

History of the Turlock Library

The story of the Carnegie building begins with a group of women who decided that their fledgling town needed a library. Thanks to the efforts of the Women's Improvement Club, Turlock's first free city library opened in 1908, the same year the city incorporated. The library was housed in various temporary locations, but it was soon apparent that a permanent library building was needed.

The Women's Improvement Club turned to Andrew Carnegie, the famed leader of the American steel industry, who throughout the turn of the century donated funds for the construction of public libraries. However, the process was stalled when the Turlock community couldn't agree on a library site. In 1914 a new women's organization, the Greater Turlock Civic Club, renewed the push for a permanent library building, and in 1915 the club asked Turlock's City Council to submit a grant application to the Carnegie Corporation.

In order for Turlock to receive the Carnegie funds, the city had to own the site on which the library would be built. Again, Turlock's citizens vigorously debated where the library should be located but ultimately settled on a site favored by the Greater Turlock Civic Club: three lots on the southwest corner of North Broadway and Spring (later Florence) Street.



On June 1, 1915, Turlock learned that the Carnegie Corporation had approved the city's grant application. Later that year the Greater Turlock Civic Club purchased the property on Broadway and presented the deed to the City Council, free of cost. It was time for construction planning to begin.

The Classical Revival-style building with cream-colored brick walls and a terra cotta tile roof was finished and ready for its grand opening on September 15, 1916. On that fall evening, a large crowd climbed a grand flight of stairs and stepped through massive sliding doors into the Turlock Carnegie Library. For 52 years the Carnegie building served as Turlock's public library until 1968, when the library relocated to a new building on Minaret.

The new library was built to serve a population up to 36,000 and hold a collection of 50,000 volumes. The Turlock Library serves outlying rural populations and several small communities in northern Merced County. The Friends of the Turlock Public Library was formed in 1993 to respond to severe library conditions at that time. The non-profit 501(c)(3) organization continues to be a major financial support to the library.

