

## The First Aptos Library, and How It Grew

*By Margaret Souza*

Editor's note: The writer, now retired, wrote this article while on the staff at the Aptos Library.

Many Aptos residents believe that "Helen's" (Wikkerink) library, which began in 1944, was the first library in the area. It wasn't. It was the first continuous one—her efforts made the Aptos library what it is today. But back to the first library.

Early in 1933 David McFadden, a long-time resident and currently reference librarian at Cabrillo College, opened the Aptos branch of the Santa Cruz public library in a vacant store in the Harper building which was owned by the McFadden family and is now known as Arne's Aptos TV and Radio Service; the library board paid \$5 a month for its rent.

McFadden ran the library for a little more than two years until October, 1935, when he left the area to go to Mexico for a visit. During that two-year period he opened the library two afternoons and three evenings a week and circulated 40 to 50 books per week. Once a week he borrowed his mother's Ford Model A coupe and took an apple crate full of books down to the main library in Santa Cruz to exchange them for a new selection. The books were shelved in rows of apple crates. The collection contained many mysteries and westerns, gift magazines, factual books and jigsaw puzzles. Many of the reference books that he used had been brought from home and included the World Book Encyclopedia (1919 or 1920 edition), World Almanac, and dictionaries.

McFadden recalls some of the people who used the library: Mrs. Clarke Earls, Dolores Miller, Oscar and Jack Payne, Paul Johnston and his family, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Toney, Lee Monroe, Charlie and Frank Larsen, Mrs. Ed Dollar, Fred Tilman, Art Wikkerink, Mrs. Hansen, the Humes family and Adela Haynes.

Early in 1944, Mrs. Helen Wikkerink began pleading for discarded books in order to start a borrowing service especially for children. Aptos residents could rarely make a trip into Santa Cruz to visit the library because wartime gas rationing was in effect. She got the Santa Cruz library system to agree to supply books providing she could find a rent-free location, furniture, and a volunteer librarian. By May of 1944, the library was established in a tiny space in the building which is now the Aptos Market. The first collection consisted of 150 books. Then, the Norton Phelps Lumber Company allowed Mrs. Wikkerink to use an abandoned office near the Bay View Hotel. A furniture-fund raising party was held Sept. 2, 1949; it was sponsored by the Aptos Chamber of Commerce, Rio del Mar Improvement Club and the Sea Cliff Association. After that, the library moved to Fred Toney's drug store. Then in March, 1952, it moved again, this time to a building on Trout Gulch Road. Mrs. Wikkerink retired in 1962.

By 1963, the library had outgrown its quarters. Residents began to cry out for a new library. The Rancho del Mar Shopping Center provided a space and the library opened its doors in its new location on Dec. 15, 1964, with Mrs. Diji Christian as librarian. Although by 1968, Aptos was the fastest growing of all the county branches and was extremely overcrowded, the staff still had time for story hours, slide programs and many library related activities.

In 1971, the county board of supervisors budgeted \$35,000 for a library site and the search was on. Sites in Aptos Village, along Soquel Drive and State Park Drive were considered by the board of library trustees. Finally, they decided on the lot at the corner of Soquel Drive and Ledyard Way and it was purchased in September, 1972. By January, 1973, the trustees named the firm of Spencer, Lee, Busse and Stipula to be the architects. Plans were put on display on Sept. 26, 1973, for the community to see and they were approved by the library trustees in December. The plans called for an 8,000-square-foot building with a separate children's room for 69 people, a typing room, and accessibility features for the mobility-disabled. Construction costs began to soar in 1974 and caused delay in the building of the library because there were inadequate funds. Revenue sharing monies from the federal government were requested by the library trustees from the county board of supervisors. E.M.I. General Engineering Contractors of Santa Clara put in the low bid for the construction and was awarded the contract in July. Site preparation began in August and good weather permitted the construction to proceed rapidly.

The search for a name for the library began in earnest in January, 1975. After some controversy, the name "Santa Cruz Public Library, Aptos Branch" was chosen.

In April, 1975, Miss Heidi Jaeger was appointed branch librarian. She was replacing Mrs. Diji Christian who had been accepted at the School of Library Science, University of California, Berkeley.

The new library was dedicated June 28, 1975, with great fervor despite a battle with the county over the funding of the library regarding the federal revenue sharing money (this was settled shortly to everyone's satisfaction). The library opened for business on Monday, June 30 and circulated 1,142 books. Charles Atkins, library director, notes that "since the opening, many out-of-town librarians have visited the new Aptos branch and all have expressed the opinion that the library is one of the most beautiful and functional buildings they have seen." When he was asked for a personal comment, Atkins said, "The completed building is everything I had hoped it to be with no defects or problems."

The new library has met with a great deal of community support. In addition to the many generous book and magazine donations, local residents have given decorative items to the library. Mrs. D. F. Gardiner donated a lovely handmade basket for plants. The Garden Section of Welcome Wagon weekly brings in a fresh floral arrangement. Mrs. C. Roelofsen has donated two local paintings: one of the Cement Ship and one overlooking Monterey Bay. Mrs. Beatrice Wheelock donated an oil painting. Nancy Monroe donated pastel portraits of children for the children's room. The future will see a continuation of children's programs and the enlargement of the reference collection to serve the community.

## Sources

- *Source: Cabrillo Times & Green Sheet. February 12, 1976, page 3.*

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