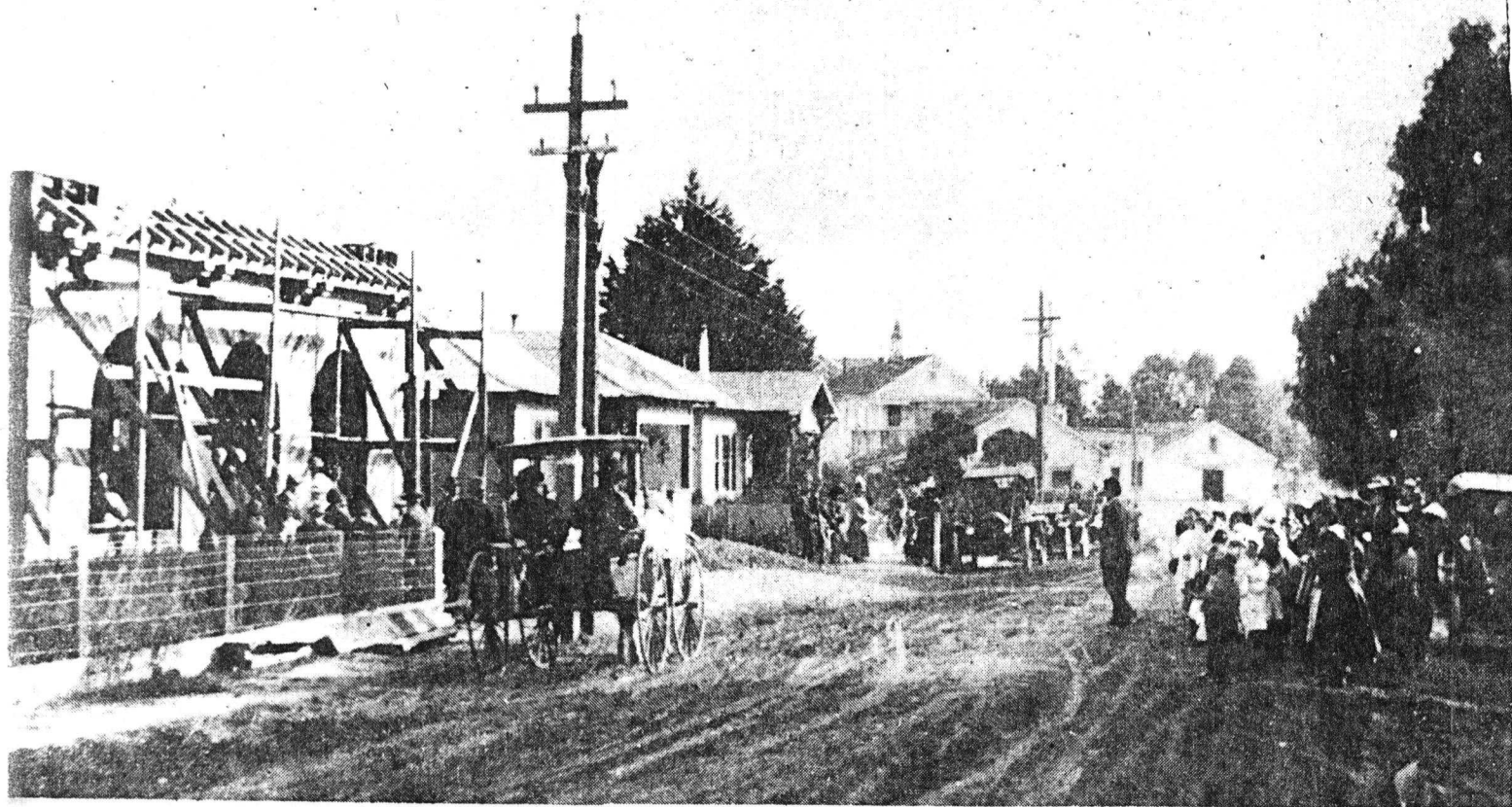


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The 1913 dedication of Porter Library "was a most joyous occasion."

Libraries - 1980 1989

## Porter Library's happy birthday

By CANDACE ATKINS

Oh, the stories those walls could tell....

Since 1913, the public library in Soquel has provided the local citizenry with reading materials, despite pesky termites, a caved-in roof, two floods and Proposition 13.

And on Sunday from 2 to 4 p.m., everyone is invited to celebrate the library's 70th birthday. In addition, the third anniversary (Feb. 2) of the independent, volunteer operation of the former branch of the Santa Cruz City-County library system will also be observed. The library is located at 3050 Porter St., Soquel.

Porter Memorial Library was founded in the American barn raising tradition — in September, 1909, the ladies of Soquel Improvement Club decided to establish a local library as their next project. Immediately, they went to work to obtain everything and anything necessary to open a library.

A site for the library was given by the Sesnon family, some books were donated by a Miss Forbes of Seabright, the County of Santa Cruz allowed \$600 for the library in the 1911-1912 budget. And the ladies in the Improvement Club organized a series of fundraisers, most notably, a "rose fair" that was reported in the Santa Cruz Surf as having, "a most worthy object, the Porter Memorial Library."

Within months, the library was completed, and dedication ceremonies took place Jan. 27, 1913. A story by Josephine Clifford McCracken in the Jan. 28, 1913 edition of the Santa Cruz Sentinel, described the event as "a most joyous occasion."

William T. Sesnon, who made the first donation to the library fund, a \$100 check, was orator for the ceremonies.

He said to the "large assembly:"

"To me, the occasion is not so much a dedication of the building as a dedication of the magnificent spirit that prompted its erection...I feel that this library will have a dominating influence on the whole community, bringing with it opportunity for all. It is up to you, ladies and gentlemen, to stimulate its use and derive the real benefits from it."

Seventy years later, Porter Library's operation still represents the caring and cooperation of local residents. Without them, Soquel library would be nothing more than a nostalgic memory.

The library was one of the first casualties of Prop. 13 — it was closed less than a month after the June, 1978 election. For six months, the library remained unused, but in January, 1979, it was reopened, only to be scheduled for what was sure to be a final closure in February, 1980. "That (closure) would have been permanent, no question," said Mona Blankholm, one of the library volunteers.

The library volunteer group started as a Friends of Soquel Library — an organization that was formed in November, 1979, to try to help obtain new books and hopefully increase dwindling circulation.

It did not occur to them that three months later, they would be in charge of the whole operation.

"There was no choice — if the library was to remain open," said Mrs. Blankholm, "It was going to have to be run by volunteers."

That was almost three years ago. During that time, circulation has increased, the book collection has been updated and is being replenished, and many repairs and improvements have been made to the building. Construction of a new deck is underway, and the parking lot is being paved.

A free lending library, Porter Memorial is open seven days a week to the public. Unlike other libraries, patrons can renew their books by calling the library, and fines are only a nickel a day.

Without exception, Porter Memorial Library is a charming little place to spend an hour or two. There is a huge rock fireplace (that helped hold the structure to its foundation during the 1955 flood), heavy wooden furnishings, and in one corner there is a display case of birds that has been a part of the library since it opened 70 years ago. Library staff members still do not know who made the bird arrangement. Anyone who has information on who the person was is asked to contact the library.

Besides being a quiet and nostalgic place to visit, Porter Library provides patrons with a good, basic selection of reference and reading materials. There are two new sets of encyclopedias.

Library hours are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 1 to 5 p.m.; Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Staff members receive no pay for their work. They give their time for what they call, "the freedom and value of information."

These volunteers will be honored on Sunday at the open house and anniversary celebration. They are: Mai Daniel, Lynn Coker, Patti Herman, Dorothy Sides, Mary Hudnall, Carolyn Stephenson, Vi Garrison, Vera Morey, Marianne Raedler.

"I'm sure there are those who thought the volunteer library wouldn't last a week," said Mrs. Blankholm. "We wondered, of course, but I don't think we ever really doubted."