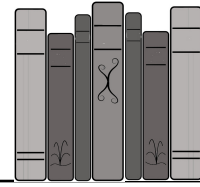


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Newsletter of the Ventura Friends of the Library P.O. Box 403, Ventura CA 93002
Spring 2019

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Mary Olson

With all the planning for our 50th anniversary celebrations, it occurred to me to wonder:

Where DO Friends of the Library come from?

An early newsletter from San Buenaventura Friends of the Library noted that "In California, the first Friends group was formed in the town of San Juan Batista. In 1896 a group of residents bought books to support the Library. Ten years later, residents of Davis founded a library club for the same purpose." I sort of imagined porcelain tea cups, literary discussions and someone suggesting "Let's have a book sale".

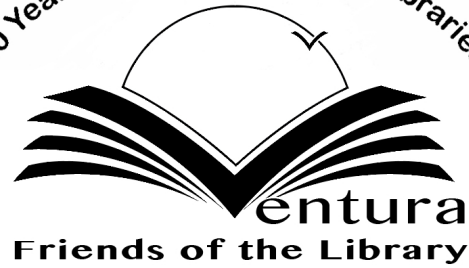
What I learned as I started looking into the subject was a surprise. An article in the journal "American Libraries" (February 2004), written by Sally Gardner Reed, links the origin of Friends groups to Andrew Carnegie's grants to cities and towns in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Carnegie's view of philanthropy, "the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves." Free libraries were, in Carnegie's opinion, among the best ways to lend a hand to anyone who deserved it. Carnegie's grants required the local governments receiving grants to also help themselves by providing the building site, paying staff and maintaining the library, drawing from public funds to run the library - not relying on private donations alone, and to provide free service to all. These requirements often caused city leaders to be reluctant to accept grants.

Meanwhile, also trending at the time was the rise of women's clubs. The clubs allowed women, who had little political standing at the time, to gain greater influence in their communities. Paula D. Watson finds that these groups were most responsible for organizing efforts to establish libraries, including long-term fundraising and lobbying within their communities to support operations and collections. ("Founding Mothers: The Contribution of Women's Organizations to Public Library Development in the United States", Library Quarterly. Vol. 64, Issue 3, 1994, p.236)

In 1898, a U.S. Board of Education survey recorded only 637 public libraries in the United States, primarily on the East Coast. By the time Carnegie provided his last grant for a public library in 1919, there were 3,500 public libraries across the country. Only about half the new libraries received Carnegie grants. The surprise was the centrality of citizens who organized as friends of the library (in action, if not in name) to this profusion of libraries in communities across the country.

In 1983, one of our founding members, Hazel Canfield wrote "A Brief History of F.O.L", in which she notes that in 1969, when Catherine Chadwick took over directorship of the Library Services Agency, one of her top priorities was the establishment of local Friends of the Library groups. Fifty years later, we still have a crucial role in ensuring the viability and sustainability of our libraries by raising money, awareness, and political support.

50 Years of Serving Ventura Libraries



Thanks to all who renewed for 2019!

Not sure if you renewed?

The date your membership expires appears with your address on this newsletter.

Let's have everyone in as a card-carrying member for our 50th anniversary year!

Renewals can be mailed in or made online at <https://squareup.com/store/VenturaFOL>

Bag o'Books Book Sale

Saturday, April 13
Vons at Telegraph & Victoria

details inside