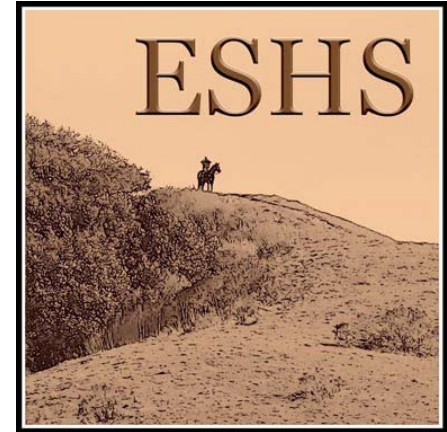


# A Place For All Reasons

## A History of the El Sobrante Library

*Adapted from an Exhibit of the El Sobrante Historical Society*



A library is an important place in any community, but in El Sobrante, the library has assumed a place of special significance. Over the years, the current library building has become the site of virtually all the important business that takes place within our community. The Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC) meets here, as does the Planning and Zoning Committee. SPAWNERS (San Pablo Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society) holds its public meetings here, as well as a host of other, public-oriented groups. Everyone knows where the library is. Without a city hall or official board chambers, the library has become the center of civic life in El Sobrante. Its importance to the community cannot be over-stated.

The current library building is now over 50 years old, and thus is eligible for placement on our historical society's list of historic sites. To honor that distinction, and to honor the peculiar value that the library holds in the hearts of the citizens of el Sobrante, the El Sobrante Historical Society has created this exhibit. We hope you enjoy it.

# El Sobrante Library Chronology

**December 1938:** Book deposit station established in the home of Blanche Burg, with a stock of 200 books.

**September 1943-October 1947:** No library. Mrs. Burg took a war job and no other quarters were available.

**October 1947:** Under sponsorship of the El Sobrante Garden Club, library re-opened in a small building on Maloney Road (later Valley View). Mrs. R.E. Radke appointed library attendant.

**October 1949:** Library moved to quarters in the Mitchell Building, at the corner of Valley View and Appian Way. Shelving constructed with donations from the community.

**October 1956:** Status changed from deposit station to branch library. Mrs. Radke retired, and Mrs. Thea Babbit appointed to succeed her.

**June 1959:** Branch enlarged by adding shop next door (former barbershop). Agreement made with city of Richmond to purchase a site for a new library.

**November 28, 1960:** Groundbreaking ceremony for new library, to be built at the corner of Appian Way and Garden Road.

**June 3, 1961:** Dedication of new library building.

**July 10, 1974:** Groundbreaking for new library expansion.

**April 13, 1975:** Official opening of new expanded library.

## **EXPANDING EL SOBRANTE LIBRARY GETS NEW HOME**

In new quarters situated in the Mitchell Building, where larger space offers more adequate library service to this growing community, the El Sobrante branch of the Contra Costa County Library is open for business, it was announced today.

Contributions from local citizens who helped the Library Fund, made possible the purchase of shelving material and H. L. Darlington, a cabinet maker, built the new shelves, generously donating his time and skill.

Since establishment of the local library two years ago in the tiny building just vacated, its use has steadily increased to the extent that 1041 books were borrowed during the month of October.

With delivery last Wednesday of 115 books from the county library headquarters in Martinez, El Sobrante's book stock has been brought up to 1100 books. Monthly consignments from headquarters, plus twice a month shipment by mail of specially requested books will add to the collection.

The entire resources of the county library are available to El Sobrante readers, who are encouraged to ask for desired books they do not find on the shelves.

The policy of the Contra Costa County Library, directed by Jessie A. Lea, County Librarian, is to constantly redistribute books among the 39 community branches and deposit station libraries in the organization.

Mrs. Radke continues in charge of the El Sobrante Library. She has announced that new children's books will be on display during Children's Book Week, that is observed from November 13 to 19.

Library hours are 2 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., Mondays and Thursdays.





For over 11 years, from late 1949 to 1961, the El Sobrante library served the local community from this space at the east end of the Mitchell Building, located at the corner of Valley View and Appian Way. It was always a tight fit, though some space was added in 1959 with the purchase of a former barbershop.

The building is still there.

## EL SOBRANTE LIBRARY CHANGED TO BRANCH STATUS BY COUNTY

Change of status of the El Sobrante library from a station to a branch library, as proposed by County Librarian Bertha D. Hellum, was authorized Tuesday by the Board of Supervisors.

Since the local library was established in 1948 the book circulation has increased 466 per cent according to Mrs. Hellum. During the past fiscal year El Sobrante readers borrowed 26 per cent more books for home reading than in 1954-55.

As evidence that this increase will continue, Mrs. Hellum quoted population figures compiled by the Richmond City Planning Department, estimating a current El Sobrante population of more than 8,000, 20,000 by 1965; 35,000 by 1975 and 65,000 by the year 2000.

Mrs. R. E. Radke, who has been in charge of the El Sobrante library, located on Valley View Drive and Appian Way, will continue as librarian, having passed the recent written and oral civil service examinations for Library Assistant. An increase of library service hours and employment of a Library Assistant qualified by civil service will be in effect with the change from station to branch library. "The increased hours of opening," said Mrs. Hellum, "will be announced after the final budget is passed."

The El Sobrante library book stock, limited by lack of space to some 4,809 volumes, is maintained by weekly delivery from county library headquarters in Martinez. During the last twelve months 1,435 books, including 904 specially requested titles, were added to the El Sobrante library.

*El Sobrante Herald, July 19, 1956*

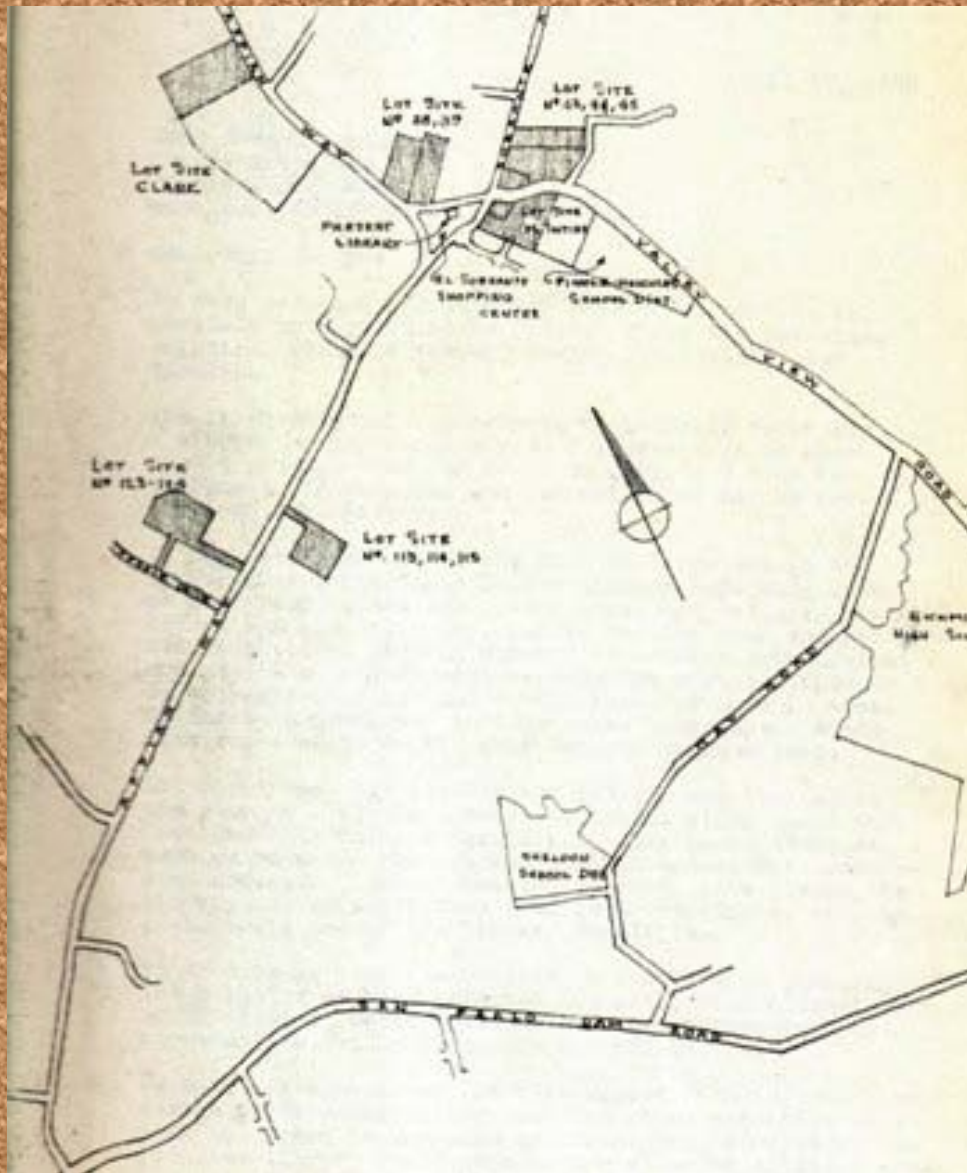


In October, 1956, the El Sobrante Library became a full-fledged branch of the county library system. Mrs. R.E. Radke, who had been the site's only librarian since 1949, soon retired and was replaced by Mrs. Thea Babbitt (shown above, behind the desk).



**Old Library, Mitchell Bldg., c. 1959:** Even though the library expanded into a neighboring shop in 1959, it was still badly over-crowded, as we see in this picture. The librarian is **Thea Babbitt**.





**Possible Library Sites, April 1958:** By 1958 it was clear that El Sobrante needed a much larger library, so a study was prepared and six possible sites were selected. Most of the lots were close to the old library, near the intersection of Appian Way and Valley View. Interestingly, as of this date, the actual (eventual) site, at the corner of Appian and Garden Road was not considered.





**New Library Site, 1960:** The city of Richmond agreed to purchase this orchard at the corner of Appian Way and Garden Road, while construction and operation of the new library would be the responsibility of Contra Costa County.



**Groundbreaking, November 28, 1960:**

From left: **Antone Goyak** (Contractor), **Jim Kenny** (County Supervisor) **Avril Miner** (El Sobrante Library League President), **Bertha Hellum** (County Librarian), **Emil Esola** (Chairman of the Richmond Library Commission), **Coit Coolidge** (Head Richmond Librarian), and **R.S. Chang** (Architect).



Construction on the new library began in January, 1961, and was completed in just 5 months.

An historic event in the life of the library: the first book checked out. The exact date is uncertain, but this probably took place during the open house, June 10, 1961.





*El Sobrante Branch Library*

Contra Costa County Library

Appian Way and Garden Road

El Sobrante, California



You are invited to the

DEDICATION

1:30 p.m.

Saturday

June 3, 1961

PROGRAM

CONCERT

De Anza High School Band

Director — Keith Bee

INVOCATION

Reverend Sigmund Schade

El Sobrante Community Methodist Church



**Pledge of Allegiance, Library Dedication, June 3, 1961.**

Local boy scouts had the honor of raising the flag and leading the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance. Note the newly planted roses that were part of the original landscaping.



### **Inside New Library, April 1962**

Though significantly expanded in the 1970s, this photo shows the early library building to have been open, airy, and un-crowded, with lots of natural light.



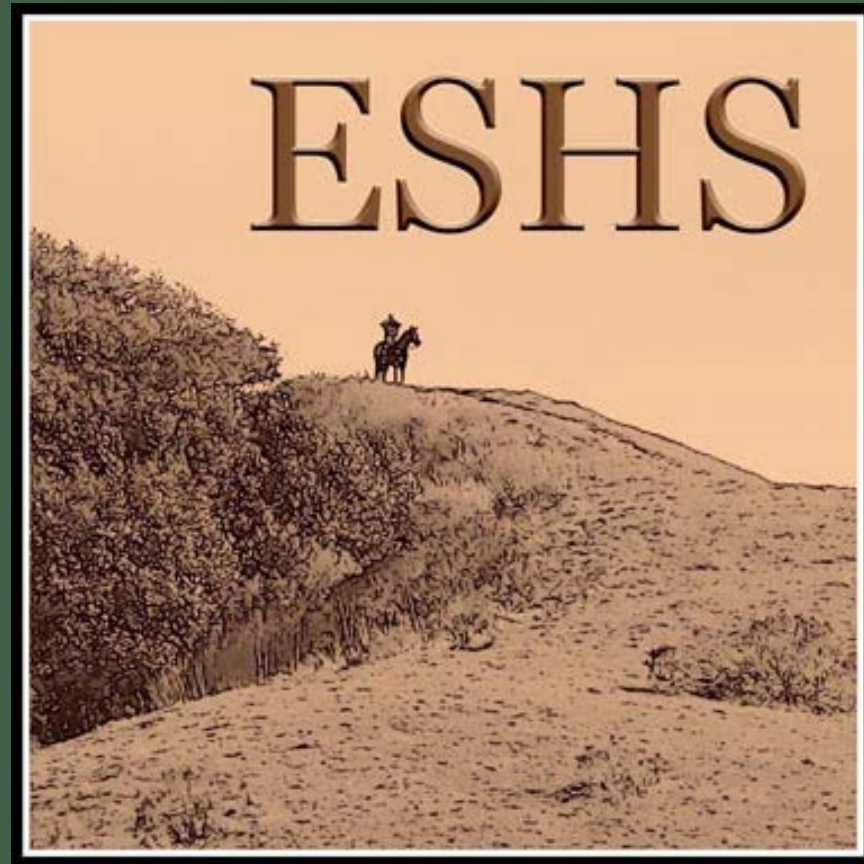


**New Library and Parking Lot, April 1962:** This picture shows that the basic appearance of the library has not changed greatly over the years. These mature trees must have been part of the original landscape, but are now gone.



**Library Expansion Project Ceremony, July 8, 1974:** An unexpected summer rainstorm forced this event indoors.

From left: **Clarence Walters** (County Librarian), **Alfred Dias** (County Supervisor), **A.B. Miner** (president of the Friends of the El Sobrante Library), **John Wilson** (Architect), and **Robert Sharp** (El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce).



*eshist.org*