

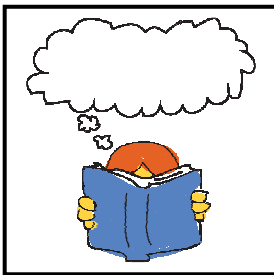
## **HISTORIAN'S HISTORY~**

### Alamo Women's Club and Its Strong Library Connection

The Alamo branch of Contra Costa County library was started in **1917** in a room in the Alamo schoolhouse. With the mothers' club of Alamo starting in 1916 and the small size of the school its not a stretch that the early librarians were founding members and a driving force for the library. It was noted later that the library was 'one of the first AWC service projects for the community', not school related! Also, that many of the initial books were provided from private libraries and that many were provided by members. This AWC effort continued for close to **sixty years**. That is a very long time for a club to devote that attention and such a continuous long-lasting effort to one project.



While exact details have been lost, according to an early notation in **1922** AWC set up and rented space for the Alamo branch in the Humburg\* home. References also point to using space at the home of Annie Chase and outfitting her 'tank' house for the library. Several other locations of short duration may have happened. Regardless of its location the women's club members were present and staffing it in an arrangement with Contra Costa County. At this time from **1922** to **1939** the library was open Tuesdays and Fridays.



Eventually the library moved again and an article states that it moved to the women's Club 'rooms'. In trying to piece together the location several articles refer that when Annie Chase died in 1939 the library was put in the Community club location sponsored by club members. From our scrapbooks, we find that is the year the Club began renting the Henry Hotel and with notation that not only did they rent the space for the library but also that club women continued as the librarian and staff!

Interestingly, the American Library Association officially recognizes our umbrella organization, GFWC (General Federated Women's Clubs) and its clubs **as founding 75% of all U.S. public libraries** in the **1930's**! We were part of that effort right here at home.

The library was a feature of local social life to the point that by **1942** local papers report the number of borrowers and the number of books loaned: at the Alamo branch there were 144 borrowers of 1888 books loaned. By **1947** the local newspaper also reported titles and authors of new books purchased and delivered for local readers to check out. Several stories are told about the 1940's Henry Hotel space which was heated by a coal and wood stove. Bertha Linhares\*, the Alamo postmaster, would build the fire on her way to the post office so that the room would be warm for the librarian and the women coming in to work. What a nice thing to do.

By **1949** it looks like the library was open on Thursday afternoon and twice a month deliveries of book requests were sent from the main library in Martinez to the Alamo branch as well as delivery of other books.

The library moves again with the *Alamo Women's Club* relocation to their new Clubhouse in **1952**. AWC continues its library service as before and they even built space for the library in the new clubhouse. A newspaper clip of **1952** announces that the 'newly painted shelves' for the library were ready. \*



The Alamo branch remains for another ten years. But, unfortunately, by the **1960**'s the County discontinues its support. Instead, they provided a bookmobile. Again, AWC steps up and (wo)mans the bookmobile. By **1970** that too was sadly discontinued. But even after the County pulls out, our club provided books to ill and those who were home bound. It appears that this practice faded away sometime after the late 1970's.

For **60** years our members set up, moved and relocated several times, rented space for, and provided the librarian from our membership: a remarkable service to local community life!

Vicki Koc, Historian

Notes to Historical Information:

- According to Virgie Jones (former member and historian and author of "*Remembering Alamo and Other Things Along the Way*") this was the Humburg\* home built in 1920 and located near current CVS site. Different sources site Huber when history was rewritten in early 1970's. Since both families were in Alamo it is possible both housed the library at one time or another.
- The library series of moves out of the schoolhouse in 1922 was to make room for expanding classrooms for the schools increasing population. All of the small moves took place between 1922 and 1939 and possibly included (besides Humburg, Huber & Chase homes) someone's garage, and the 'Gifford' home too
- Bertha Linhares family was the Bell family and collectively five family members were appointed and served as Alamo Postmasters for 52 of the first 123 years (1852-1975). Her service began in 1947.
- Our vestibule where we now have check in for meetings had shelving that was removed in the 2014 renovation. Some of those shelves were salvaged by member Diane Leventhal and can currently be seen in our shed outside the kitchen holding household club supplies!

Historian Note: Much of what AWC did is hard to retrieve as sources become scarce, are contradictory over decades (think the game of telephone), have typos, are more scattered and, in fact, much was not written down. It is a challenge following a volunteer organization for 102 years and any errors are mine. For articles multiple sources are used, our scrapbooks and sources in other historical writings.