

Putting Library Service In Soquel A Step Back In Time

The county Board of Supervisors Tuesday took a giant step backward in time to put library service in Soquel where it was at the turn of the 20th Century.

City-county library records show that in 1899 Soquel residents asked the city of Santa Cruz library to lend them a hundred or so books every two months until they could assemble their own library. In 1901, the city library lent the residents 100 old books and sent more discarded books to them in 1905.

Loans, discards and generous gifts of books kept the library going until a contract for library service for Soquel was signed by the Board of Supervisors and the Santa Cruz Library Board of Trustees in 1912, but it was the Soquel Improvement Club and concerned citizens who built the Porter Memorial Library of today.

Now, by a Board of Supervisors' order Tuesday, the library will be dropped from the city-county library system and the supervisors' hope is that again the city of Santa Cruz will be generous and let Soquel have old books for volunteers to lend out to residents of that community.

Librarian Charles Atkins Wednesday said he would have no problem allowing Soquel to have the older books and other materials not needed by the city-county library system as a whole. But he deplored the economic reasons given by the county administration for chopping Soquel out of the system and putting into immediate jeopardy the branches in Ben Lomond, Freedom, Capitola and La Selva Beach.

"The position of the city has been, as expressed by City Manager David Koester to the county, that there should be no budget cuts in the middle of the budget year. The city does not want to cut its own library budget," Atkins said.

"But the cutback is proposed by the county because of a \$127,000 deficit. The city did not make this cutback, it was the county that proposed Ben Lomond, Freedom, Capitola, Soquel and La Selva branches, or stations, be closed. The Library Board went along with this, aware of the county's funding problems.

"It should be stressed there is nothing in the county proposal that requires any service cuts in the city libraries.

"If the city wishes to keep Garfield Park branch open, it may do that. If Capitola wishes to reimburse the county for expenses of keeping that library open and in the system, it may do that."

In the Tuesday decision, the supervisors gave a 30-day reprieve to Ben Lomond and Freedom for conversion of their library stations to volunteer stations outside the library system. La Selva may convert also to volunteers.

The fate of the Capitola station is now in the hands of the Capitola City Council: it is scheduled to be chopped out of the system unless Capitola picks up the costs.

Atkins said the county has asked the city of Santa Cruz to agree to leave the furniture and the book collection in the Soquel station so that volunteers may have a library to operate outside the system. There would be no further funding by the county of the Soquel branch, nor would there be any expenditures for books for that library from the city-county library fund.

The same proposal has been made for the Ben Lomond branch, which is located also in a county-owned building, but the original closure date of Feb. 1 has been extended in the proposal to March 1 to give Ben Lomond citizens a chance to try to salvage something from the breakup of the agreement covering service to that community.

The proposed elimination of Ben Lomond from the library system was as much a shocker to history buffs in the North County as the elimination of Soquel was to history buffs in the Mid-County.

The Free Public Library of Ben Lomond was established March 6, 1911, when the Ben Lomond Library Association was

formed. In 1912 the Board of Supervisors granted \$300 for maintenance of the library, and in March of 1913 the Santa Cruz Library Board of Trustees and the supervisors signed a contract for "land affecting the Ben Lomond Library." A building went up on a lot provided by Elisha Brooks by the middle of November in 1913, and Samuel Leask, founder of Leask's Department Store and an officer of the Santa Cruz Library Board of Trustees made remarks at the dedication. On Oct. 15, 1916, Ben Lomond became part of the city-county library system of that day.

Also, in the old days the schools were a major part of the library system.

Then, as now, the county ran no libraries of its own. But thanks to an act of the Legislature in 1909 allowing cities with libraries in a county to form a County Library which would act as a central distributing point for present and future libraries, the supervisors accepted a plan extending library services to the county areas. By 1917 there were 30 county branches, most of them in various schools.

Now Soquel is scheduled to leave the system, if the Santa Cruz City Council approves, by Feb. 1, and the branches at Capitola, Freedom, Ben Lomond and La Selva Beach will go also unless conversions to volunteer systems and/or new funding arrangements are made soon.

Historical material included in this article is from the "History of the Santa Cruz Public Library System," by Margaret Ann Souza.

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