

Phebe Estelle Spalding



Above, a young Phebe Spalding as she entered Carleton College. Below, Phebe soon after her arrival at Pomona College.



One of the earliest and most important figures in bringing a library to Claremont was Phebe Estelle Spalding. Moving from New England into the Dakota Territory as a young adult, Phebe spent her early adulthood teaching grammar school, occasionally acting as school principal at various schools in the area. Achieving her lifelong dream of attending college, Phebe was admitted and received a scholarship to Carleton College in Minnesota in 1886, at the age of 27. Studying Literature, Spalding graduated in three years finishing as one of the top students in her class. In 1889, Spalding moved to Claremont, hired by Pomona College to teach Latin, German, English composition, and English literature. With her, Phebe brought over 200 books that would serve as a nucleus for the college's first library. With the role of librarian soon added to her growing list of her duties, Phebe was constantly brainstorming ways to improve the facilities, including using fines for rule and etiquette infractions as a way to raise money for new books. While Phebe Spalding's influence on Claremont and Pomona College in the early days was largely in a material sense, her attitude toward reading, education, and literature would also have a profound effect on the city of Claremont and the establishment of a public library.



Spalding was the first woman to receive a professorship at Pomona College.

Phebe was also a great author, writing many books, poems, and novellas. Several of these were printed by Saunders Press in Claremont.



Carnegie Library

In 1908 Pomona College and Claremont were graciously awarded a Carnegie Library. A gift from Andrew Carnegie himself, the library was designed by architect Franklin P. Burnham and constructed at a cost of \$50,000. The magnificent Classical Revival building allowed the college to have a permanent and beautiful structure on campus to house its many books, which thanks in part to the early college professors like Phebe Spalding, now numbered over 15,000 volumes. Townspeople from Claremont were welcome to use the facility, in fact a main reason the library was built was under the condition that it could and would be used by the public. The new library soon became very popular among students and townspeople alike, granting both parties a place to read, study, relax, and entertain themselves.

As per Willis Kerr in a talk to the Friends of the Library on May 23, 1957:

Before 1914 the Claremont Church provided books from the Sunday School Library conducted by Frank Pease. Claremont resident Myron Powell verified that when he was a boy, he used to get Horatio Alger books from the Sunday school library. A small booklet from the Historian of the Claremont Church printed in 1903 lists 134 books in the Sunday school library, most being non-religious books.



The Carnegie Library Building, a majestic example of Classical Revival architecture.

County Free Library Law of 1911

The County Free Library Law of 1911 was a major factor in allowing Claremont to open a free public library. A statewide law for California's individual counties, the County Free Library Law provided for the establishment and maintenance of branch libraries in parts of the county without regular public library service. The County library required each branch provide a suitable place to house the books and to hire a suitable custodian for one year. After the year was up the county would assume all expenses. The county too would furnish all reading materials and library supplies, covering any transportation costs of said materials. The books at the local county library were to be kept until no longer wanted or needed and then sent back to county headquarters to be redistributed among the other local county libraries. Finally, every resident of the community would be entitled to borrow books from the local library. In September 1912, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted in favor of establishing the law, allowing for libraries to open in Claremont and elsewhere throughout Los Angeles County.

Claremont Establishes County Free Library

Claremont residents were already very lucky to have access to a library with the opening of the Carnegie Library in 1908. However, the overwhelming popularity of the library among the locals soon made it apparent that Claremont needed a community library of its own. The approval of the County Free Library Law in Los Angeles County allowed Claremont to apply for the city's own facility. In December 1913, a joint committee was established to vote on an approval to open a county library for Claremont. Made up of representatives from the Men's Union, Women's Union, and the Mother's Club, with Claremont Grammar School principal Mr. Herbert Patten acting as chairman, the joint committee approved the motion and a county library would be opened the following year.

Herbert Patten, Claremont's Grammar School principle, was instrumental in bringing a County Free Library to Claremont.



Claremont's First Library

Following the approval of the Claremont Joint Committee and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, discussions about the opening of the new library began in January 1914. County library committee meetings were held at the home of F.W. Thomas, with the decision made to divide the town into districts with solicitors helping to raise money for the opening of the library. The committee decided that they would need to raise at least \$500 to cover the cost of hiring a librarian and paying for rent, lights, fuel, telephone service, and other incidentals. With this amount, the committee hoped to be able to keep the library open for a few hours each day. A room in downtown Claremont was found for rent for \$10, providing an excellent central local for the library. The east room of the Claremont National Bank on the northeast corner of Yale and 2nd was rented out and arrangements were quickly set in place to get the library up and running.



Located initially on the northeast corner of Yale and 2nd, Claremont's County Free Library was an instant success, despite only occupying a small rented storeroom. Below, images from the 1930s show the location of the County Free Library looking both North and South on Yale Ave. Moving across in the street in 1919, the County Free Library would remain on this block until 1929.

With a room in downtown Claremont found to rent and a whopping \$520 raised by the County Library Board Committee, arrangements were made to move into the room and to find a librarian. Books and furnishings were moved in during the first week of February 1914 and Mrs. Anna Robinson of the Sycamore Lodge was hired as librarian on a temporary basis, with former Pomona College librarian Miss Julia Steffa helping out during the first few months. The library officially opened on February 6, 1914, with Claremont becoming the 50th county library to open in the Los Angeles area under the County Free Library Law. Approximately 500 books and a few magazines were available and library hours were established: Mon-Wed-Fri-Sat. 3 to 5, and Sunday from 2 to 6.

Library's Popularity Increases

The library was a great success almost immediately. A statistic from 1914 shows 1,781 books lent out for the month of August, a great testament to the library's growing popularity for a city that at the time only numbered around 1,500 people. Meanwhile, new books were constantly coming into the library, including a large donation from Pomona College, which saw the Claremont County Library inherit over 1,000 books as the college was making room for new reference material. The following year the county took over the library and Anna Robinson was hired on as the permanent librarian, a position she would hold until 1939. The popularity of the library during its first two years and increasing circulation prompted many citizens to ask for a larger facility or even a Carnegie Library of their own. This question would be a recurring theme over the next ten years.



Interior view of the library at its original location. Identified are librarian, Mrs. Anna Robinson at her desk talking to Mr. George Sumner and Pomona College professor Merrill Jones, the man with moustache, 1914.

Library Moves to a New Location

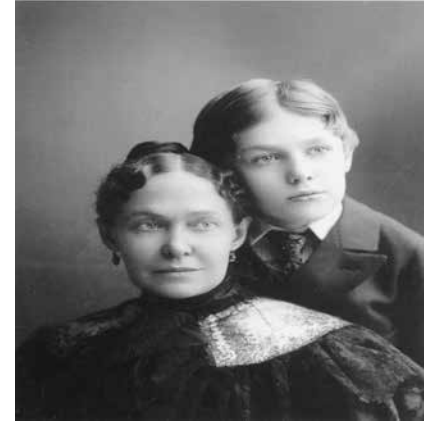
A few years after the opening, the Claremont County Free Library became more and more crowded for space. Citizens began to call for a new library, specifically a new, Carnegie-funded library building. Several Claremont Courier articles during this time mention possible donations from Carnegie, also proposing new facilities like a community center with swimming pool be added on, and even claiming representatives from Carnegie were coming to survey land for a suitable plot of land. In the excitement over a new facility, many news reports were in haste, with article claiming the \$20,000 needed for a Carnegie building was “almost a certainty” and “dead easy”. Unfortunately while the city council did forward their application to the Carnegie Corporation, it was never granted. By this time, the County Library was three years old with a circulation of 21,869 and two-thirds of the population holding cards by 1917. There was however to be a move on the horizon for the County Free Library. Perhaps not as glamorous as a brand new Carnegie library, the County Library did in fact move in 1919 to the southwest corner Yale and 2nd, in what would later become the Barrett’s Drug Store building, where it would remain for 10 years. The new site provided slightly larger facilities and allowed the library to host the occasional special event including Mrs. Robinson’s annual flower shows, San Antonio Library Club meetings, and book review sessions.



The move to a larger facility in 1919, allowed the library staff to put on special events, including Anna Robinson’s popular annual flower shows. The spaciousness of the new library allowed for an interesting setting for a flower show!

Claremont Gets a New Library

Despite not being granted a Carnegie library, excitement for a new library facility never left the hearts of Claremont residents and supporters continued to campaign for a new and larger facility. Beginning in 1926, the Claremont Chamber of Commerce returned to the question of opening a new library as a generous donation of land from Claremont resident Mrs. Helen Renwick provided the best chance for a new library in years. The plot of land donated by Mrs. Renwick was a 150 x 150 lot that sat on the northeast corner of 2nd and Harvard, behind her house, and provided ample space for a new library to be built. Mrs. Renwick's donation was held on the provision that a \$20,000 library would be built there within 10 years. In March of 1927, voters approved a bond election that provided \$25,000 for a new library building. Under the proposal, County would again pay for an operating library with the city of Claremont covering any addition costs. On May 26, 1927, the library bond was voted upon by the city and passed easily with a 441-71 vote. Work on the library plans was soon underway with the Marston & Marbury firm of Pasadena chosen as architects and John Strona of Pomona chosen as contractor to begin work in the Spring of 1928. The new library would be built in a Spanish Revival style with large reading rooms, including a children's room and fireplace, a heavily beamed timber ceiling, and a beautiful patio with brick tiles and a large fountain. The children's room was also very popular and considered a model for other libraries and included a beautiful tile decoration affixed to the fireplace depicting various fairytale characters. Work was completed in the summer of 1929 with the opening held in August. The library was opened to great fanfare with the library now holding 5,000 books and ready to serve 1,400 cardholders.. The new library was a great success, increasing circulation and providing the people of Claremont with a much-needed new facility.



Mrs. Helen Renwick, pictured here with her son William, generously donated a plot of land behind her house at Second and College (seen below) providing a suitable location for the library. The library building still sits on this plot of land today.

Claremont's New Library - Exterior Shots



Outside view of the new library - 1928 - right after the building was finished. The 1961 addition was built in the angle shown here.



Another outside view of the library taken from across the street on the Post Office corner. Not only is the new beautiful structure shown.



The beautifully crafted Spanish Revival building provided a wonderful setting for Claremont's new library. Complete with an open courtyard and fountain, the pristine facility would faithfully serve Claremont locals for several decades.



Claremont's New Library - Interior Shots



The new library building provided ample space for its patrons and created a relaxing environment for many of Claremont's voracious readers. The interior was beautifully designed and crafted, even containing a beautiful fireplace in the children's reading room.



Anna Robinson

Instrumental to the success of the County Free Library was Claremont's first and longest serving librarian, Mrs. Anna Robinson. Serving as librarian from the County Free Library's opening in 1914 until her retirement on February 4, 1939, Mrs. Robinson helped shape the success of the library in its early days. Initially appointed as a volunteer, Robinson became a paid library employee in 1915. Prior to her position as librarian, Anna worked at the Claremont Inn and was a well-respected member of the community. Mrs. Robinson lived a few blocks north of the library with her husband Lucius (a cabinetmaker) and her son and daughter. Those that knew her and visited the library described her as a very motherly and loving person, recalling fondly her love for detective books, the annual flower shows she hosted the library, and the large amount of books she obtained for the library on special request.



Mrs. Anna Robinson helping a guest in 1928.



Mrs. Robinson sitting at the charging desk in the new library building.

Vera Paul

Taking over as librarian after the retirement of Anna Robinson was Pomona College alumni, Mrs. Vera Paul. A graduate of Pomona College in 1917, Vera Paul received professional library training at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, later serving as children's librarian for the New York Public Library for two years (1919 – 1921), before returning to Claremont. Upon returning to Claremont, Paul did some newspaper reporting for the "Foothill News" and the "Claremont Courier" before replacing Anna Robinson as librarian in 1939. Like Mrs. Robinson before her, Vera Paul loved when her books were in circulation and business was booming, and also organized school visits to the library, summer reading programs, and art exhibits. Serving nearly for 25 years herself as librarian, Mrs. Paul retired on November 1, 1963, leaving behind a great career and wonderful impact on the community.

Claremont's Librarians After Vera Paul

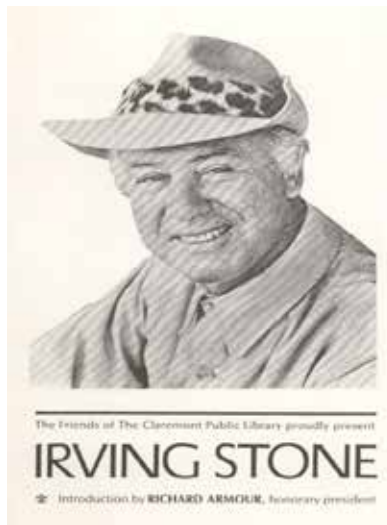
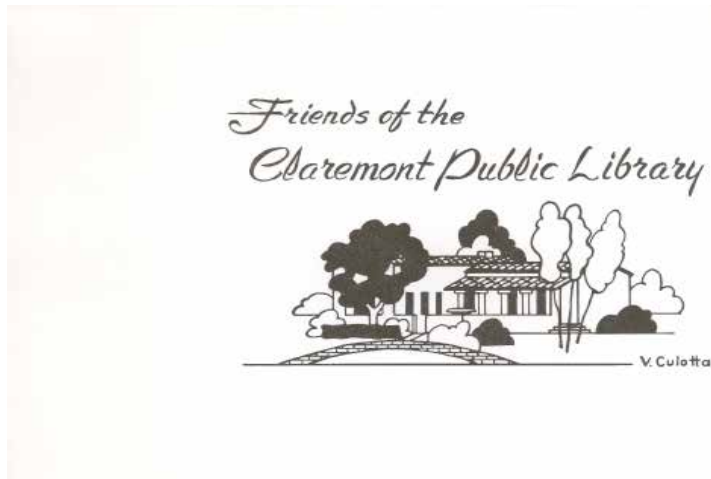
1964-1968 Unryu (Kay) Sugiyama
1968-1969 Martha C. Ainsworth (children's librarian 1961-1968)
1969-1970 Steward A. Robbins
1970-1981 Mary Haaker
1981-1985 Joan Jolly
1987-1996 John McClellan
1996-2002 Charles Kaufmann
2002-2004 Dan Golden
2004-2013 Don Slaven



Vera Paul's dedication to the Claremont library, especially her work with children and reading programs left a lasting impact on the community.

Friends of the Library

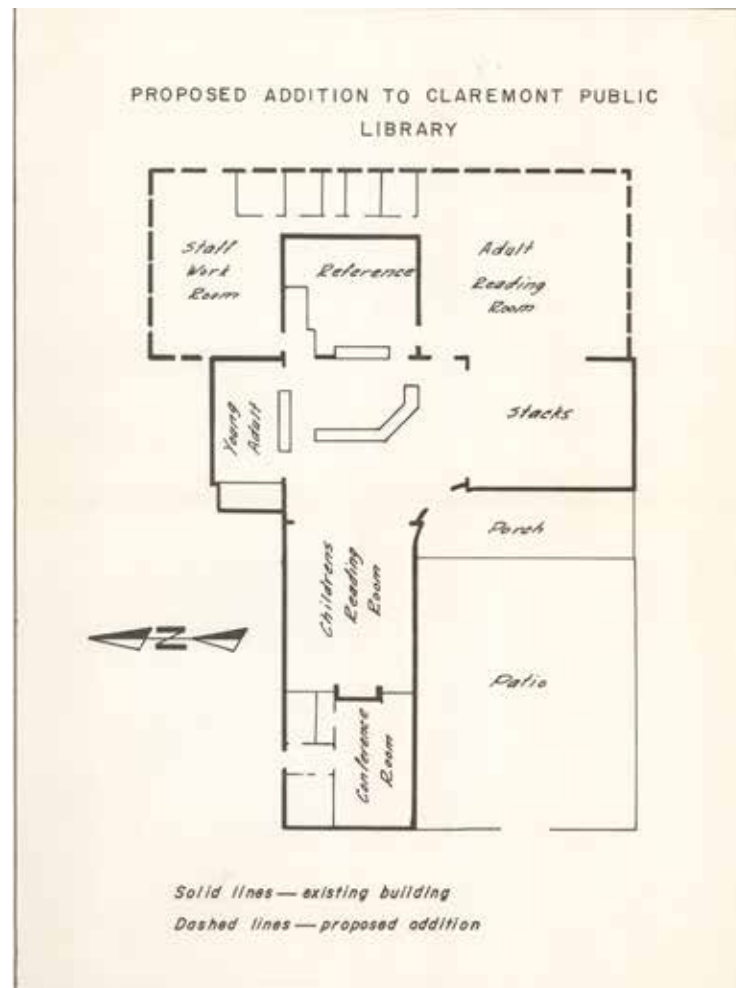
January 26, 1957 marked the establishment of the Friends of the Library group in Claremont. While other Friends groups would emerge in neighboring communities throughout Los Angeles County in the coming years, Claremont's Friends of the Library group was the first established, providing an example for these future groups to follow. Organized to support and assist the Claremont library, Friends of the Library contributed to bringing a closer relationship between the public and the library, through fundraisers, book fairs, and other special events. Founded by Mrs. Clarence Livingston, literature chairman of the Claremont Junior Women's Club, the beginnings of the club came about in an attempt to protect class visits of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders to the Claremont Library. Other founding members included Mrs. Ward Smith, Mrs. Eve Landis, Mrs. Cornelia Hull, Mrs. Joyce Brown, Lyman Carney, and Willis Kerr. Throughout the years the Friends have helped to enrich the library, organizing special events with authors and guest speakers, providing fundraising for the library in times of financial strain, and lending any other support that the library might need. The Claremont Friends of the Library Group is still going strong today continuing its passion and dedication to maintain the integrity of Claremont's library.



The Friends of the Claremont Library kept Claremont residents informed about all library activities and special events through newsletters (above) and promotional flyers. To the left, a 1971 flyer promotes author Irving Stone's visit to the Claremont Public Library.

Library Expansion

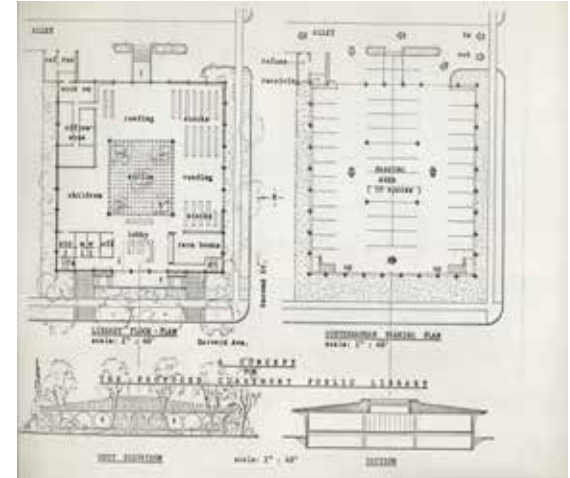
By 1958 the library was again getting too small to serve Claremont's ever growing library patrons. The same library building had faithfully served the Claremont public since its opening in 1929, yet over the decades much had changed. By 1960, Claremont's population had increased to 12,600 from 2,500 when the library was opened. Likewise, the library's book stock had increased from 4,800 to 22,900 volumes. Space was so limited, books had to be stacked on top of bookcases, in hallways, and on tables. It was apparent that the library needed some renovations. By 1958, the overcrowding became so serious that the Claremont Coordinating Council met with Friends of the Library president, Mrs. Dwight Brown to discuss what changes could be made. Claremont asked the county for financial assistance for the remodel and expansion of the library. The county agreed to help, underwriting the first stage of the expansion and prepaying \$44,500 in rent for the new building. Criley McDowell was hired on as architect to oversee the project with the renovations being completed in 1961. The enlarged and expanded library was formally dedicated on March 5, 1961 with the additions nearly doubling the library in size from 3,069 to 5,450 square feet. A young adult room was added (one of the first of its kind), as well as a room dedicated to longtime library employee Anna M. Robinson. Shelving capacity also increased to 35,000 books and new furniture and equipment were brought in.



Schematic drawings showing the 1961 additions to the library.

Call for a New Library

Despite being recently renovated, the ever-growing population of Claremont led many to again call for a completely new library just three years later in 1964. Throughout the next four years, various locations were suggested as a site for a new and larger library. Some locations included the northwest corner of Baseline and Indian Hill, Cahuilla Park, and Memorial Park, all of which were denied. Ideas for two separate libraries one in the Village and another in northern Claremont were also discussed, however these too were rejected. Eventually it was agreed that a library would not be built elsewhere, rather the existing library would be razed and a completely new building would be built allowing the library to remain in a central location in the Village. In August 1968, terms were agreed upon with the county, where a new library would be built on a site provided by the city. In January 1969 a library committee was approved by the city council and established to enter into negotiations for a new building. The committee was made up of members from the community serving four-year terms and would deal in all library-related activities, including working with the city council on library proposals, improving library services, and taking in suggestions from the community for a library that would fit the citizen's needs. In March 1970 after much debate and a failed bond package, the city council was able to reach an agreement with the help of the library committee, to begin the process of constructing a new library facility. The library committee's agreement with county for a new library was voted on by the city council and passed, with the library to be built on its present site with additional land to the north leased from Pomona College. Entering into an agreement with the county, March 1971 saw the Joint Powers Committee deciding to issue revenue bonds and go ahead with the construction of the library. The library land was leased to the county with rental payment from the county library funds servicing the bonds. In May, Los Angeles County paid Pomona College \$125,000 for land to the north and schematic drawings were submitted. The process of constructing a new library building was finally underway.



Proposed Two Level Library

Pictured here, an early schematic drawing from 1966 shows a proposed two-level library, which would have replaced the old library building. Including subterranean parking, the proposed building would have been roughly 15,000 square feet. The building was never approved with a new library building chosen several years later.

Construction of the New Library

Plans for the new library began in September of 1971, yet a unified decision over the style of the building could not be agreed upon. Throughout the following year library plans were redrafted, as the Architectural Commission was not happy with the drawings that were submitted. Chairman William Abbott noted that it looked like a fortress, failing to relate to the outdoor space, instead Abbott preferred an “airier, pavilion-type structure”. Revised plans showed large windows in the adult reading room, yet there was still much disagreement over the new building amongst Claremont citizens, especially when a historically and architecturally beautiful building such as the library was being replaced. It was no easy decision. However, in June 1973 final working plans were approved by the city council to go ahead with the construction of the new building. September 8, 1973 saw the closing ceremonies of the library, which had stood there for almost 50 years, and the city of Claremont turned the land over to the county to begin construction. The young architectural firm of Hutner and Appel of Beverly Hills were selected by the county to undertake the job with the estimated the library cost at \$760,000. Destruction of the old library began in January 1974 with the new library’s construction soon to follow.



Top Left, County Supervisor Peter Schabarum (second from right) and Claremont Mayor Mrs. Bertye Smith pose with plans for the new library. Top Right and Below, Demolition begins on the old library building, including the removal of ginkgo trees from the premises.



New Library Completed

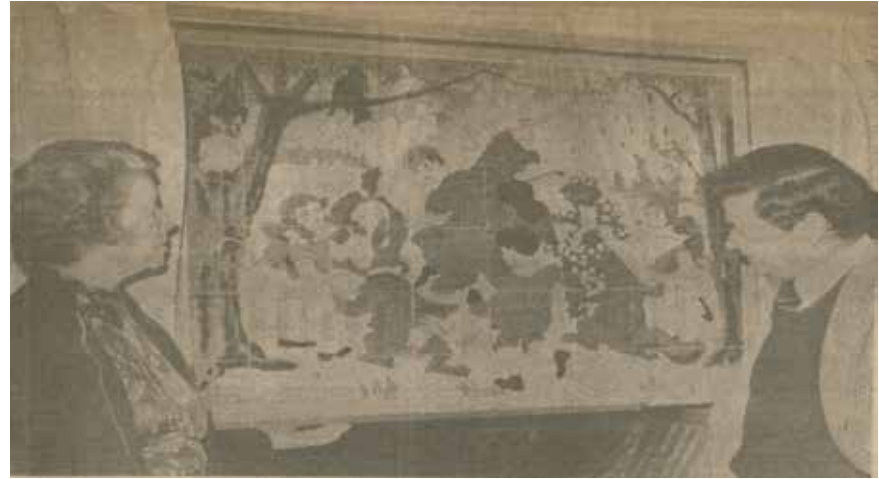
Articles from this time capture the sense of disagreement over the library design, which was still a prevalent issue. The relatively young partnership of Larry Hutner and Dick Appel had never worked on a government building before, instead designing hospital and industrial facilities. Some issue was raised over the choice of Hutner and Appel who were not even on the list of approved architects, however Architectural Commission chairman William Abbot stated, “Basically you can’t fault them, they are competent people, we wanted a lighter building, this was a compromise.” Sharon Hightower, director of planning, too was against the design feeling that the design problems were to be blamed on county policy. The overall consensus of complaints noted the library was “too heavy in mass” and looked like a fortress. The architectural commission eventually gave reluctant approval to go ahead with construction.



Construction and completion of the new library building, 1974-75.



The razing of the old building also brought about problems and questions of historic preservation. Sadly, the beautiful Spanish revival building was destroyed, but there were other historically significant objects saved from a similar fate. For example, the beautiful patio fountain was saved from destruction and given to Mt. View Elementary School for their campus. Also saved from complete destruction was the children's mural. Apparently an uniformed workman began to remove the mural with a sledgehammer, but the man was stopped in time and the mural was able to be salvaged. The mural was purchased for \$125 from the Gladding and McBean Company of Pasadena in 1925 and was appraised at a price of \$2,000-\$3,000 in the late 1970s. Thankfully, the 1200-pound mural was repaired for \$600 complete with a new concrete backing. Highlighting the seemingly haphazard destruction of the old library building, city records were found in the rubble of the razed building. With the loss of Spanish Revival library building and the carelessness of the workers in dealing with pieces of Claremont history, the question must be asked if these events provided awareness of the importance of historic preservation for Claremont residents going forward.



The children's mural was saved from destruction and refurbished beautifully.

Left, a tree removed from the library site is replanted in Memorial Park. Right, the old library's courtyard fountain which was saved and donated to Mt. View Elementary School.



The new library was dedicated on April 4, 1975 with Mayor Bertye Smith and County Supervisor Peter Schabarum present. Heralded as a successful joint venture between the county and city, speeches were made by Richard Armour (Honorary President of the Friends of the Library) and Margaret Gibbs (acting President of Friends of the Library) to a great reception. Despite the controversial design and displeasure some held towards the new library, many citizens liked the added services and spaciousness of the new library facility. The new building stood four times the size of the old library at 61,000 square feet and had the shelving capacity for 100,000 volumes. The library now held 62,000 books with 400 magazine subscriptions and included many new features such as: an audio/visual center with listening stations, phonograph records, cassettes, and films for circulation; microfilm and reader; a multi-purpose meeting room and kitchen unit; and offered pre-school story time, summer reading programs, and school class visits.



Above, the new library soon after completion and again in 1994 (right). Bottom left, Barbara Lauterer and former children's librarian, Martha Ainsworth, stand among the shelves of the new library.



Claremont Public Library librarian Mary Haaker (1970-1981), enjoys the increased space of the new library facility.



Library Present

Since its completion in 1975, the Claremont Public Library has faithfully served the community granting the citizens of Claremont a place for reading, education, studying, and relaxation. Despite going through budget cuts in the late 70s and again in the early 2000s which saw staff and library hours limited, the Claremont Public Library has forged on, always supplying Claremont with a wealth of reading and multimedia material. 2014 saw the first renovation of the children's section with help from County Supervisor Gloria Molina and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and a generous donation of \$120,000 made by the Friends of the Claremont Library towards the renovation. 2014 also marks the centennial celebration of the establishment of the Claremont Library. A great and important resource for the city Claremont since 1914, the Claremont Library and its devoted staff and touched many hearts and lives. Here's to another 100 years of excellent service!



Loyal patrons enjoy the Claremont Public Library.

