

Lake County History: Lakeport's Carnegie Library

SUNDAY, 15 JUNE 2014 02:02 JAN COOK



In this early photo of the Carnegie Library in Lakeport, Calif., the dredger is visible at the far left. Soil dredged from Lakeport's harbor filled the waterfront from about First to Fifth Streets. Lake County Museum collection.

LAKEPORT, Calif. – Lakeport's first library opened in the Board of Trade rooms in the Levy Building opposite the old courthouse in 1907. Civic-minded citizens had formed a library committee in 1906 to find a location for a town library.

The library outgrew its original space and in 1913 Lakeport's library committee filled out and submitted Carnegie's "Schedule of Questions," hoping to receive a library grant.

The Carnegie Corp. approved an \$8,000 grant for Lakeport in November 1914.

Also in 1914 the Yolo Water and Power Co. (YWP) built the Clear Lake Dam in Cache Creek to increase YWP's storage capacity in Clear Lake.

White & Co., investment bankers in New York, financed YWP's dredging operations in Clear Lake including dredging and filling along Lakeport's waterfront.

During the same period the Clear Lake Railroad (CLRR) started a railroad line from Hopland to Lakeport and arranged with YWP for a depot and rail yard on the filled land.



This early photo of the Carnegie Library in Lakeport, Calif., shows the young palm trees planted on either side of the stairs. Those palm trees now tower over the building. Lake County Museum collection.

Owners of the new land deeded their property to Lakeport for a city park and Lakeport abandoned Second Street from Park Street to the shoreline.

The deal stipulated that Lakeport would have the right to build a public library in the park.

Reality fell short of the plans. The CLRR graded a few miles of road bed in Mendocino County before the company collapsed. Only the Carnegie library was completed.

L.J. Shuman, president of Lakeport's library board, corresponded with Andrew Carnegie's personal secretary and grant manager James Bertram during the grant process. Shuman and Bertram discussed Lakeport's choice of site and problems with the fill for months.

Carnegie required towns to pledge taxes equal to 10 percent of their Carnegie grants to support their libraries. Lakeport had had a library tax since 1910 and fulfilled Carnegie's requirement.

By summer 1916 all property titles were clear and Lakeport's grant was secure but the fill needed time to dry and settle before construction could begin. Bertram urged Shuman to consider another site, but Lakeport kept the park site.

Carnegie insisted that grant libraries have basements 4 feet below grade, which would have put Lakeport library's basement into the water table. Dredging created the small rise on which the library sits and solved that problem.

provided for the purpose at either the Farmers Bank or the Bank of Lakeport on Tuesday, Jan. 19, 1915, from 9 a. m. to 3 p. m.

The two sites to be voted on are the 3rd street site and the site facing 2nd street on the park. Several prop-

ose the center of the park facing the street, and would have a clear view both up town as well as being immediately visible to visitors passing along Main street. The preponderance of opinion now seems to be in favor of the 2nd street site. The building will be about 20x20 feet.

officers appointive length of each county except key and tax collectors. The supervisors themselves will largely bear the brunt of the Government as it carries with it the of over one hundred salaries of judges will be they will be sent where ed, all their salary will state instead of half by now. It is not propose with the present and officers so that the amendment if it carries from now will give to favor the appointment officers and in the case judges it will be six ye bill will go into effect.

The non-partisan ph away with all party in the primaries the two-c ing the highest vote will before the people for th seek regardless of the i may have been formed or opposite parties. It system of county elects to the state.

Another important ite gramme is to abolish d of the legislature and t one house. It has even ed that the legislature abolished and that the y a Commission form t as some of our cities now. Whether a consti ment will be introduced or not remains to be see would only elect five e and all the members of t and state officers except abolished. It is claime system would be a grea money and as the h generally subservant to t it is useless anyhow.

Aside from these radica ing the very system of st ment we are to have liquor law which will be

Map of proposed sites



Ballot, Cut this out

Lakeport Library Ballot

Mark X opposite Street on which you wish the Library built

I Vote for Library on
Second Street

I Vote for Library on
Third Street

Lakeport, Calif., held an election to settle the question of where to put the library. Voters cut out, marked and submitted this ballot printed in the Lake County Bee in January, 1915, to select the location for the Carnegie Library. The Second Street location won 180 to 8. Lake County Bee 1/8/1915, Lake County Library microfilm collection.

San Francisco architects Ward and Blohme designed a classic revival façade to enclose a Carnegie floor plan "A" for Lakeport.

When all of the bids exceeded the \$8,000 grant, the architects scaled back their plans and donations made up the \$500 difference.

Contractors Randolph and Hinds began construction in August 1917 and finished in February 1918. Volunteers helped librarian Kate White move the books and furnishings from the Levy Building to the new library which opened on Feb. 18.

Over the next 68 years with the city library upstairs, the lower floor sometimes had other purposes. Lakeport's town trustees met there from 1920 until 1947 when the city hall opened in the Craig Building at 435 N. Main St.

The downstairs has been a kindergarten classroom and a meeting place for Boy Scouts, and it became headquarters for the Lake County schools librarian in 1957.

Lakeport might have lost its library in 1953 had not librarian Gertrude Benson smelled the smoke from an electrical fire in the attic and called Fire Chief George Turnbull for help.



Lakeport, Calif.'s waterfront hugged the back of buildings on Main Street before dredging and filling extended the shoreline about 200 feet into Clear Lake. The larger sailboat is near the foot of Second Street. The Levy Building, the long two-story building in the center, housed Lakeport's first library on its second floor. The second floor was removed around 1960. Lake County Museum collection.

Volunteer firemen extinguished the fire before major damage occurred.

From 1971 to 1974 the lower floor served as headquarters for the Lake County Library Demonstration Project while Lakeport's city library operated upstairs.

The Carnegie Library became the main library for the newly-formed Lake County Library system with Steve Klein as county librarian in 1974.

Kathleen Jansen succeeded Klein and under her direction the Lake County Library expanded its collection and services.

In 1986 the county library moved from the cramped Carnegie to the new library at 1425 N. High St. in Lakeport.

The Carnegie Library has hosted other organizations since the county library moved out. Lakeport's Centennial celebration had its headquarters there in 1988 and for several years UC Davis operated a laboratory there to study Clear Lake.

In 2008 the Carnegie Library was entered into the National Parks Service's National Register of Historic Places.

Lakeport city departments and the Lakeport Main Street Association have used the Carnegie building recently, but the building is now vacant the city of Lakeport is exploring options for future uses.



Lake County's first county librarian, Steve Klein, hired Kathleen Craig as reference librarian for the Lake County Library. She married Larry Jansen in 1978, and, as county librarian, Kathleen Jansen oversaw the county library until her retirement in 2008. Lake County Library collection.

Notes on sources:

- The correspondence between Bertram, Shuman and other Lakeport officials is preserved on microfilm in the Carnegie Corporation of New York Records Collection at Columbia University.

- Lake County newspapers on microfilm in the Lake County Library collection contain articles on the Carnegie Library, the Clear Lake Railroad and the Yolo Water and Power Company.
- The Mauldin Notes contain information about these topics.
- Carnegie Libraries: their history and impact on American public library development by George S. Bobinski, provides context to Lakeport's Carnegie story.

Jan Cook has lived in Lake County for about 40 years. She works for the Lake County Library, is the editor of the Lake County Historical Society's Pomo Bulletin and is a history correspondent for Lake County News. If you have questions or comments please contact Jan at jan.cook@lakeconews.com .