Early Library Service in Gilroy

The Blue Ribbon Temperance League first attempted to establish book services in Gilroy in 1878 as a reading room. The group joined with another temperance society in 1880 serving coffee and ice cream and circulating books from a downtown gallery. Later several book groups formed including the YMCA Reading Room (1883), the Gilroy Ladies Reading Circle (1895), and the FRFG Reading Club (1898) which is still active in Gilroy today.

Taxpayer measures for a new library failed in 1890 and 1894. Finally in 1906, the Gilroy City Council adopted a resolution to formally establish and maintain a public library in Gilroy. Mary Briggs Benn was appointed as Gilroy’s first librarian in 1907. Library Trustees successfully applied for a $10,000 grant from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation to construct a public library. To fulfill one of the Carnegie grant requirements, philanthropist Caroline Hoxett donated $1000 to purchase the land for the new library. Watsonville architect William Weeks designed the new library. H.J. Wood also from Watsonville was hired as builder. Space for the temporary library was created in City Hall in 1907 and filled with books provided by the Gilroy Ladies Reading Circle.

The Gilroy Library opened its doors in 1910 at 195 Fifth Street with a collection of 1700 books. The Gilroy Carnegie library was the first of William H. Weeks’ seven "classic Carnegies" of the Greek temple style noted for its central octagonal rotunda and patented skylight. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 and appropriately became the home of the Gilroy Historical Museum in 1976.

The Gilroy Library Since 1975

By the Sixties, Gilroy was a town that was rural but changing. In 1966, the residents of Gilroy passed a $600,000 bond measure to construct a new building to accommodate the needs of the growing community.

Recognizing the benefits of joining a larger library system, the City of Gilroy joined the Santa Clara County Free Library on July 1, 1968. The partnership between the city and the County Library is a strong one: the cities provide the buildings and the County Library provides the library services, staff and materials. Currently, a member of the Gilroy City Council sits on the Santa Clara County Library’s Joint Powers Authority, the library’s governing body. The Gilroy City Council also appoints citizens to serve on the
Gilroy Library Commission which advises the city council about library matters and meets monthly with the County Librarian and Gilroy Community Librarian.

The current library opened its doors on February 1, 1975 at 7387 Rosanna Street in the Gilroy Civic Center. The building was 12,500 sq. ft. with 140 seats.

The Gilroy Library collection has grown from 57,000 volumes in 1975 to 150,000 volumes in 2009. The library subscribes to nearly 400 periodicals and carries a large selection of books and media including the largest Spanish language collection in the Santa Clara County Library. Many of the staff is bi-lingual. The library also provides a vital Internet hub for the community helping to connect Gilroy citizens to the greater world and providing access to extensive informational and cultural resources. It houses a unique collection of 200 phono-records used by the disc jockeys airing on the legendary KFAT radio station that broadcast from Gilroy until the 1980s.

The Gilroy Public Library converted its records to an automated system in 1988.

The current library has served Gilroy residents well but its systems are antiquated and inadequate to serve the growing population and its needs. The population of Gilroy grew from 15,000 in 1975 and will exceed 70,000 by 2020.

A New Library in Gilroy’s Future

In the November 2008 election, a group of citizens called Library4Gilroy, worked to pass a $37 million bond measure to construct a new library for Gilroy. In spite of the severe downturn in the economy at that time, nearly 70% of the voters supported the library bond measure.

The current library will move to a temporary location for 2 years starting at the end of 2009.

The City of Gilroy hired the architectural firm of Harley Ellis Devereaux to design the new two-level, 54,000 sq. ft. library. The library will be constructed on its present site in the Civic Center.

The new library will be a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified building. It will be the first green building in the Santa Clara County Library and in South County. LEED is an internationally recognized green building certification system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council.

http://www.usgbc.org/

Follow the City of Gilroy website for design drawings and news about the progress of the new library:

http://www.ci.gilroy.ca.us/
Community Librarians of Gilroy:

Mary Briggs Benn 1907-1915
Irma Whitney (Kilgore) 1915-1917
Pearl Lavin 1917-1943
Marjorie Grodhaus 1943-1965
Mary Goshert 1966-1969
Alice Dawson 1969-1970
June Hopper Hymas 1970-1983
Lani Yoshimura 1984-