



## 440 West Sierra Madre Blvd The Sierra Madre Public Library 1955

By Caroline Thomas, Library Director  
2014

Photos within the history courtesy Caroline Thomas and the archives

The Sierra Madre Public Library has its roots in the early history of our City. The town's first settlers valued the arts and literature while local citizens took on an active role in building this new community. So, not long after the town was incorporated in 1886, the library was built in 1887 on the same lot that it stands today, 127 years later! Our library is the fourth oldest library in Los Angeles County and the tenth oldest library in Southern California

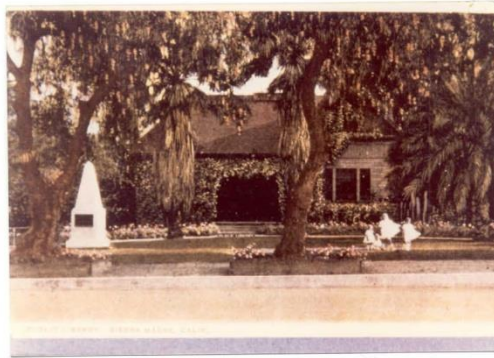
### Timeline



- 1887 The Sierra Madre Library was built on what was then called Central Avenue. Mrs. R.E. Ross donated the land in memory of her husband with an additional \$2,000 provided by her towards the building of the library. Professor Hart held violin concerts to benefit the library building. Forty families formed a Library Association to support the library. When it opened in summer 1887, the library had 600 books.
- 1910 City of Sierra Madre (1,805 residents) assumed responsibility.



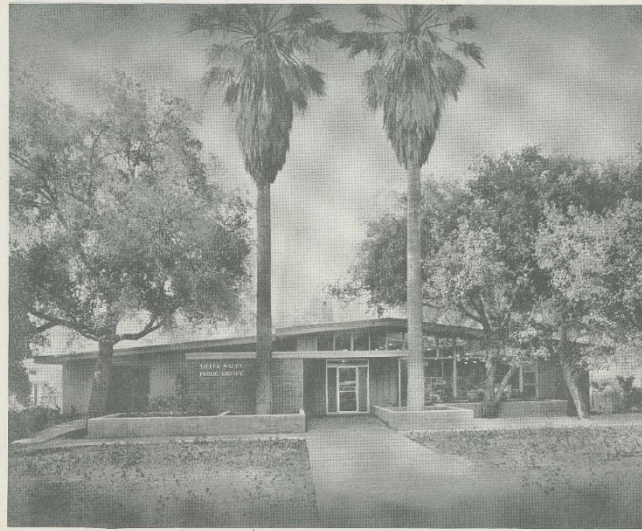
1915 Note the palm trees in front of the library! Still there today!



1930 Image of Library with obelisk (library postcard).

- 1940 City of Sierra Madre's population grew (4,581 residents) but World War II and lack of funding prevented construction during this time. The library building was inadequate to serve the community.
- 1953 Friends of the Sierra Madre Library was formed to raise monies to support the library.
- 1954 Funds to support a new library building were provided by the Tarr family who donated proceeds from the sale of a lot to support a building fund. City Council allocated \$10,000 for a bond to build a new library. A library building measure passed and provided \$40,000 towards the library building.
- 1955 The new library building was built by Robert Ainsworth, a well-known mid-century style architect who lived in town in a home he had designed. The library had 8,762 square feet – a main floor and basement, a community room with seats for 150, and a kitchen. Designed to hold 50,000 items both on the main floor and the basement, the library cost \$60,075. There were 8,752 residents in 1956.

Sierra Madre Public Library.  
Built 1887 Razed 1954 New Building 1955



1955 Memorial Children's Room

- 1960 24,404 books in the library.
- 1972 The lot behind the library, at 449 Mariposa, is deeded to the City of Sierra Madre with the hope of expanding the library.
- 1978 Effort to expand the library building due to overcrowded conditions was initiated, but funding was denied.
- 1981 Jameson Sierra Madre Room was built to accommodate rare books and local history materials.
- 1985 Walt Wesley Computer Literacy Center was added to the front of the library.
- 2008 Friends' Library Garden, resulting in an outdoor meeting space with patio seating, is dedicated.
- 2009-
- 2011 Wi-Fi installed, new HVAC system, new furniture and study carrel purchased. 10,917 residents in 2010.
- 2012 Rotary Children's Library remodeled and upgraded (in the former Community Room).

- 2013 Digital Storyboard to promote local history installed in Jameson Room and Richardson House. Teen Docent Program begun.
- 2014 Local History Room remodeled to create study space and room for archives. New door added to room. 71,467 materials in library. 11,023 residents.



Our library today is a busy and cherished resource in the community. Look at what we provide monthly:

- 5,000 items circulate
- 6,500 people visit
- 800 people log on to our public computers

In addition, the library offers 256 free programs a year for all ages with over 6,000 attending.

Originally designed to house 50,000 materials, the collection has grown to over 70,000 items. The Archives include books, maps, correspondence, oral histories, photographs and ephemera. Precious space has given way to house public computers, study space, reading areas and a small children's programming area. New collections such as eBooks, laptops, iPads, music cds, audiobooks, dvds, magazines and newspapers, and even an art collection are housed in the facility. Stop by to see for yourself how this library has been in the same place for the past century but has changed and created space and services for our community that truly make this library a treasure.