

Cahuenga Branch Library
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HISTORY OF CAHUENGA BRANCH LIBRARY, 1916 - 1976

In 1900, Hollywood was a farming village of 500. Oranges, avocados, bananas and wheat grew on the site of L. A. City College, and north toward the present Los Feliz area.

By 1910, the population had grown to 7,000, and Hollywood and East Hollywood were being annexed to Los Angeles. The area was served by the Red Car Line, and the fare from Los Angeles was five cents.

With cityhood, demand for services arose. The Los Angeles Normal School, a teacher training institution, was built; in 1919 it became the University of California, Southern Branch; and in 1929, when U.C.L.A. was built, it changed to Los Angeles Junior College, now City College. Children's Hospital was begun, and a group of citizens offered to purchase land for a neighborhood library near Santa Monica and Vermont.

Building funds came from the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie; the total cost of the building, including equipment and furniture, was \$33,978. The location, ^{on S.M. x Madison} was selected by the Library Board under the chairmanship of Mr. Orra E. Monette, because it was less expensive than the corner of Santa Monica and Vermont. Eventually, the site was acquired through assessment proceedings, and a substantial and dignified brick-faced building was constructed in Italian Renaissance style. The architect was Clarence H. Russell (1874-1942), who also was associated with Norman F. Marsh in the building of Venice and its canals.

The floor plan of the library was known as the "butterfly" type, containing two reading rooms, one of each side of a central entrance, desk, and stack room. The building contained 8,474 square feet of floor space on two floors. Besides the children's and adult reading rooms, there were an auditorium, a room for children's story hours, a staff room, and even an ~~under~~ open air reading room.

The library name was chosen for its historical significance. It came from a tribe of Indians living in the area, the Cahueg-na; the name was then given to the Rancho Cahuenga, a Spanish land grant which included the Hollywood and Atwater area, as well as part of the Hollywood Hills.

The new library was opened on a cold, rainy Monday, December 4, 1916. In his address, the City Librarian, Everett Perry, proudly pointed out the modern features: books on open shelves accessible to all; "several thousand carefully selected volumes of children's literature", an auditorium "free to the people for meetings, subject to the very liberal regulations of the Library Board."

The original staff members were Fannie Dorman, Branch Librarian; Corrie Ziegler, Librarian; Gladys Glenn, children's librarian; Ralph Shaw, page; and George Champion, janitor. Library hours were from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M. Mondays through Saturdays, and 2-6 P.M. Sundays until 1922, when all libraries were closed on Sundays.

In 1917, a neighborhood survey was taken. The population was mostly white- and blue-collar Anglo; of 2017 families surveyed, only 58 were immigrants or non-white (Black and Japanese). The area was residential, with single family homes predominating. Commercial activities were limited to small neighborhood business. However, the growing movie industry was present; the Fine Arts Studios, where among other films "Intolerance" was made, occupied the site of the

present Safeway Market at Virgil and Sunset; Kalem Co. and Mabel Normand Studios on Hyperion near Fountain; and the William Fox Studio on Sunset Blvd. and Western Ave.

In 1919 and 1920, the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright designed Hollyhock House on top of Olive Hill, as it was then called, owned by Mrs. Aline Barnsdall. Mrs. Barnsdall, a wealthy philanthropist and early advocate of women's rights, wished to further the arts and later sold the entire property to the City of Los Angeles. This is now known as Barnsdall Park and houses the Municipal Art Gallery and the Junior Arts Center.

From the outset, Cahuenga Library was dedicated to community service. "I remember when they were rolling bandages in the Library Auditorium during World War I," says Mr. Raymond Thompson, a resident of the community since 1910, "and they used to have community sings every week." Over 100 people attended regularly until the influenza epidemic of 1918/19.

Educational programs for adults and children, music, lectures all formed part of the library resources. The year 1925 offered the following events:

- Gral Arts Club, weekly
- Hollywood Repertoire Co., rehearsals three times a week;
- Americanization classes, three times a week
- Boy Scout troop, weekly
- Western Rangers, boys' and girls' groups, weekly
- Music recitals
- Election board for city elections
- Post office for handling ~~strict~~ Christmas mail.

In 1925, the annual circulation of books was 160,153, with a book stock of 11,406. Miss Helen Cummings, a retired teacher and area resident since 1915, and whose father was one of the early farmers of the East Hollywood area, remembers especially the literary lectures and the child health programs given by Dr. Maude Wilde. "As a teacher, I was most interested in the literary and cultural programs of the

Library. I recall Miss Fannie Dorman, the first branch librarian, and the zeal with which she arranged interesting events."

Throughout the 1920's, the neighborhood became more built up. New residents included a community of White Russians who had come to America to escape the Russian Revolution, as well as Armenian refugees from Russia and Turkey. Both ethnic groups are still apparent today and form an active part of the library's readership.

The late 1920's meant further growth in the community. UCLA moved to Westwood, and the campus became Los Angeles Junior College. Across the street, on the East side of Vermont Avenue, a private institution, Chapman College, opened its doors. Cedars of Lebanon Hospital was built. Apartment buildings became more prevalent than single homes. With the increase in population came an increase in library use. The minority population was on the rise also; Blacks, Mexican-American and Japanese.

Then came the Thirties and the Depression which brought greater numbers of people to the library than ever before or since. By 1933, Caluenga Library had an annual circulation of 375,317. People who lost their jobs had more time to read; they studied to prepare for new careers; or found the library just a place to go. More library staff and more space was needed to serve the readers, and the active community programs became victims of the Depression, not to be resumed until 1971.

The 1930's also saw phenomenal building activity. Silver Lake Reservoir was completed, and around it arose one of the finest ~~architectural~~ residential neighborhoods in Los Angeles. World-famous architects such as Richard Neutra, Rm M. Schindler, Ralph Soriano, and Gregory Ain built houses admired even today for their beauty and advanced design.

The 1940's brought World War II and the post-war era. During the war, part of the library building was used for civil defense. The Cahuenga Library was severely affected by population and employment changes.

The branch librarian, Mrs. Anna-Marie Hook, gave the following reasons for a decline in circulation from 281,000 to 180,000 during the war years:

1. Enlistment and draft, affecting L.A. City College enrollment;
2. Evacuation of Japanese residents;
3. Continued increase in employment;
4. Nightly black-outs.

The ethnic grouping at that time was described as "the average American people, living in modestly comfortable homes, and while not watching their pennies too carefully, they are not spendthrifts."

Some Black families, living nearby, were also library users.

The Hollywood Freeway was built from 1947 to 1949 and affected the area served by the Cahuenga Library considerably. Many dwellings were razed, and the inhabitants had to relocate in other areas. The Dayton Heights School, one of those served by the Library, lost a larger percentage of students than any other.

The 1950's carried with them new construction and renewal. New hospitals were built and old ones refurbished; L. A. City College initiated an eight-year building program. A few new apartments were built, but hardly any single homes.

The library stayed on an even keel until 1957, when the so-called "student explosion" occurred. After the Russians launched their first space satellite, Sputnik, a tremendous drive for more education and learning hit the schools and libraries. Cahuenga too had to make great efforts to meet the student demand resulting from American zeal to catch up with the Russians. This occurred in 1961.

With the 1960's, more rapid changes began to occur in the composition of the neighborhood. The transiency rate increased. As the white population gradually moved to the suburbs, they were replaced by oriental, Spanish-speaking and Black residents. The Library at first found it difficult to give the new patrons what they wanted and needed, but as time went on, materials on citizenship, do-it-yourself projects, and languages other than English became available.

The building of the shopping center below Barnsdall Park and the expansion of the one at Vermont and Santa Monica formed a nucleus of activity. However, they had little direct influence on the Library; Alhambra was used because the patrons felt a need for it, not just because it was there.

The 1970 census revealed that 53.3% of the area residents were either foreign-born or had foreign-born parents. More than 25% spoke Spanish as their native language; more than 20% were Orientals: Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Thai. There was a sizable Arab population and natives of Russia, France, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Poland. The Black population comprised about 5% and centered around the area directly adjacent to the library.

Since then, there has been a large increase in the Oriental, especially Korean and Filipino population. New immigrants from Russia, mainly Armenian and Jewish, are also evident. The Arab population has decreased, while Armenians from Arabic-speaking countries are on the rise.

The health industry is a major factor in the area. There are 5 major hospitals, 13 convalescent homes, and 2 public clinics. Also the Braille Institute, a constantly growing institution.

In the early 1970's, the Library began to change its image. In order to be more useful to the neighborhood, it began an outreach program. Ethnic factors were taken into consideration, and the character of the area as a melting-pot was recognized. East Hollywood became the place where many newly arrived immigrants found their first home and began the difficult task of adapting to life in America.

From 1971 to 1974, Cahuenga Library received funds from the Federal Government to extend its services to those who previously had not been library users. A multi-lingual staff included persons fluent in Spanish, German, Russian, Persian, Armenian, Arabic and Chinese. Classes in English as a Second Language and citizenship were begun, and frequent programs of movies, live entertainment, lectures and festivals drew large crowds. Crafts classes and bus trips took children into the wider world. Patients in convalescent homes were served with book deposits and film programs to brighten their often dreary lives.

A volunteer program of service to shut-ins gave personal attention to those who due to age or infirmity were unable to leave their homes.

Even though Federal funding had ceased, the library staff is maintaining many programs. Film series, children's activities, and service to shut-ins are carried on, as well as movies for convalescent home residents. Special attention is given to the needs of foreign-born patrons. Although the English classes moved to a nearby church, books, dictionaries, foreign language records and deposits of films in eighteen languages are available. Special material for learning English for adults and children can be found.

Throughout the years, Cahuenga Library has striven to provide the best and friendliest service and the most complete book collection its budget will allow. The mainstay of its public, college students, high school, junior high and elementary pupils, senior citizens, and anyone desiring information or just a good book, is made welcome. ~~and~~ Over the past sixty years, Cahuenga Library has earned its place as one of the focal points of the East Hollywood community.