

## WILSHIRE BRANCH LIBRARY

### SIGNIFICANCE:

The Wilshire Branch Library is significant for design and cultural reasons as one of the largest branch facilities built with the funds provided through the 1925 bond referendum; as an excellent example of regional design from the 1920s era; and as one of a handful of public/institutional buildings designed by the architect Allen Kelly Ruoff, a prominent local architect during the 1920's known primarily for his residential design work.

The Wilshire Branch Library was completed in 1927, and officially dedicated at a ceremony on August 1, 1927 where Everett R. Perry, Head Librarian and administrator of the Los Angeles Library system, and Orra E. Monnette, president of the Library Board, officiated. As one of the largest and more costly branch facilities, the library enjoyed a showcase status, a photograph of it serving as a kind of frontispiece for Everett Perry's 1928 Hand Book of the Branch Libraries. The completion of this facility also represented the last phase of a vigorous campaign on the part of the Library Board to expand public service through construction of branch libraries between 1911 and 1926. As such, the completion of the Wilshire Library is the architectural embodiment of a phase of local and national history when public libraries served an even greater public education role than they do today. This importance is suggested by both the liberal policy of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation in funding library construction, and by the overwhelming support in Los Angeles expressed in the passage of several bond issues to fund library expansion.

In architectural terms, the Wilshire Branch Library is an excellent example of its style (Italian Romanesque Revival), and reflects the popularity of Mediterranean inspired architecture during the 1920's and 1930's in Southern California. The library is also a precise translation of library design guidelines developed by the library for its branch facilities by the mid-1920s: separate adult and children's reading rooms; provision for expansion of the collection; a patio area for outdoor reading during the warmer summer months; appropriate staff facilities; a centralized circulation desk; and a small meeting room for community use. The building fulfills these requirements while being thoughtfully adapted to its small site. The library is also noteworthy for the masterful way in which it plays formal design notions associated with public structures against informality of treatment--a result probably expressing both the Library Board's and the architect's objective of giving the building a formal character appropriate to the scale and tone of the adjoining buildings in its residential setting.

The architect, Allen Kelly Ruoff (1894-1945) came into prominence locally during the mid-1920s as a designer of homes, many of them in the popular Mediterranean-revival styles of the era. Henry F. Withey's Biographical Dictionary of American Architects discusses Ruoff, specifically mentioning the Wilshire Branch Library as one of the architect's major non-residential works. Ruoff is also listed in Who's Who in Los Angeles County (1924), a further indication of his professional and social standing. Among the architect's residential work the Walter P. Story House, and the E. T. Williams House (done in partnership with A. C. Munson) received national attention through their publication in the Architectural Digest. Ruoff also

wrote articles on residential design for the Los Angeles Times (mid-1920s).

In summary the Wilshire Branch Library is an architecturally and culturally significant property representing an important phase in the development of the current Los Angeles Public Library System. It is an excellent example of regional design from the 1920s era, and is notable not simply for its adept siting on a difficult site but as a major work of a local architect who reached his peak of his prominence during the period.

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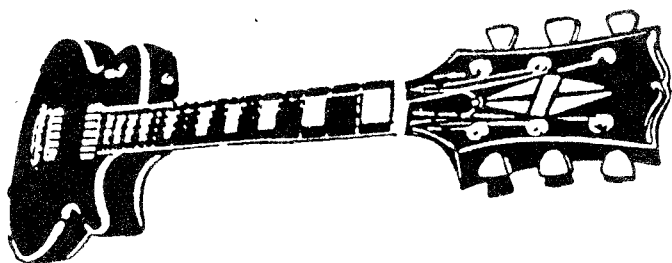
DESCRIPTION:

The Wilshire Branch Library is a one-story Italian-Romanesque structure loosely L-shaped in plan. It is of concrete tile and brick construction. Secondary architectural materials include off-white colored stucco sheathing and carved tufa stone trim and decoration. The building is surmounted by a low-raking mission-tile hip roof. The building's asymmetrical plan is expressed on the building's principal facade. The entry is not at the center, and the window openings are not symmetrically arranged, though in balance with one another in an informal sense. The windows, balcony, balustrading and entrance details are the primary decorative elements on the exterior of the building. The principal facade is five bays across, with its window/door openings in loose balance with one another. The doorway is the most noteworthy feature of this facade. It is Lombardic Romanesque in spirit, and is based on the design of the Portal of Costanzo, Perugia Cathedral. It consists of paired panelled doors that are recessed within a shallow vestibule. It is framed by tufa stone carved panels containing animal and foliate motifs. The surround is capped above by a semi-circular shaped hood. Animal motifs continue in the decorative panels across the sweep of the hood.

The two principal window openings of the north elevation contrast with each other stylistically in a manner characteristic of vernacular structures in Italy that were remodeled over centuries of time. This treatment of historic style which juxtaposes contrasting elements within an asymmetrical context serves to soften the lines of the building, and to adapt the building in a harmonious way to its small lot in a residential setting. The eastmost window is framed with architrave and cornice mouldings, in a manner characteristic of Renaissance design. The St. Andrews facade is divided into two wall planes. The wall enclosing the east end of the children's room contains a single window that matches the Romanesque-style window on the building's north elevation. The wall of the clubroom is punctuated by a single semi-circular headed window which opens into a brick balcony. A stairway of concrete construction with a medieval-revival coping, provides direct access to the Clubroom space from outdoors.

Other identifying architectural features include the classical-style cornice, iron grillework, wrought iron wall lanterns and an attractive courtyard space for outdoor reading. The principal architectural feature on the interior (adult reading room) is a fireplace of Renaissance design. It is inscribed with the words, "Nec Nimis Prope Nec Nimis Longe" (neither too near nor too far) a probable reference to the service provided the public through the branch library construction programs of the 1910s and 1920s.

# MUSIC FOR KIDS



## James McAuley

presents

"The Guitar From  
Renaissance To Rap"

on

Wednesday, January 25  
3:30 p.m.

Everyone is welcome to this free  
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*This program is made possible in part by  
a grant from the City of Los Angeles  
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