

# Porter Memorial Library/ A survivor

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SOQUEL — It was with the pomp and circumstance usually accorded a dignity that exactly 70 years ago today the Porter Memorial Library in Soquel was dedicated. On Sunday, the oldest library in the county will be the site of an unpretentious celebration.

The dedicated group of volunteers who have operated the library on their own for three years now will host an open house from 2 to 4 p.m.

Reflecting the hard work instituted by the Soquel Improvement Association more than 70 years ago in struggling to get the library built, today's volunteers have again made the library a showcase.

Consider these facts if you will. Since the county Board of Supervisors detached the library from the city-county system in 1979 due to funding problems, volunteers have:

- Nearly doubled total operating hours to the point it is the only library in the county to be open seven days a week.

- Circulation has increased 30 percent to 800 books a month. Some 1,300 library cards have been issued.

- Overdue book fines continue to be the lowest in the county at 5 cents a day and personalized service is stressed. Where else, for example, can patrons telephone to renew books?

- Improvements are constantly being made. Besides a new paint job and heater, a long-awaited 12-car parking lot, deck and patio are being constructed behind the library. Completion is hoped for by June.

The library also has the distinction of having made it through two floods — the storms of '55 and '82. A sign taped on the front door today, in fact, features an arrow about three feet high that shows the high-water mark of last January.

"We literally had to dig ourselves out," says super-volunteer Mona Blankholm, who is also treasurer of the Library Board. "Mud was everywhere, but volunteers were amazing. One month after everything was a shambles, we were open again."

The library differs not only in service, however, but in looks.

A huge rock fireplace dominates the homey interior. A clock that was an original gift when the library opened sits on the fireplace mantle, and it still works. In the corner is a glass display case of birds.

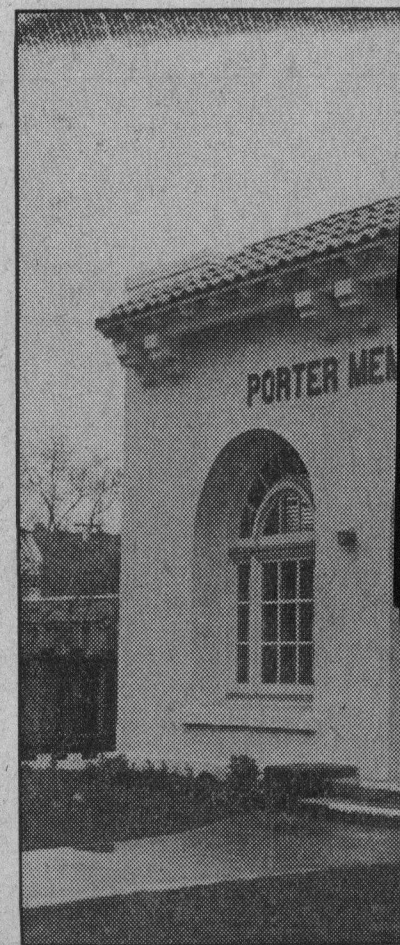
The exterior is much the same as it appeared on that Jan. 27, 1913 day when the library opened. In Mission style, it has the simple grandeur of high arched windows and a wide, high arched entrance door.

The Sentinel described the dedication as such:

"An important event... That it was considered important was proved by the presence of so many distinguished men from San Francisco, so many prominent men from Santa Cruz and the presence of the ladies of Soquel and vicinity, and not the Improvement Club alone.

"The children of the public school came marching up with flags waving, held in each little hand. The larger, sturdier pupils came with the tramp and the stride of the soldier."

Guest speakers at the ceremony included Warren Porter and William Sesnon, representatives of the pioneer families whose land the library was built on and,



Porter



The library today is run by a dedicated group of volunteers.

subsequently, the library was named after.

As the story goes, the Soquel Improvement Association wrote to the Sesnons inquiring whether they could get a long-term lease on the property. Sesnon wrote back that they could have the property for a library and would even match dollar for dollar the monies raised by the organization.

An extensive fund-raising campaign was started. The library eventually was built at a cost of about \$3,000.

Sesnon lauded the spirit of Soquel residents at the ceremony. "To me, the occasion is not so much a dedication of the building as a dedication of the magnificent spirit that prompted its erection."

Blankholm adds today: "The people scrimped and saved to get this library built. There's so much history