

History of The Huntington Beach Public Library 1909-1975

from the dedication booklet for the Huntington Beach Library & Cultural Center, Saturday April 5, 1975

Beginning

From the beginning the Huntington Beach Public Library has been an illustration of citizen concern for the community and its future generations.

Shortly before the city was incorporated February 1909, the possibility of opening a library was brought to the attention of the Board of Trade by two citizens, R.W. Blodgett and Mrs. R.H. Lindgren.

Efforts of these two citizens aroused the interest of some local organizations and the Huntington Beach Women's Club called a mass meeting on February 15, 1909, to form a library association.

Library Association

This meeting resulted in a temporary organization being established and Mrs. Blodgett was asked to draw up a constitution and by-laws for the new organization. The first board of trustees consisted of Mr. A. W. Everett, Mrs. C. D. Heartwell, Mrs. Mary Manske, Miss Alma Wilson and Mr. A. L. Reed. Each member of this board represented a different group or interest in the city.

Once the Public Library Association was established, friends in the community began giving books and other necessary things and a home for the new library became a problem. The board decided to buy an old office building which was to be moved and Mr. Reed guaranteed payment of \$50 for the roofless building. Mr. S. E. Hearn agreed to allow the board to move the building to a lot at the corner of Walnut Avenue and Main Street for a nominal rent charge.

Community involvement in the new library was particularly noteworthy during this period. During the time the citizens and the library trustees were busy readying the new library the city was officially incorporated and a board of trustees, the forerunner of today's city council, was elected.

Community involvement

On June 14, 1909, the president of the Public Library Association, Mr. Everett, appeared before the city board and offered to turn over the library to the city. The subsequent agreement called for the city to set aside \$300 for the immediate use of the library, to assume its debts and to support the library with tax funds.

After Mr. Everett's appearance before the board, the city governing body enacted Ordinance 18, which established a public library. At this time, the city's board chairman, Ed Manning, appointed the first library board of trustees. Members of the first board were Mr. Everett, president; Mrs. Lindgren, secretary; Mrs. Manske; Mrs. Blodgett; and Ida Vincent.

First librarian

Shortly after the city acquired the new library, Elizabeth Singleton and two assistant librarians from Long Beach came to the city and catalogued the books free of charge. Their lunches and traveling expenses were provided by the Library Board of Trustees.

Edith Brown of Long Beach became the first city librarian in July, 1909. At that time there were 338 volumes in the library, 228 were gifts while 110 had been bought new. The new library subscribed to twelve magazines and held hours of 10 a.m. to noon and 2:00 p.m. to 7 p.m.

In August, Mr. Hearn, owner of the property where the library was located, notified the Library Board that the library had to move by the end of the year. In January, 1911, the library was moved to the intersection of Walnut Avenue and 3rd Street.

Many improvements

Miss Andrews was granted a leave of absence from her librarian's job in March, 1911, and when she failed to return, Bertha Proctor was permanently appointed to take her place in May. At that time the librarian's salary was \$35 per month.

During the next few months there were many improvements to the library building and its surroundings but it was becoming more apparent that the need for a permanent library building was surfacing. The Huntington Beach Company offered the city a site provided a \$5,000 building was erected on the property. The Library Board began looking for the means to accomplish such an endeavor but the project was temporarily abandoned when no funds could be located.

Council aids

After some discussion, the Library Board decided to purchase four lots on the corner of Walnut Avenue and 8th Street at a cost of \$1900. The Library Board was able to come up with all but \$300, so the City Council provided the extra money and by May, 1913, the city had acquired a site for the proposed library.

Once the lots were clear and title was given to the city the Library Board in cooperation with the City Council, the Huntington Beach Women's Club and the Parent Teacher Association began gathering the necessary data to obtain a Carnegie Library building.



Carnegie Library

Carnegie Library

In February, 1913, councilmen received notification of the \$10,000 grant and they notified the Library Board to begin discussing plans for the new library.

In August, 1913, the Carnegie Corporation accepted the plans and W. D. Lambert of Long Beach received the contract. The cornerstone of the Carnegie Library was laid during a big ceremony. The history of the city, the library, names of all those who had served on the Library Board, city trustees, pastors of the churches, members of the Board of Trade, names of those who had served on the library staff, the name of each child in the schools and a small American flag were enclosed in the stone.

In a little over four years the number of volumes in the library had risen from 328 volumes to 2800 volumes, 700 of which were donated by residents of the city.

The main floor of the new Carnegie Library housed an adult reading room, a children's department and the librarian's office. The lecture room, a reference room and the furnace room were located downstairs. The Chamber of Commerce was located in the lecture room until 1921.

In order to be more responsive to community needs the Library Board decided to establish a reading room at 205 Main Street. The reading room was open the same hours as the main library, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. The reading room was used for a three-year period from 1928 until August, 1931.

Earthquake damage

In March, 1933, the Carnegie Library suffered considerable damage in the great earthquake which struck the area. The board authorized Catching Brothers Company to make the necessary repairs to the Carnegie building.

1934 saw the library lose its librarian of 23 years when Bertha Reynolds (formerly Proctor) resigned. She had seen the library grow from the small building at Walnut Avenue and 3rd Street to the Carnegie Building at Walnut Avenue and 8th Street, and now the library was outgrowing that facility.

A preliminary set of plans was submitted to the Library Board by Architects McClelland, McDonald, and Markwith of Los Angeles, but the advent of World War II held up construction until 1949.

Margaret Kemp served as temporary librarian until Floyd Jorgensen filled the job in 1937. When he left for the military, Lylyan Mossinger took over and served until 1959.

On Friday, July 13, 1951, the Carnegie Library closed its doors after almost 40 years of service. When the doors closed, the library had a total of 42,000 volumes.

On Sunday, September 30, 1951, the new library building at 525 Main Street was dedicated by Mayor Vernon Langenbeck. The library was built at a cost of \$140,000. Members of the Library Board at the time of the dedication were Pearl M. Jones, president, Berta Tovatt, J. K. McDonald, Edith Vavra, and G. H. Hasson.



Walter Johnson

The new Huntington Beach Library started its existence in 1967 when the Librarian Walter Johnson created a program citing the library needs for a growing community and the library board selected the Talbert Avenue site. The City Council then decided to place the library program on the ballot.

The issue failed on the election held on November 5, 1968. With approximately 62 percent of the vote in favor of the library, however, the council decided to fund the project through the creation of a Public Facilities Corporation and created a five-man corporation for this purpose.

The same body represented the city for the new Civic Center. Members are Dr. Dudley Boyce, Darrell Ward, Robert Polly, William Armstrong and Larry Curran.

Hire Neutra

Library Board members, wanting a first hand view, toured libraries in California that had recently been constructed and were of similar size. The board developed a list of some 35 architects that they were interested in considering and eventually narrowed it down to 17 whom they invited in for interviews.

Of the 17, the firm of Richard & Dion Neutra was asked to design the library. Shortly before the actual signing of the agreement, Richard Neutra passed away while on tour and his son, Dion, was retained to design the project.

The site had been selected because of its centralized location, both geographically and by population, and because of the natural beauty surrounding it. A ten-acre plot of land was purchased for the site, including part of Talbert Lake, and the ground breaking ceremony took place on October 28, 1972.



*Central Library and Cultural Center
dedicated April 5, 1975*