

THE ALPINE SUN SHOPPER – December 5, 2013
Tattered Tidbits: Alpine Historical Society

BEYOND THE CORNER DRUGSTORE

The following article, *Community Spirit of Yesteryear Formed Foundation of Today's Busy San Diego County Library*, appeared in the 75th Anniversary edition of the San Diego County Library Connection and provides an excellent picture of how free libraries evolved in San Diego County. In honor of the 100th anniversary of the opening of the Alpine Library, December 22, it's fun to look back on its history.

“Once upon a time, a shopper could buy hair tonic, castor oil and cure-alls—and check out a book at the same time. Down the road a bit, members of the Women's Club could enjoy tea and cakes while reading poetry in the librarian's parlor. Or upon returning from a Mexican holiday, travelers could check out books while U. S. Customs Officers checked out their identities. Whether in the corner drugstore or the Customs House, the San Diego County Library had a colorful beginning.

It all started on May 5, 1913, when the Fallbrook Branch opened its doors. The Women's Saturday Afternoon Club had generously offered furnishings and a portion of a librarian's salary if the County would provide the books. Soon a small collection was set up in Jess Hardy's drugstore, and the owner himself doubled as librarian.

Only two weeks later, on May 19, Mrs. E. B. Flint converted the front parlor of her home into the Poway Library, a pleasant arrangement that lasted thirteen years. W. L. Crabb became the second druggist/librarian when the El Cajon Library opened in his pharmacy on May 22. Four days later, the Ramona Branch was established after residents requested a library for its 'benefit to our schools, our farmers and our townspeople.'

The busy month of May ended with Lakeside Hall becoming home to that library branch on May 30, and Librarian Gertrude Nelson's leadership spanned three full decades. A local clubhouse opened its doors to the Lemon Grove Branch on June 30.

The summer of 1913 passed before the La Mesa Library was established in the Women's Clubhouse on September 4, and the community of Alpine followed La Mesa's example on December 22. The local Library Association had offered to pay the rent and part of Librarian Alvin Wilber's salary only if the County would keep its books separate from the existing collection. Eventually, reassured borrowers agreed that the collections should merge. A few miles away, a County branch opened on that same December day in the mountain town of Julian. First housed in the high school, the Julian Library is now located in the 100-year-old schoolhouse that was, ironically, once the Witch Creek Branch of the County Library.

This exciting year ended successfully with the openings of the Bonita and Campo branches on December 30. The Sweetwater Country Club welcomed the Bonita Library, while the Campo collection was set up in the U. S. Customs Station at the Mexican border.

From those humble beginnings of 75 years ago, the busy San Diego County Library is rapidly heading toward the 21st Century. No one could have anticipated the advanced technology and information management systems of today's libraries back in 1913 when Jess Hardy checked out

books in his Fallbrook drugstore. Yet the original goal of providing equal, economical and complete library service to all residents of San Diego County is just as important in 1988.”

And.....25 years later, we can say the same! The Alpine Library was housed in the old Town Hall, now the Alpine Woman’s Club Building at 2156 Alpine Boulevard. The above article mentions librarian Alvin Wilber; however, Bea LaForce’s *Alpine, History of a Mountain Settlement*, describes Lawrence Wilbur as Alpine’s early librarian. Some of the original library shelves still line the walls in Gordon Mize’s State Farm Insurance office. Unfortunately, some of the original shelves were removed when the new restroom was added to the building.

Members of the Alpine Library Friends Association have served as advocates for the library over the years. Recently, several scrapbooks belonging to the Association were scanned and added to the Historical Society website. They can be viewed at www.alpinehistory.org; Historical Research, Alpine People and Places. Copies are also available for viewing at the museums on the last Saturday and Sunday of each month.

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