor, Fred E. Strong, to the Library Board for more permanent library services, a sub-branch was opened in November, 1915, in a rented store in a new building at 2065 W. Jefferson St.

1920

In response to heavy usage of the library by the residents, the branch was promoted at the close of the fiscal year 1919/20 from a sub-branch to the group called "rented branches." Staff and service hours were increased.

1922

The Library Board secured a lot at 2211 W. Jefferson St., one block west of the rented store location. C. E. Norenberg, architect, designed a building of modified Spanish style, frame construction, with stucco exterior.

1923

The new building was presented to the community during the first week of November, 1923.

1928-29

The rapid growth of the branch was not anticipated when the building was planned. After five years in the new building, the book stock had increased by almost 150%, exceeding the planned book capacity. Jefferson became one of the ten busiest branch libraries in the City.

1930's

Depression years saw a reduction in staff and funds to buy books, accompanied by large increases in usage. Changes in the ethnic makeup of the community took place during this period. By 1936, the pattern was well established; Caucasians, Blacks, Japanese and small percentages of other groups, e.g., Jewish, Mexican and Russian.

1945

Our Authors Study Club was organized February 14, 1945, by Vassie D. Wright.

1949

The Branch Librarian reported that "according to a recent issue of the Negro newspaper, **The Tribune**, the Jefferson district has the second largest Negro population in Los Angeles."

In February, Our Authors Study Club, led by Vassie D. Wright sponsored the first city-wide National Negro History Week.

1950-83

The community underwent many changes. Throughout this period, the library served the residents with a variety of materials, including foreign language books and recordings.

1983

On October 16, the branch closed due to damage caused by an arson fire.

1984

On May 22, the Board of Library Commissioners adopted a resolution to rename the branch:

Los Angeles Public Library
Jefferson Branch
Vassie D. Wright Memorial

1985

On February 14, in honor of Black History Month, the Board of Library Commissioners passed a resolution honoring Vassie D. Wright for her many contributions to the community and announcing the branch would reopen bearing her name.

Extensive repair and renovation work was completed. The new building now features a lowered ceiling and improved lighting, carpeting throughout the facility, and air conditioning. Security measures, including wrought iron grills on windows and an intrusion alarm have been installed.

Summer Hours:

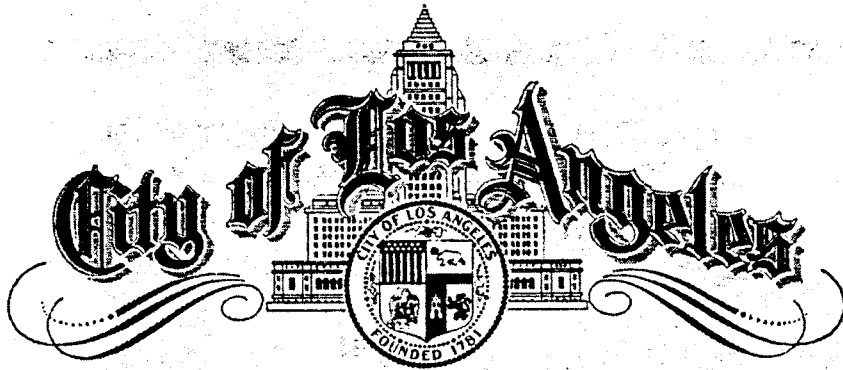
Monday - Thursday 12 noon - 5:30 p.m.;
Friday, Saturday 10 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Location:

2211 Jefferson Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90018

Branch Staff:

Branch Librarian: Frances Moriwaki
Children's Librarian: Jannie L. Tracer
Young Adult Librarian: Dhiren Dave
Support Staff: Lyle E. Adams
Renee M. Cooper
Jane Shepard
Gerald Turner
Marilyn R. Willis



R E S O L U T I O N

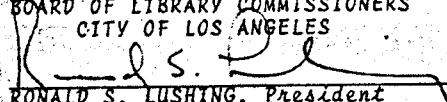
- WHEREAS, Vassie Davis Wright was the Founder-President of "Our Authors Study Club," the Los Angeles branch of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which has been credited with promoting revolutionary changes in the projection of Black contributions in American history and their inclusion in text books on both a state and national level; and
- WHEREAS, under her leadership the first city-wide Negro History Week celebrations were initiated in February, 1949, an observance which has grown to become Black History Month; and
- WHEREAS, Mrs. Wright initiated the first classes in Black History in the Los Angeles Adult schools at Dorsey and Manual Arts evening schools; and
- WHEREAS, she was a life member of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and a member of the National Council of Negro Women, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, the Second Baptist Church, and the YWCA; and
- WHEREAS, during her lifetime, Mrs. Wright was an inspiration and a tireless advocate of understanding, tolerance and learning which will continue to enrich life in our community for generations to come:

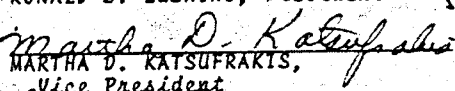
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Board of Library Commissioners recognizes the many contributions made by this remarkable woman and as a tangible expression of appreciation from the City of Los Angeles adopts as the name of its branch library at 2211 West Jefferson Boulevard the JEFFERSON BRANCH LIBRARY - VASSIE D. WRIGHT MEMORIAL.

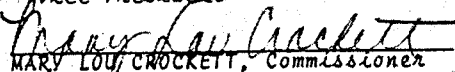
February 14, 1985

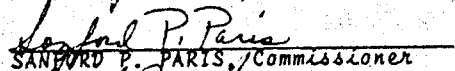


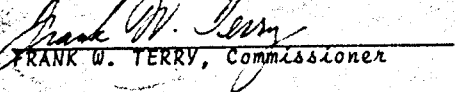
BOARD OF LIBRARY COMMISSIONERS
CITY OF LOS ANGELES


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HISTORY OF JEFFERSON PARK

1st Draft 1/21/89
CONFIDENTIAL

Note: The Jefferson Park area encompasses the area bounded by: ADAMS BOULEVARD to the North, EXPOSITION PARK to the South, WESTERN AVENUE to the East, and CRENSHAW BOULEVARD to the West .

Information on ethnic composition of the area was taken from the files of the Jefferson Branch Library, Vassie D. Wright Memorial. Statistics were estimates made by the staff.

The Jefferson Branch Library was first opened in 1915, during World War I. The surrounding community was essentially white at that time.

The current Jefferson Branch Library structure was built in 1923, at a total cost of \$16,696, including land and construction. By 1937, the polygot community comprised Russians, Germans, Jews, and French, followed soon thereon by Armenians, Italians, and Mexicans.

In the 1940's, palatial homes along Adams Boulevard between Western Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard were gradually replaced by multiple units.

By 1946, the ethnic composition of our Jefferson Park community changed to include Blacks and Japanese in addition to Whites. These newcomers occupied and operated the small shops along Jefferson Boulevard, including markets, drug stores, restaurants, beauty shops, dry good stores, and gift shops.

By 1956, the community was equally divided between Blacks and Japanese who lived in older, middle class single dwellings and some duplexes. Large numbers were civil servants, mostly postal, and teachers. Gardening was the main occupation of the Japanese.

A large influx of Blacks from the South resulted by 1960 in a ratio of 2/3's Blacks, 1/3 Orientals, and the balance Caucasians. Majority were middle income professionals, semi-professionals and owners of small businesses.

By 1963-64, a marked change of the area became apparent with the appearance of a poolhall, bookie joints, bars, and a pawnshop. With the opening of the Santa Monica Freeway, traffic increased on Arlington Avenue but decreased on Jefferson Boulevard.

In 1972, community activist and civic leader, Lyle Adams, spearheaded a request of then Councilman Thomas Bradley for the city to buy the condemned property next to the library and to convert it into a minipark. Great Western Savings and Loan later donated the land for the park. On November 12, 1976, the Leslie N. Shaw Park became a reality. Mr. Shaw, Vice president of the Family Savings and Loan Association, served as Los Angeles Postmaster 1963-1969, and was an outstanding civic leader.

In 1973, Councilman Thomas Bradley became Mayor of the City of Los Angeles.

By 1977-78, arrivals to our community included well educated from Central America and the West Indies. The Arlington Sundries on the Southwest corner of Arlington and Jefferson, was closed in July, 1977. Also, half-way houses made an appearance.

In the 1980's

- . A steady increase of Spanish speaking changed the ethnic character of the Jefferson Branch Library patronage to about:

70% Black
20% Hispanic
7% Oriental
3% Caucasian

- . By 1989 the ratio changed to nearly 49% Black
49% Hispanic

- . On Oct. 16, 1983, an arson fire closed the Jefferson Branch Library. Because of huge community support of the three area schools and the churches, Councilman Farrell successfully advocated in City Council for the renovation of the library. On June 6, 1985, the newly renamed Jefferson Branch Library, Vassie D. Wright Memorial re-opened. Mrs. Wright was the Founder-President of "Our Authors Study Club," the Los Angeles branch of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Under her leadership the first city-wide Negro History week celebrations were initiated in February 1949, which is now Black History Month.

- . Community input made possible a denial of a Penny Arcade application for a location one block East of the library. Concerned citizens felt that such a business would not enhance the community or serve as a model for students in the area.

- . On January 31, 1987, Our Authors Club, with the assistance of Councilman Farrell's staff, held a community program in the Leslie N. Shaw Park at which a portrait of Vassie D. Wright was presented to the Jefferson Branch Library. Nearly 800 people attended the affair, and 2,330 invitations were sent.

- . In 1988, under the leadership of Co-chairmen Pastors Harshaw and Schmitz, the Jefferson Boulevard Improvement Committee was organized with the objective of beautifying and cleaning up the area, and revitalizing the new Jefferson Park area.

AREA CHURCHES

One of the historic churches on Adams Blvd. is the Holman United Methodist Church.

Trinity Baptist Church, founded in 1917 at Normandie and Jefferson Blvd. had its first pastor, the Rev. Archie Williams. The church purchased ten lots in 1945 on Cimarron and Jefferson, and on April 4, 1948, a new building was built with the J. L. Caston, its proud pastor.

Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church was erected as a wooden frame building in 1921. Five years later in 1926, the church and school were rebuilt. In 1952 the present church and school were erected.

Westminister Presbyterian Church

Anderson, Eddie "Rochester", (1905--1977) lived in our area. "Rochester" was a fixture on radio and television as Jack Benny's butler. He also played leads and supporting roles in a number of films including "Green Pastures" (1936), "Gone with the Wind" (1939) and "Cabin in the Sky" (World Almanac who's who of Film.)

LEON AUBREY has hosted the Jefferson Council (made up of "old timers" from New Orleans) for 35 years at his barber shop on Jefferson Boulevard. The Council's list of activities and sponsorship of political and civil causes is impressive. They have contributed Christmas food baskets, housed the League for Community Improvement, served as campaign headquarters for prominent politicians, hosted the Los Angeles Police Department's Southwest Division Booster Club--this is only a partial list! (See Thursday, January 12, 1989 Los Angeles Sentinel, column by Larry Aubrey, "Urban perspectives.")

GRAND L. BUCH, lives three blocks from the Jefferson Branch Library. He is an actor who played in "Roots", "007", "The Hulk", "Finish Line", "The Jeffersons", and many television shows.

TERRAZENE BROWN - a Tokyo Olympic champion. (Could not verify.)

PAINTER AVERY CLAYTON, son of Dr. Mayme Agnew Clayton and a painter in all media has a studio and lives in our area. Stevie Wonder took the Martin Luther King posters created by Avery Clayton to Washington, D.C.

DR. MAYME AGNEW CLAYTON, founder and archivist of the Western States Black Research Center, a nonprofit organization on Montclair Avenue. Dr. Clayton is known throughout the United States as one of the foremost authorities and leading collectors of materials on Afro-American culture and history. She was inspired at an early age by Mary McLeod Bethune.

HAROLD AND BELLE'S RESTAURANT. Owner Harold L. Legaux and his wife Belle, both originally from New Orleans, opened up the Harold and Belle's restaurant on Jefferson Boulevard in 1969. (The restaurant features Creole and Cajun cuisine.)

HERB JEFFRIES made three cowboy films in 1938-39 and was a singer in the Duke Ellington band. Known for singing the song, Flamingo, he lives near Montclair.

REV. JAMES JONES, was President of the Los Angeles School Board in the 1960's.

KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR. A Dorsey High graduate, Janice Browne, was once married to famous basketball star, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

HATTIE McDONALD, (1895-1952) movie actress lived on 30th street. She grew to be the personification of the cheerful Black Mammy. She was the first black woman to sing on radio and the first to win 2 supporting actress Oscars, which she received for her immortal performance as Mammy, in Gone with the Wind (1939). She appeared in some 40 other movies. (World Almanac Who's who of Film.)

G. MILLS, KNOWN TO THE COMMUNITY AS BILLY MILLS was Councilman for the Eighth District before Councilman Farrell. He was appointed to the Los Angeles Superior Court in 1979. (He is a member of Trinity Baptist and lives in our area.)

JANE PHILLIPS, AUTHOR who was born in Los Angeles, attended Immaculate Heart College and U.C.L.A. She is the author of the young adult book titled "Mojo Hand."

ARTHUR LEE SIMPKINS, a prominent singer of the 40's, 50's, and 60's lives on Montclair.

SHAW, LESLIE NELSON, Los Angeles Postmaster, 1963-1969; Vice President of the Family Savings and Loan; Vice President, Director Community Development, Great Western Savings and Loan. (See Who's Who in America).

WILLIAM GRANT STILL, was one of the most prolific American Negro Composers and had his works performed by major orchestras throughout the world. A Community Arts Center at 2520 West View was named in his honor, (see McGraw Hill Encyclopedia of World Biography; also other references.)

ATTORNEY VINCE MONROE TOWNSEND was the first Black to buy a home on Arlington Avenue in 1944.

RON TOWNSON, current member of the Fifth Dimension, attended Dorsey High and lives on 10th Avenue.

FRANCES WILLIAMS, actress who played in the television series, Frank's Place, presents plays in a small studio at her home.

VASSIE DAVIS WRIGHT was the Founder-President of "Our Authors Study Club," the Los Angeles branch of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which has been credited with promoting revolutionary changes in the projection of Black contributions in American history and their inclusion in text books on both a state and national level.

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Mrs. Wright initiated the first classes in Black History in the Los Angeles Adult Schools at Dorsey and Manual Arts evening schools. (Negroes Who's who in California.)

LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY
Jefferson Branch
2211 West Jefferson Blvd.
Telephone 734-8573
Hours: 1-9 Monday through Friday

Former library service: This branch existed as a deposit station at the Soffel Drug Store, 2100 West Jefferson Street from 1912 to 1915.

Present Building: Opened November, 1923

Architect: C. E. Noerenberg

Cost: \$14,104 (Building, Equipment and Furniture)

Style: Modified Spanish

Construction: Frame-stucco

Size: 90' x 40'

Floor space: 1,966 square feet

Book capacity: 11,000 volumes

Staff: 2 professional, 2 clerical

VITAL STATISTICS

<u>Year</u>	<u>Cardholders</u>	<u>Books</u>	<u>Circulation</u>
1915	1,009	1,209	18,929
1924	4,484	5,002	75,794
1967	5,194	24,790	57,126

April, 1968