



THE HISTORY OF THE SANTA ANA PUBLIC LIBRARY

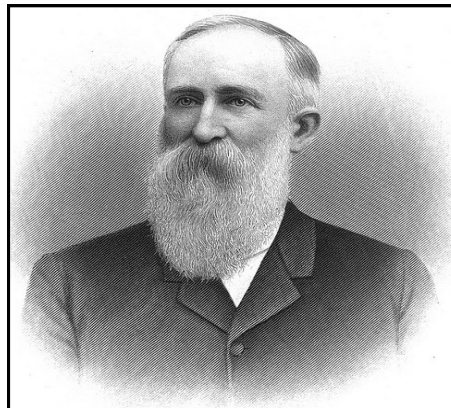


The history of the Santa Ana Public Library tells a story of a community working together toward a shared purpose, the spread of knowledge throughout the community.

In the 1890s, when the library was founded, the concept of the purpose of a public library was not yet fully formed. The importance of information and ideas was and is at the heart of every library; however, the value of reserving a central communal space and the forging of new ideas between neighbors within that space has become the core of the library in Santa Ana. It has inspired local culture, built robust communities, and nurtured ambitious leaders in the City of Santa Ana. The Santa Ana Public Library's history has involved people from all walks of life: land merchants and religious leaders, nineteenth century industrialists and working class men and women, bureaucrats, activists and rabble rousers. Through collective commitment from seemingly disparate people, their shared esteem for knowledge and vision toward achieving its accessibility to all people, the Santa Ana Public Library has become what it is today.

In 1869, Kentuckian W.H. Spurgeon, purchased land from the descendants of Spanish land grantee Jose Antonio Yorba. Santa Ana was incorporated as a city in 1886 with a population of 2,000 residents. Three years later it would become the seat of Orange County. Only ten years following incorporation, the Rev. H. I. Parker, remarked at a town meeting that "each person present had an interesting book which [they] could donate" and advocated for a communal circulating library. The community joined together in the Santa Ana Library Association and launched the library. Dr. J.G. Bailey contributed the first book "Habits of a Good Society." At its launch, only \$20 was needed to purchase and equip the library with furnishing, while membership fees were to be used for regular purchases of new reading materials. The library was located on 4th and Main street in a corner office of a real estate and insurance enterprise.

The up-and-coming library often served as a cultural hub, and its loyal staff and patrons have always been at the forefront of creative programming. When library funding ran short their hearts and minds nonetheless sustained the community's healthy thirst for experience and information. Through socials, musicals, and literary entertainment, librarians and staff managed to keep finances above water. One notable production of "Richelieu" was given a special fundraising matinee, receiving the substantial sum of \$100 in proceeds from enthusiastic patrons. The historical play from British writer Edward Bulwer-Lytton, portrays the life of seventeenth century French statesman Cardinal Richelieu, and originated the phrase "the pen is mightier than the sword." In the summer of 1892, through collective efforts



William H. Spurgeon 1829-1915

and in no small part due to the support of Mrs. J. S. Rice of Tustin, an entertainment was held netting \$344.15. This was added to a \$100 surplus collected from relocating after an earlier building lease had expired.

This change of venue moved the library to a more affordable, but more compact two rooms in the Hewey Block on 121 E. 4th street. Creativity and innovation in developing cultural enrichment, educational, and civic engagement programs has been the engine propelling optimal service for patrons.

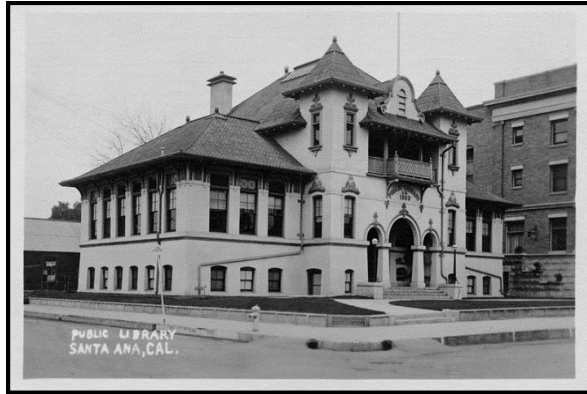
Over the course of its rich history, the library has been associated with several district owners, contributors, builders, architects, sponsors, land developers, and patrons, all of whom contributed to the same vision of maintaining knowledge to the benefit of their communities. In 1887, the founding Santa Ana Library Association was bought out by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, but by 1891, the WCTU officially transferred ownership to the City of Santa Ana, making the Santa Ana Public Library the oldest public library in Orange County.

Two years later, Miss Jeannette McFadden was appointed head librarian, and under her stewardship patronage steadily increased until its service demands required a new building to contain the book and meeting space needed to satisfy the burgeoning enthusiasm of local residents.

In 1901, Andrew Carnegie, the infamous steel magnate of the United States' nineteenth century industrial boom, allotted \$15,000 in donations to construct a new building for the Santa Ana Public Library, on the reasonable condition that each year the city raise 15% of the sum of \$1,500 for maintenance purposes. W.H. Spurgeon donated the



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The Santa Ana Public Library, Carnegie Library 1905

lot upon which the Carnegie Library was to be erected, and it was built with a Spanish Revivalist architectural motif. The impressive edifice stood on North Sycamore Street.

The Santa Ana Carnegie Library was completed in 1905, and stood resolute for the ten years following. Circulation rose quickly to 60,425 annually, averaging 5 books for each city resident! With such accelerated demand, additional loans from the Los Angeles Public Library, the San Francisco Library, and the State and Congressional Libraries were pursued. At all stages of its development, the Santa Ana Public Library has been a collaborative effort from individuals and institutions from across the country.

As history often demonstrates, good fortune seldom lasts. Shortly before six o'clock on March 10, 1933, the Carnegie Library trembled violently, alarming staff and patrons and sending pools of people streaming into the streets. This was, of course, the earthquake that has now been ranked as one of the major shocks of the Pacific Coast. Three deaths occurred and, though the building withstood the tremor with remarkable fortitude in contrast to surrounding structures, books were strewn from shelves, plaster was knocked from ceilings, and the roof withstood damage from debris that had fallen from the neighboring Elks Hall.

Though library services were temporarily displaced to provisional facilities, lagging patronage from the quake dissipated quickly, and by March 18, 1933, with refurbished, freshly-laid plaster, decorative floral arrangements, and other welcoming touches, patronage swiftly returned to previous levels.

In 1956, a \$700,000 bond issue for a new library building was approved by voters. The Santa Ana Public Library



Earthquake March 10, 1933. Downtown Santa Ana

Library Groundbreaking Ceremony was held in 1958, with local representatives standing by to christen the land upon which the library we know today would be built. The final cost for construction was \$805,000. On May 1, 1960 the 40,557 square foot structure was completed, located on the corner of Civic Center Drive and Ross Street, in the heart of Downtown Santa Ana.

In the new millennium, the Santa Ana Public Library continues its history of reaching out to academics, students, reporters, entrepreneurs, readers and everyone inspired by curiosity about the world they live in. Increasingly, the



The Santa Ana Public Library 1960



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library has pivoted to secure educational and informational resources for at-risk youth in a community where, for many, the acquisition of knowledge is more than a leisurely past-time. For these young people, knowledge can provide literacy, numeracy, and other essential skill development that connects young people with a wealth of opportunities and positive social and peer support. In a Los Angeles Times article from October 6, 1991, one journalist reflects on the continuing trend toward increasing youth services in libraries in light of climbing poverty rates and high youth demographics. “The goal is to attract more people, especially young students...It becomes even more important in Santa Ana where school drop-out rates are high...a library invites youngsters into the world of books. That can open the door to knowledge- and close the door to joblessness and poverty.”

In the new information and technology age, the Santa Ana Public Library is pursuing innovative and cutting-edge educational technologies for today’s youth, in order to propel this next generation into the future with confidence and skill sets that will be vital for the careers of tomorrow. The work of Santa Ana Public Library is never done so long as knowledge opens doors to opportunity, and library staff would have it no other way. Check us out, use our services, get to know your librarians, and be a part of history at the Santa Ana Public Library!



The Santa Ana Public Library wins recognition at the National Medal Ceremony for Museum and Library Service from the White House in May 2016