

History of the Friends of the Library

The following three-part history of the Friends of the Library was written by Gertrude Odell, Past City Librarian of San Bernardino.

Part One

Have you heard about the "Friends of the Library?"

The origins of the group go back to 1972 when City librarian, Gertrude Odell, began conferences with a number of library patrons, addressing their concerns regarding difficulties the library was experiencing in reaching the broadest potential to the community with the small budget allocated by the city.

Library patrons wanted to help the situation, but they didn't know where to begin. A committee was formed in July 1972 to assemble facts about library services, library finances, and to consider what could be done to help the library.

In January 1973, the committee felt it would be proper to establish a formal organization with a constitution, bylaws and a board of officers. However, no one wanted to be an officer, so the group decided to continue as a committee and proceeded to do so for the next two years.

During this period two main goals were established.

- (1) Raise money to fund library projects that could not be paid for out of the library budget.
- (2) Publicize events that would bring people into the library.

The first steering committee meeting at the members' homes consisted of Gertrude Odell, Dorothy Bright, Joyce Cozzo, Fay Engleman, Emily Knight, Judy Pike, Sylvia Stuart, and Norma Ulery.

In 1974 the first event designed to bring people into the library was held. A book talk was given by Dennis Casebier, a local historian, who had written several books about trails in the Mojave Desert. Later other authors spoke individually. Six authors appeared at a large event called "Meet the Author" which was held in the upstairs reading room of the old library on Fourth and Arrowhead Avenue.

Part Two

As described in the November/December issue of the Chattergram, one of the main goals of the Friends of the Library was to raise funds for the San Bernardino City Library for library projects that could not be underwritten by the annual library budget.

Thus evolved the idea of a book sale for the public with useable books and periodicals donated by the general public. Local newspaper stories carried the plea for book donations and the collection process began. Sorting and storage space was non-existent at the central library. Following a plea for help to the City Administration, the temporary use of a loft in one of the city warehouses was offered. Collecting and storing began in earnest.

Preparing for the first sale in October 1974 involved much muscular activity since the public had generously responded beyond the Friends' expectations. To store hundreds of donated books and periodicals, Friends volunteers climbed 20 steps to the loft to store materials and then 20 steps down to sort and arrange materials for sale. What a weight loss activity this was! Up and down...hundreds of times!

This October sale was an outstanding success and immediate plans began to develop for succeeding sales. Dates were set, publicity prepared and Friends of the Library was on its way to become a permanent community activity.

In 1975, the Friends of the San Bernardino Public Library were incorporated as a legal non-profit organization with a constitution, bylaws and dues structure. Membership was open to the public. Officers chosen were Judge Kenneth Pike, first president of the San Bernardino Friends of the Library; vice-president Dorothy Traver; and secretary/treasurer Beverly Snyder.

Continuing to this day, one of the prime concerns of Friends of the Library is the promotion of children's reading programs, especially through its summer reading projects. Creating exciting reading events, colorful brochures to excite readers, and certificates of awards to foster reading are provided by the Friends.

Part Three

On May 13, 1982, the San Bernardino Public Library Board of Trustees appointed a Blue Ribbon Citizens Advisory Committee for the New Library with Bud Kelley as chairman. Among the 15 members were Thelma Press, Judge John Kennedy, and two Friends of the Library members, Wallace Stoebe and Gertrude Odell. Because of the memory of previous hardships involved in holding book sales, the Friends members lobbied for a Friends' Room for book sales during subsequent meetings from June to August.

The first drawings submitted by the architects did not show any allotment of space for the Friends, so we tried harder. The minutes of August 19, 1982, say: "It was emphasized that space must be allocated for the Friends of the Library." When the final drawings were presented, we realized that we had achieved our goal. We had our space.

In using its funds, the Friends group has adhered to its original aims: to help service to the public, and to try to bring people into the library. With those purposes in mind, among the many things funded have been: a circulating collection of video cassettes; refreshments at receptions for artists who have works on display; cordless phones for reference personnel who need to go into the book stacks for research; sponsor all facets of the children's reading club; an overhead banner publicizing book sales; and issuing a Friends newsletter. Most of us try to buy a book or two at the book sales.