

HISTORY OF RICHARD HENRY DANA BRANCH
LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY
1912-1936

The Richard Henry Dana Branch had its beginnings in deposit stations, established in 1912. The first was in the Loreto Street School where it was supervised by Miss Jessie Gearhart, Principal of the school, assisted by the members of the Parent-Teachers' Association. Another station was started in the Aragon Avenue School under the direction of Miss Jessie Crandall, Principal, with the teachers acting as custodians. There was still another station at one time in the car barns of the Los Angeles Railway where the widow of a street-car conductor was paid by the company to act as custodian.

After some six or seven years of service through deposit stations, it was decided to establish a separate public library branch with a trained librarian in charge. Through the efforts of Miss Gearhart and other community workers, a store building was rented at 507 W. Ave. 28, just off Dayton Avenue. Here the library was opened on October 11th, 1920, and named the Dayton Branch. The circulation for the remainder of the year from October 11th to June 30th, 1921, was 12,651. Miss Emily Richie, a senior attendant, formerly of San Diego, was in charge of the branch for the first year, followed by Miss Bessie Markson for one month, then by Mr. Hubert Frazier who acted as librarian from October 1921 until October 1923. Miss Cora E. Wise was sent from Arroyo Seco Branch to fill in until the first of November 1923 when Miss Esther Thompson of Detroit became librarian. The circulation for the year 1922-23 had increased to 30,024.

Miss Reba Dwight was first in charge of children's work at Dayton Branch, supervising this and nine other branches. In October 1921, Mrs. Anna-Marie Hook was made additional supervisor in sub-branch work. In February, 1922, Miss Dwight resigned to take a position in Hilo, Hawaii. The vacancy was filled by Miss Gladys Crowe until October 1922 when the children's work was reorganized and Miss Frances Matchette was assigned to be in charge at Edendale, El Sereno, and Dayton Branch libraries. During the year 1923-24, we find the children's work taking on new importance, a phonograph having been sent for use in music appreciation hours and the Aragon and Loreto Schools making posters for display in the Library. Appeals started coming in for a new library building on account of lack of facilities in the building, poor ventilation, lighting, etc. During this year, there was a gain of 13% in circulation, making the total 33,889.

The year 1924-25 witnessed an entire change of staff. Miss Esther Thompson was transferred to Moneta Branch as Senior attendant, and Miss Dolly Bright became branch librarian with Miss Hope Hendryx in charge of juvenile work. A half-time junior and part-time page were also added to the staff. A campaign for bonds was carried on throughout the city, this branch and community assisting as much as possible for it meant new buildings for many branches. The campaign and contacts made formed closer ties and sympathy between the public and the library. The gain in circulation this year was 31%, making a total of 44,603.

There were changes in staff again this year, Miss Hope Hendryx being replaced by Miss Marie Pinney of Cleveland who did some very fine work with the schools and organizations in the district. After a few months she was transferred to Vermont Square Branch and her place filled by Miss Arthur who finished the year and helped greatly in building up the children's work.

During the year, there was much anticipation of the new building which was now a definite thing of the near future, and the name of the branch was changed to Richard Henry Dana in honor of the famous author who sailed around the Horn and visited California in the early days.

During the year 1926-27, there was a number of changes in staff, Miss Lillian Locklin becoming the first half-time children's librarian in September. She was transferred, however, in May, and Miss Althea Jillson became the first full-time Children's Librarian. At this time also, Miss Katherine Lake became junior attendant, and Mr. C.H. Lewis was added to the staff as janitor. The new library building at the corner of Pepper and Romulo Streets was opened to the public on May 3rd, 1927. The style of the building is simple Colonial and the details, such as lights which resemble ship lanterns and two porthole windows, are in keeping with the name of the Library. A picture of the ship in which Richard Henry Dana sailed was obtained through the Houghton Mifflin Publishing Company and was taken from an original painting in the Dana home. The whole atmosphere of the library is restful and harmonious, and a cool green patio opening off the reading rooms adds charm and beauty to the building.

This first year in the new building proved to be most pleasant and profitable. The gain in circulation some months was as high as 75%. Intensive work was done with the children as that seemed the best way to advertise the library. Every class from every school visited the library and regular story hours were held with many special features. A Parent-Teachers' meeting held at the library in December and followed by a tea served by the library staff was very successful. There was an average gain of 42% in circulation this year, making the total 94,857.

The year 1928-29 saw the work carried on as in the preceding year with a very successful Book Week and numerous exhibits arranged for the children. Boys' Day and Girls' Day were celebrated for the first time with good speakers for both occasions. The discipline problem was successfully coped with through the co-operation of Miss Jessie Crandall, Principal of Aragon School, who was always a loyal friend of the library. Circulation this year was 99,905.

In 1929-30, the branch was opened on Saturday afternoon and evenings, causing a complete change in schedule. Publicity received an impetus this year through the North Los Angeles News and a slide, advertising the library, which was shown at the new Arroyo Theatre. A special feature of this year's children's work was the organization of a book club among the better readers of the upper grammar grades. Miss Bright resigned on March 31st to be married, and Miss Jillson was left as acting librarian in charge of both adult and juvenile work, assisted by a senior attendant, Mrs. Hendrickson,

who stayed three months and was followed by Miss Helen Scheid who worked during July and August. Both were very capable assistants. On September 1st, 1930, our senior assistant was transferred, and Miss Mildred Gang was added to the staff as Children's Librarian. Miss Gang took over the work with energy and enthusiasm and made some fine contacts with the schools and various organizations. Miss Weamena Gill, as junior assistant, and Miss Theodora Valdez, as page, proved to be capable and conscientious workers. Reading tastes of the public seemed to be changing this year, many of our patrons becoming more and more interested in the new non-fiction titles and lists which were put out in attractive and popular form. Miss Haines' lecture held in the library in May was an outstanding event of the year and well attended by an appreciative audience. Circulation this year increased to 120,570.

The year 1931-1932 showed a nice increase in circulation and a building up of a more intellectual class of patrons. Many interesting contacts were made with the Parent-Teachers' Associations, the event of the year being the Mother's Day program given at the library early in May. A play presented by the boys and girls of the Book Club was thoroughly enjoyed by the mothers present. At this time, we had an opportunity to discuss the need for a community center for children with Mrs. Weber, President of the Community Improvement Association. New shelving placed at the right of our entrance to form an aisle in front of the desk proved of great assistance in supervising patrons and reducing book theft. Our staff remained unchanged this year, and circulation increased to 125,182.

Except for a change in page personnel, our staff has remained the same during the past three years. The peak of circulation was reached in 1933, the total for the year being 131,478. Many interesting contacts have been made with the different community leaders - Mr. Stanley George, the pastor of the Cypress Park Presbyterian Church and the Presidents of the various Parent-Teachers' organizations.

A library Book Club for adults, organized in October, 1933, has grown into an informal discussion group where book reviews are given, the lives of authors and their works discussed, and a number of interesting speakers have given impetus to the meetings. Mrs. Hyers, Library Publicist, and our first speaker, gave a most instructive talk on "What to Expect in a Book Review". Later in the year, Mrs. Virginia Bartlett, author of the Mistress of Monterey, delighted the club with a humorous and original dissertation on the trials of being an author, emphasizing her interest and research in early California history. Mrs. Tilly, a cousin of Sigrid Undset, entertained us at one of our meetings, showing pictures of her home in Norway and the famous church mentioned in Kristin Lavransdatter. Mrs. Gardiner of the Eagle Rock Branch Library gave some splendid reviews at one of our meetings, and Mr. Robin Lampson, author of Laughter out of the Ground, read excerpts from his novel and regaled us with stories of early Gold Rush days.

The long-felt need for a community center was met by the opening of the Poplar Playground in the spring of 1934. This playground, located at the corner of Pepper Avenue and San Fernando Road, two blocks from the library, is under the capable direction of Miss Helen Pontius. Supervised physical culture, games, dramatics and parties have done a great deal for the young people of this community. Miss Pontius has presented several plays in the library patio and visits the library often, leaving announcements and posters to be displayed, and we in turn advertise the library at the playground through book jackets, lists, etc.

Closer co-operation with Franklin High School was effected by a personal visit of the Branch Librarian with Miss Hodgkins, the Vice Principal and members of the faculty. Publicity has been secured through monthly lists sent to the Southern Pacific offices and articles to the Lincoln Heights Review, a Bear Market advertising sheet, the only paper distributed in this community. We also send notices occasionally to the Weekly Chronicle, a paper published in Glassell Park, which reaches some of our patrons.

Beginning with 1934, circulation began to drop due to the fact, we believe, that, after several years of unemployment, our patrons were returning to work and, therefore, had less time for reading. Decreased book funds also may have had an effect on circulation. It is interesting to note that circulation this year has reached the level of that of 1928-1929, the year which marked the beginning of the depression era.

Althea Wilson
Branch Librarian.