



History of the Santa Maria Public Library

Updated June 16, 2009

Today, hundreds of people per day flock to the beautiful Santa Maria Public Library to peruse its books and DVDs, perhaps catch a puppet show or storytime, stroll through an art exhibition and relax with coffee. The grand main library opened on August 23, 2008 and instantly became a jewel of the Central Coast.

Until 1907, the only resource for books in Santa Maria was the Minerva Library Club which dispensed approximately 600 volumes in the lobby of the Post Office, then on the west side of Broadway between Main and Church Streets in the Jones Building.

Soon after the incorporation of the City of Santa Maria in 1905, people began talking about the possibility of a library and in 1907 the City appointed a Board to make plans to that goal. Because the Carnegie Library Foundation was then giving money for buildings in order to encourage the use of libraries, the Board applied for a grant in the amount of \$10,000. It was decided that whatever balance was needed should be raised by local people, and the City was to designate the building as a Public Library and support it.

The women of the Minerva Club got their wish for a new library after cityhood. After consideration of various locations, Mr. Paul O. Tietzen generously donated a plot of land, with 210 feet fronted on Broadway and Cook Street for library and park purposes deeded to the City, with 110 feet by 80 feet specifically for the library. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie kept his promise to the determined women and his donation was made.

A beautiful Carnegie Library opened in May 1909, initially with 600 volumes. Mrs. Minnie Stearns, local painter and former schoolteacher, was named as Librarian at the salary of \$70 per month (including janitorial service). She served for over 25 years until retiring in 1934. The new Librarian was Miss Dorothea Dudley, who took the job at \$150 per month. Nine months later she married Paul L. Nelson, at that time manager of the municipal pool. The library was a branch of the Santa Barbara County Library and had a staff of two, plus some part-time help.

As the population grew, the need for a new library building gathered momentum. The firm of Crawford and Davis was commissioned to draw up plans and specifications for a building to harmonize with City Hall in style. City Hall was dedicated in 1934. The plans for the new library were finished in 1939. The Federal government had passed a Library Services and Construction Act through which the City was able to secure augmented funds. At the total cost of \$36,700 Mr. H.E. Small built the library. It was dedicated on July 15, 1941, one of the last library buildings to be constructed on the West Coast before World War II. The book collection numbered about 10,000 volumes.



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The old Library at 420 S. Broadway (State Highway 135) had three additions since construction of the original structure in 1941. A mezzanine and storage area was added in 1958, bringing the total square footage to 7,800. It seemed that space was never adequate and a major expansion was delayed until 1963, when the firm of Kerr and Beggs was hired by the City to draw up plans for a children's room, to be extended from the south side of the library toward Broadway. This enabled the library to substantially enlarge its work with children.

Meanwhile, the original Carnegie Library served as a USO center and then a youth center under the Parks and Recreation Department but it was ultimately condemned. Costs of rehabilitation were too high and so it was razed in 1966 amid deep feelings of nostalgia. The footprint of this building is marked with 12 palm trees on the lawn facing Broadway (State Highway 135).

In 1970, the third addition was built to the Library. This was a two-story wing to house the fiction collection and a community room on the first floor, and the Reference Department on the second floor. Bids for construction were let in the spring of 1969 with Thielman Construction Co. of Santa Barbara the successful bidder at \$556,000, which included some parking area.

Because of the extensive remodeling involved, it would have been uncomfortable and awkward to keep the library open during construction. A search for a temporary library site found an empty Safeway supermarket building awaiting demolition under a rehabilitation program. With some minor repairs, the vacant store at Chapel and McClelland became the temporary library from May 15, 1969 to June 1970. Mrs. Nelson had retired in September of 1968, after almost 35 years in her position (since 1934), but she continued as Library Consultant for the new building. The new library was dedicated on July 12, 1970.

Year	Square footage	City population
1941 (original building)	3,000	9,000
1958 (Mezzanine & storage)	7,800	20,000
1963 (Children's wing expansion)	10,287	Not available
1970 (Two-story expansion)	28,250	32,749

James Petrella succeeded Mrs. Nelson as the City Librarian. He retired in 1979 and Jack Buchanan became the fourth librarian. He served January 1980 to retirement in



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July 2002. Many more people used the library as Santa Maria's population soared from 39,685 in 1980 to 77,423 in 2000. By 1990, it was obvious to all that the library was too small. The building ran out of room to add new books without seriously compromising space for reader seats and studying.

By 2000, over 5,500 books and other materials were shelved in storage due to lack of shelving in the public areas. There was no more space to offer public computers, and even if there were, the wiring capacity of the building had reached its limit. Other deficiencies ranged from no branch libraries within the City limits, and only one community meeting room in the library, to leaks and lack of room for classes.

The City Council approved a Library Master Plan in 1998 and the City applied for State grant funding in June 2002, in order to finance a new library. This would be built on the parking lot immediately to the south of the current library. Fortunately, the City was awarded a \$16.39 million grant from the Library Construction Act of 2000 and the Council agreed to finance the balance. Librarian Jack Buchanan personally had driven to Sacramento with the grant application.

BFGC Architects Planners Inc. was chosen for the project. As enthusiasm spread, the project began receiving donations from local community and civic groups to provide literacy materials and training at the new library. The Santa Maria Friends of the Library volunteers group assisted with fund-raising to add to the Library's book collection.

Plans called for a nearly 60,000-square-foot, two-story Public Library fronting Broadway just south of the current Public Library, with parking off South McClelland Street. The first phase of construction was a two-level parking structure on McClelland Street behind the existing library. On February 15, 2005, the City Council awarded a \$5.1 million contract to A.J. Diani Construction Co. of Santa Maria for the construction of the new two-level parking structure.

Construction began in March 2005 with the reconstruction of the City Hall parking lot, then turned to excavation for the recessed 150-space parking structure. The new structure opened on March 1, 2006, with its lower level well-lit with natural light from large openings on all four sides and from a skylight in the ceiling, in addition to electric lights at night on both levels.

Construction of the new library began on Monday, May 1, 2006. The first steps after fencing off the site were demolition of a concrete block building and the asphalt parking lot, then grading. Crews excavated earth to build the foundation and building pads. The footprint of the new library is approximately 30,000-square-feet, about the size of a supermarket.



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By December 2006, ironworkers and a huge 250-foot-tall crane were quickly piecing together 800 tons of structural steel, creating the shape of the future library. The halfway point of construction was reached in June 2007, when the bare concrete roof began to be covered with 15,000-square-feet of clay tiles and the steel studs that formed walls received exterior wall sheathing. Straub Construction Inc. of Bonsall, California (near San Diego) was the contractor.

As of June 2, 2007, the contractor had placed 800 tons of structural steel (to form the superstructure), 200,000 pounds of rebar, 35,000 square feet of concrete hardener, more than 2,000 cubic yards of concrete foundation and floor slabs, 100 tons of reinforcing steel in that concrete, 20 tons of anchor bolts (40,000 bolts) and 60,000 square feet of decking material (to construct the second floor). Additionally, there was 40,000 feet of electrical and communications conduit, 60,000 square feet of sprayed-on fireproofing material, 120 floor boxes and 1,500 feet of sewer and water pipes.

The 59,850-square-foot building is approximately 49 feet tall from ground level to the peak of its roof, 151 feet wide at its frontage along Broadway (State Highway 135) and 266 feet long.

As construction continued, Francisco Pinneli retired as the City's fifth librarian in November 2007. Mr. Buchanan returned as the Interim City Librarian. After a competitive recruitment, City Manager Tim Ness announced on March 14, 2008 the appointment of Mr. Buchanan as the new City Librarian. He started full-time on April 12.

"I knew shortly after I returned that I wanted to return full-time and do the job again," Mr. Buchanan said. "The City is building a \$33 million main library and I'm very excited about this opportunity. "This is the only job that I'd want to do, and I'm thrilled. I have a wonderful staff, a wonderful Friends of the Library group, and a strong Library Board."

The present two-story Public Library building is twice the size of the old (current) library that was last expanded in 1970. Expanded book collections, 77 public computers, a children's theater, a café, community meeting room and a new literacy center are among the many features.

The new library opened on August 23, 2008, and at 59,850-square-feet, the two-story library at 421 S. McClelland Street offers vastly more resources to Santa Maria Valley residents. The names of generous local benefactors decorate rooms throughout the building. This was the largest civic project undertaken by the City in its 100-year history.