

## The Building of the Corte Madera Library

The Corte Madera Library was the fourth branch of the Marin County Free Library system, which was established by the Board of Supervisors on August 3, 1926. The branch opened in January, 1928, in the Parkside Hotel building, which it shared with the Post Office. Dorothy Pingree was the first librarian. In September, 1935, Ann S. Hall succeeded her.

In November, 1941, when the Post Office expanded, the Library moved to a new location in the remodeled automotive showroom of Harold Bates. When Miss Hall retired in 1953, Edna Winfield took over.

In 1954, the Corte Madera Lions' Club, in cooperation with the Corte Madera Women's Club, began construction of a community recreation building, with space provided for the library. Proximity to the new Neil Cummins School made it easy for children and teachers to use the library.

Betty Jennings, Dorothy Malmgren, and Laura Hougland were employees beginning in 1956.

In 1964, a special study of the twin cities, Larkspur and Corte Madera, was undertaken to find a way to improve library service to these two areas. It was suggested that the cities might cooperate in the construction of a new library. However, Larkspur did not want to become a part of the County Library system, and Corte Madera did not want to leave the County system. Over the next few years, the idea of a joint library was approached several times but never developed.

In June, 1968, the Board of Supervisors approved a master plan designating Corte Madera as the location of a regional library branch serving the southern portion of the county. It would replace two small branch libraries in Corte Madera and Greenbrae. This would provide a much larger facility and collection and expanded services to the citizens of Corte Madera as well as other areas of southern Marin not already served by city libraries. The Board also approved a new means of financing the library, which would accelerate the building project. On July 1, 1970, the County and the Town of Corte Madera formed a Joint Powers Authority, which would issue revenue bonds to pay for the construction of a new library. The Authority consisted of members of the Board of Supervisors and members of the Town Council. It acted as a separate public entity. The JPA also shared in the cost of constructing a new parking lot in 2003 and was dissolved in 2009.

A 2.7 acre parcel of land fronting Meadowsweet Dr. was purchased, at a price far below market value, from Fred R. Sanford for the purpose of constructing a new library. The architectural firm of Smith Barker Hanssen of San Francisco drew up designs for the building, and DiGorgio and Sons of San Rafael began construction in November, 1970.

The new Corte Madera Regional Library was dedicated in a ceremony on December 11, 1971. Some of the dignitaries attending the ceremony were Mayor Holmes Norville, Town Council members Edward Colthurst, Robert Simmons, and Harold B. Wagstaff; and Marin County Supervisors Peter Arrigoni, Michael Wornum, and John F. McInnis. The County Librarian at this time was Bruce D. Bajema. Staff members were Margaret Galvin, Jan Christenson, Teddy Olwyler, Marie Duffee, Dorothy Malmgren, Susan Glassman, Janet Horvath, JoAnn Joy, Alice McNamee, and Jane Sheeks. Mrs. Walter Neale was the President of the Friends of the Marin County Library, who co-hosted the dedication ceremony with the Corte Madera Chamber of Commerce.

The cost of construction, including site development, furnishings and equipment, was \$684,000. The new single-story building of 9,800 square feet featured a striking angular design with a great many windows, including a dramatic clerestory roof structure. Natural wood was used extensively in both the interior and exterior of the building. Although near commercial and residential areas, its setting on a heavily wooded slope provided a sense of natural serenity.

The new Corte Madera Library building soon was awarded several architectural prizes.

- *First Place, Commercial/Institutional, Plywood Design Awards, 1972.*
- *Award of Merit, annual Library Buildings Award Program of the American Library Association, 1972.*
- *Bay Area Honor Award, American Institute of Architects, 1974.*

Color photographs of the library were used in brochures and advertising by the California Redwood Association and the American Plywood Association, which characterizes the building's design as "utter simplicity, masterfully executed."

The building was featured in an article titled "Splendor in the Stacks," in the May, 1972, issue of *Architectural Forum*. The author writes, "These days you don't notice so much that commercial strip along the road entering Corte Madera, California. What helped is the new regional public library . . . this little library, in all its modesty, is good advertising for what's down the road in Corte Madera."

Nancy Davis, Library Branch Manager

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