

Arroyo Library result of sacrifice and determination

(Sixth in an exclusive series about noted places and personalities of Northeastern Los Angeles.)

By **WILFRID DELLQUEST**

One of the projects in the local library expansion program approved by voters at the recent library bond election is replacement of the Arroyo Seco branch library in Highland Park by a modern building and enlarged facilities.

THREE GENERATIONS

The familiar building atop the triangular plot at the intersection of Piedmont Ave. and N. Figueroa St. has, for 43 years, been closely associated with the progress of Northeastern Los Angeles. It has been a cultural and social center for three generations of area residents.

The books on its shelves have provided relaxation, diversion, and vicarious adventure to many thousands of readers. They have been a spark of inspiration and a cushion of solace in the turmoil of a hurry-fevered world. Boys and girls, now grown to grandparenthood, sat at the long tables in the reading room preparing their homework, exchanging notes and whispering sweet nonsense. Downstairs in the assembly room Red Cross, Community Chest and YMCA drives have been spearheaded; adult classes have met, and the pulse of community endeavor beat strongly for civic betterment.

MILLER'S HALL

It is a good time to retell the story of the Highland Park public library. It is a story of lofty ideals, of sacrifice and determination, a story of community pride and achievement that, in its way, is also part of the irresistible story of America.

The area settlement began in old Garvanza, boom-town of the 80s, just north of where Pasadena Ave. (now N. Figueroa) turned east towards the Arroyo and South Pasadena. About 1885 William Miller built Miller's Hall, a two-story frame structure on the north side of Pasadena Ave. (renamed York boulevard east of the turn) between Avenues 63 and 64.

Miller's Hall was the social and civic gathering place for Garvanza residents. Later, newcomers built homes and businesses Arroyoside southward into the area to be known as Highland Park. Historic Miller's Hall quartered lodges and fraternal groups and was the location of the first school in the district.

Along about 1890, when gentlemen sported mustaches and ladies wore bustles, Mrs. E. B. Dexter, Miss Jennie Gilbert, who was the first postmistress, and some other progressive ladies had an idea. The new community needed a library.

FIFTY BOOKS

To begin with, a reading room was opened at Miller's Hall. There were fifty books, a stereopticon viewer with a handful of stereo ("3-D") pictures, and somebody donated a subscription to "Harper's Young Peoples" magazine.

A year or two later, Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Zuber contributed a collection of 800 volumes and the library was moved to a store building on Avenue 64 (originally Mountain Avenue) and Garvanza Avenue. The library continued to grow and was presently removed to Avenue 64 and Ruby St. where a gala flag-raising ceremony was held on the 2nd of July in 1904.

In the meantime, the Highland Park section to the south was spreading rapidly and soon outstripped in growth the original Garvanza settlement.

While the intelligensia of the Highlands read "Trilby," and nurtured the tender minds of their daughters with "Sophie May" and "Elsie Dinsmore," ornery little boys sneaked out to the shed to read "Young Wild West" and a shocking book titled "Tom Sawyer" by a writer named Mark Twain. Some of the rebellious varmints also smoked corn-silk cigarettes.

ANDREW CARNEGIE

Back in Pennsylvania big things were happening. A red-headed Scotch immigrant, Andrew Carnegie, was making steel and becoming a millionaire. Andy soon accumulated so much money he didn't know what to do with it and, being a true Scot, shuddered at the realization that he couldn't take it with him.



HISTORIC MILLER'S HALL as it looks today after serving the community for more than seventy years as quarters for fraternal meetings and public gatherings. Located on York Blvd. between Aves. 63 and 64, the first public library in the Arroyo district began here in the 1890's.

Carnegie became a philanthropist, started the Carnegie Foundation and a nation-wide project to assist communities in building and equipping public libraries. In the course of events, \$210,000 was earmarked in 1911 for construction of branch public libraries in Los Angeles.

THEY ORGANIZED FOR ACTION

When the people of Garvanza and Highland Park learned of the opportunity to acquire a modern library, they were quick to organize for action. A committee consisting of Dr. John Lawrence Smith, William Miller and Thomas Fellows looked around for a suitable library location. Carnegie's offer stipulated that the community must furnish the building site and he would pay for the library building and initial equipment.

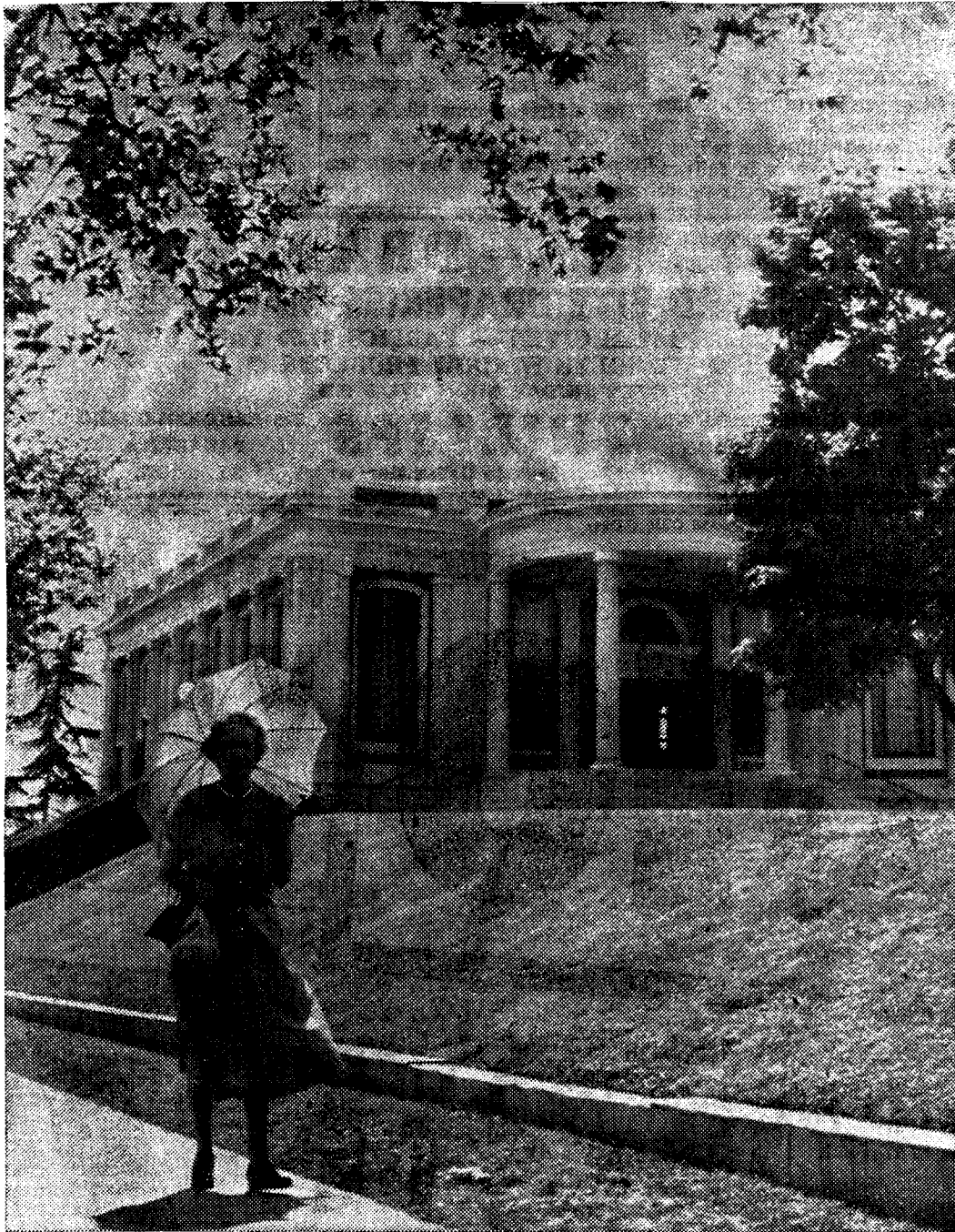
It was a generous deal, but before it could be consummated progressive leadership, hard work and sacrifice were necessary. The library committee de-

cidied upon a triangular shaped site 360x135x190 feet on an elevation where Piedmont Ave. angles to intersect N. Figueroa (then Pasadena Ave.). The owner wanted \$6,500. The committee offered \$5,000. After jockeying the price around, the owner remembered how he owed his success to books, having become a self-made man by reading the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress and the Life and Exploits of George Washington. The memory softened him and in a burst of civic-minded generosity he reduced the price to \$5,680.

THE PEOPLE BUY A LOT

While corpulent Bill Taft visited Highland Park barnstorming for votes, the library committee barnstormed for dollars to buy the lot. Little by little, with big and small donations, the fund grew until at last \$5,680 was raised. The lot was purchased and presented to the city of Los Angeles for a library building.

ARROYO LIBRARY



ARROYO SECO REGIONAL BRANCH LIBRARY at Piedmont and N. Figueroa Sts, was first opened in 1914. The present building is slated to be replaced at the same location by a new, larger structure under the city library's proposed expansion program. Capacity of the local library will be increased from 29,000 to 50,000 volumes. (Green Sheet Photo by Joe Friezer)

City Hall was delighted, as it has always been enthusiastic about culture, especially when it doesn't cost anything. This time the bill was being footed by an Eastern millionaire and everybody was happy.

OPENED IN 1914

The new library location was suited to serve Garvanza, Highland Park, York Valley, Hermosa and all the Arroyoside dwellers. A sum of \$30,000 was granted by Carnegie to build and equip the library. On Feb. 27, 1914, the Arroyo Seco library was formally opened to the public with a collection of 6,000 books on its shelves. It was a staunch, beautiful building deftly designed by its architect, Frederick Ashley, to blend harmoniously with its surroundings. The total cost, including the building site, construction and equipment was \$44,750.

Today, 43 years later, the library has 29,000 volumes. After completion of the new streamlined building, the shelf capacity will be increased to 50,000—more than eight times as many books as it opened with in 1914.

HISTORICAL LORE

The library has a unique collection of original photographs, newspaper clippings and pamphlets about early days in Garvanza, Highland Park, York Valley and Arroyo districts. Much of this material, which would otherwise have been lost, is now preserved in scrap books and filing folders.

The present staff, under direction of Lillian Nicholas, regional librarian, consists of: branch librarian, Edith Bishop; librarians, Lucile Berggren and Dorothy Matzner; children's librarian, Eleanor Lord; clerk-typists, Carolyn Gates, Catherine Hickman, Erma Kilda, Jane Milliken, Frances Parker and Myrtle Peters; messenger-clerks, Judith Bobb, Edwin Garvin, Carole Orsoline and Marlene Pinkerton.