

After the 1960 remodel, on cold winter days the library actually burned wood in the fireplace! It was quite popular.

citizens who worked to pass the remodel bond issue. During those years the members of the Hill and Dale Federated Women's Club, the Gallery Association (arrangers of monthly art shows), the Sea View Spaders (suppliers of weekly flower arrangements), the League of Women Voters, the Rotary Club, and the Lions Club all provided considerable time and energy to support the library.

In 1961 the Hill and Dale Club, along with Branch Librarian Mary Lathe and County Librarian Bertha Helium, called a public meeting to establish a Friends of the library group. The all-volunteer Friends group, open to all and growing, now has 175 members and an active 15-member Board of Directors. The group's goal is to support the library by interacting with the community and by raising money for library programs and collections. Much of the money the

Friends raise comes from sales of donated books either at their annual September sale, or via the internet for the more unusual books. A considerable amount also comes from monetary donations.

In 1969 the Gallery Association, which in earlier years had been the single unifying agent of service to the library, voted to disband. The work of booking monthly art displays for the next eight years was taken over by Ruth Wellemeyer, a volunteer from the Friends group. The El Cerrito Art Association now makes the arrangements. Other volunteer projects have included the native plant garden, an educational plot on the west side of the building; a 1997 exterior renewal job; a 1998 front garden renewal; and the county library literacy tutoring program for adult English speaking non-readers.

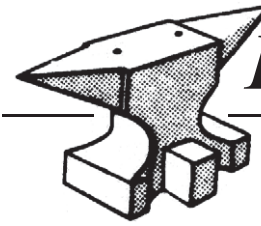
In the last 15 years, as a result of state tax-saving initiatives and failed county library service ballot measures, the El Cerrito library branch open hours have been cut from 63 hours to 35 hours weekly; staff hours cut from 240 to 152 hours weekly; and the budget from the County for books and other materials cut 39%. (In 2007 the Friends group was able to provide an additional \$13,000 for the branch book budget.) In spite of the cutbacks the branch maintains a collection of 40,000 books, magazine, tapes and videos. The library circulated 137,000 items the last fiscal year to 9,700 El Cerrito cardholders. Shelf space and study tables are at full capacity and computer use times have to be limited. The staff workspace is desperately overcrowded

The need for a larger building is again apparent. The city is committed to a new library as soon as a final decision on a site can be made and funding finalized. The citizens of El Cerrito, the library staff, and the many volunteers who contribute their time are looking forward to celebrating a new, larger, more modern El Cerrito Library.

~ The Historical Society thanks the Friends of the El Cerrito Library for providing most of the material used for this article.



Volunteers have always played a key role. Here a group works on the 1998 garden improvement project.



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**OUR NEXT MEETING: 1 PM SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 21ST, AT THE SENIOR CENTER**

President's Message

The Fall meeting of the El Cerrito Historical Society will feature a presentation by Richard Schwartz, the pre-eminent Berkeley historian, on his new book *Eccentrics, Heroes, and Cutthroats of Old Berkeley*. The meeting will be held at the El Cerrito Senior Center on Sunday, October 21st at 1 PM. Our business meeting will precede Richard's presentation. Richard is the author of several other books, including the very popular books *Berkeley 1900* and *Earthquake Exodus, 1906*.

His new book tells the story of a number of interesting characters from early times in our area. Before the early 1900s "Berkeley" encompassed a larger area than it does today, including most of El Cerrito. So some characters and incidents that today are described as being located in El Cerrito were before the turn of the century described as taking place in Berkeley. The new book has received very complimentary reviews (Malcolm Margolin, the California Historical Society, and many more) and I'm sure that Richard will give us quite an entertaining presentation.

Our web site continues to grow. In the last few months we have added some quite significant old maps to the *El Cerrito in Print* section of the web site. Without these maps, anyone who is trying to understand a legal description of a parcel of land in our area would be hard-pressed to comprehend what is being described. With the addition of these maps, what was originally envisioned as the primary content of the *El Cerrito in Print* part of the web site is complete. However, please contact me if you have any suggestions regarding *El Cerrito in Print* or any other section of the web site. I would be very interested to hear your thoughts and suggestions.

Our summer potluck lunch and meeting at Huber Park was a lot of fun. Many thanks to all who attended and provided a delicious selection of foods to enjoy. Special thanks also go to Al Elsasser and the Friends of Huber Park for helping us get the picnic area set up. ~ Tom Panas

The El Cerrito Historical Society is a volunteer, non-political, non-profit organization with one agenda: to locate and preserve our local history. Anyone may join; dues are \$20 (Household member), \$50 (Sponsoring member), and \$250 (Life member).

The El Cerrito Library - older than El Cerrito

94 years ago, when local citizens walked into the Rust Post Office they found a new attraction. The Contra Costa County Library, established in Martinez in 1913, was setting up branches throughout the county.



Faye Breneman, our original librarian, started the library in 1913 and didn't retire until 1950, thirty-seven years later.

The County Librarian, Alice Whitbeck, had announced that anyone could start a library. Faye Breneman, a teacher at Fairmont school, took up the challenge. Space for two locked cases of 50 to 100 books was obtained on shelves in the post office from the postmaster, and the Rust Branch Library opened. As Librarian, Fay spent three afternoons a week serving 93 library cardholders. Because she could not receive another county salary in addition to her teacher's pay, her Librarian's salary of \$5.00 per month was sent to her mother.

In 1915 the library was moved to the Breneman home on San Pablo Avenue, where Fay's mother and sisters volunteered to help with the growing collection. The local community was beginning to use the name El Cerrito for the nearby hill, and in 1916 the Rust branch became the El Cerrito Branch Library. The advantage of being part of the county system was (and still is) the access to the county wide collection of books. They can be requested and borrowed through any branch.

In 1917, when the estimated 1500 residents of the area incorporated, they agreed that the name of the new city would be El Cerrito. Luckily the residents of the city on the south side of Cerrito Creek (Ocean View), who had been contemplating that name for their new city, decided to use the name AL-



Our library was located in this building at Liberty St. and Fairmount Ave. from 1925 - 1949.

bany, their mayor's hometown. By 1925 the library had outgrown the Breneman home, so the volunteer El Cerrito Improvement Association renovated and equipped the house at the northwest corner of Fairmount Avenue and Liberty Street. The Association also paid the rent until the city took it over. Thus began the current arrangement whereby the city owns and maintains the library building while the county pays the salaries and owns the books. Dedication of the new library on Fairmount Avenue was held on June 2, 1925. The ceremony was attended by prominent citizens of El Cerrito, Martinez, Antioch and Richmond and was followed by music and dancing at nearby Huber Hall.

By 1946 the need for a larger, more modern library had become painfully clear and the city council named a committee to plan for expansion. The present site at the corner of Stockton and Lexington was selected; Mr. Harry A. Bruno was named architect; and financing was arranged by the city on a "pay-as-you-go" tax basis. The new building was dedicated on February 27, 1949. Rose Vainstain, a graduate of Western Reserve University School of Library Science, was appointed the first professional



The Breneman house above, at San Pablo and Avila. To the right, the library quarters from 1915 - 1925 inside the house.



librarian. The County Librarian's goal was to have every branch headed by a person with a master's degree from an accredited school or college of Library Science.

Fay Breneman remained on the staff as Children's Librarian, but retired in August of 1950 after 37 years of service to her community. Children's services

traditionally receive high priority in the philosophy of library planning. Children's services bring families into the library for their children's homework assignments and "Story Time" introduces the youngest citizens to the pleasures



The original 1949 library built at Stockton & Liberty.

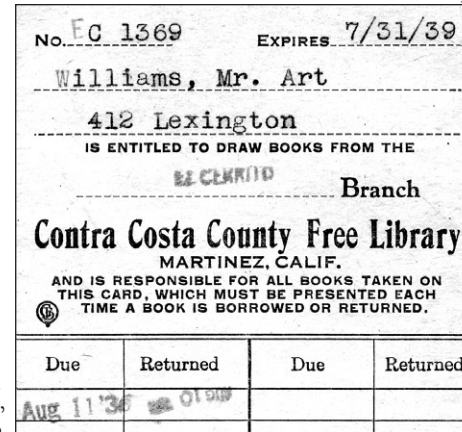
of books.

The hope is that these activities create lifetime users and library supporters. Professional Children's Librarians are now found in all but the smallest of the library branches, called outlets.

By 1959 the library, which seemed so spacious when it was opened as the first post-war library built in the Bay Area, was too small for the growing city. In October a bond issue of \$100,000 was passed for enlarging and remodeling the building. Dedication of the upgraded facility was held on November 12, 1960. The collection of 25,000 books was moved to new shelves,

which have a capacity of 30,000 books.

The library has benefited greatly from volunteers, beginning with the Brenemans. They were followed by the El Cerrito Improvement Association; the committee that worked on the new 1949 building; and the



A library card from the 1930's. The words "Public" (right) and "Free" don't seem to be used much anymore but still define library service.



Mr. James Rocke was the custodian. Before Proposition 13, the library received eight hours of cleaning every day. The floors and study tables were waxed weekly. Now the library doesn't get much more time than that in a week.