

History of the Empire Library

The first Empire Library opened March 20, 1914, upstairs in the Bechtel Building, on the corner of South Church Street and Yosemite Blvd. Emma Bechtel served as librarian from 1914 to 1924. In 1925, Emma built a one-room building for the library adjacent to the Bechtel Building and Myrtle Pharr became the librarian until she retired on October 27, 1938.



Upon Mrs. Pharr's retirement, Winnie Lindsay took over as librarian, and on October 4, 1941, the library moved into a new building one block away, at 22 North G Street. The library would remain at this location for almost 60 years. Mrs. Lindsay retired October 14, 1943. Anna Kathryn Heisel became Empire's librarian in 1944, a post she would hold for the next 30 years. During Mrs. Heisel's tenure, the County Board of Supervisors purchased the library building from Ruth McDowell in 1963, for the sum of \$4,000.

Mrs. Heisel was succeeded by Scott Hart, Stan Pollock, Edna Miller, Lee Faltermeyer, Kay Qualls, Marjorie Brannon, Manuela Benskin, Sheri Darrough, Debbie Austin, Stella Beratlis, Yolanda Sandoval, Patricia Vander Karr, Heather Bailey, Martha Perales and Grace Habiger. Diane Ramirez is the current branch supervisor.

On January 26, 1999, the library moved to the Empire Community Resource Center at 18 S. Abbie Street. At that time, it included a county medical office, a Sheriff's substation, and a Healthy Start office.

A few blocks away a community pool and a park had been developed next to the Empire Community Hall, which was located at First and I Streets. After the Community Hall was severely damaged by fire in May 2015, the Empire Community Hall Association decided to donate the property to the county for the purpose of building a new library. The old building was demolished and the land was transferred. On July 16, 2020, the County broke ground on a new library for the community of Empire.

