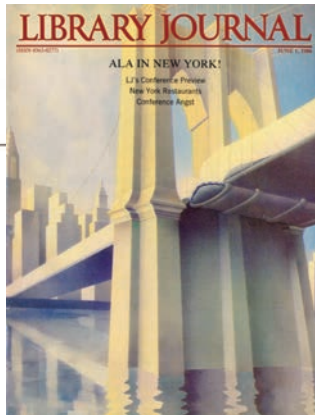




Los Angeles Public Torched Arson Blamed for Inferno

At about 11 a.m. on April 19, Los Angeles Public Library Director Wyman Jones, having left a meeting at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, was driving to the library, planning first to swing by the Hollywood Branch to see how its rebuilding, after a disastrous arson fire, was progressing. His car radio gave him the first word of an even worse case of arson: flames were raging through the main library building and fire companies were struggling to get through to it, hampered not only by the normal downtown traffic, but by crowds out on their lunch hour and the first of some 60 pieces of fire equipment that would be thrown into the battle for the library.

For the next six hours, firemen fought the fire, handicapped by determination to try to save as much of the collection as possible and by the design of the building. An old-fashioned stack tower, with steel grating walkways instead of floors that would have delayed the flames, formed a natural chimney in the area where the fire was set. Forty-four firemen were injured, but none fatally, in a battle that will be



commemorated by a bronze plaque bearing their names in the remodeled and enlarged building.

To Jones, it looked then that nothing would survive the fire, but in the end the toll was set at about 400,000 books lost and \$300,000 in damage to art works, plus unknown damage suffered by water-soaked books in freezers and others held under a bubble canopy in the Convention Center. By Saturday, all water-damaged books had been removed, 600,000 in freezers and another 600,000 in dry storage; rehabilitating them is expected to cost \$1 million.

Fire Chief Donald Manning said

"without any reservation, we can say it was arson." A search was on for a man seen in the area before the fire; he was described as white, about six feet tall, and blond. Police artists have drawn up a composite sketch that is being circulated. Reward money has been offered: \$5000 by the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Bureau, and another \$20,000 by the City Council. Speculation is growing about the arsonist's role in previous California library

fires, including two others in Los Angeles, the Hollywood Branch fire and the Jefferson Library fire.

Help came from all quarters. The ARCO Corporation turned over to the library the whole 36th floor in its tower building; it was immediately used to coordinate volunteers, who included LAPL staff and staff of other libraries and museums, including the Library of Congress, the Getty Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum, and the Huntington Library. One man called in from a Dodger game during the seventh inning to ask if he was needed. So many people were involved that it was a

Wyman Jones on the LAPL fire:

"I was driving back to the library from a Literacy Council meeting in Hollywood, hoping to swing by the Hollywood Regional Library, which is due to open for the first time since arson destroyed it five years ago.

"I was running late as I drove east on Hollywood Boulevard, and stopped to double park and run in for a chili dog at one of those open-front stands. Back in the car, and thinking of the fire at the Hollywood Library, I flicked on the radio and heard that the Central Library was on fire and already 35 pieces of equipment were there and traffic was badly snarled.

"I parked at an outlying lot and walked the rest of the way to the library, where I had to stand across the street, the smoke was so bad. Betty Gay, Central Library director, and the New York architects had been meeting in the library and were there.

"Smoke from burning books is different—deep brown clouds billowing out of windows blown out by inside pressure and flames licking out of them. It was unreal. It looked like an el cheapo movie set done by scab special effects men.

"Then the wind shifted to the west and the firemen came rushing toward us shouting to get back; we fled the smoke

down the escalators to the shopping center under the ARCO tower, made our way to City Hall, and set up a command post there.

"It's ironic—when the Hollywood Library burned, it was an old building with old books; when we reopen it next month, it will be much larger, with a great building and 100,000 new books.

"As for the main library fire, no staff, no firemen, no citizens lost their lives. Our materials losses were heavy, starting with 400,000 books just turned to ashes and dumped out of the building down chutes—but we're going to make it back."

major task to round up enough hard hats for them, and it cost \$15,000 to feed them.

Help in rebuilding the collections came in a \$2 million gift from the Getty Trust. The PublishersMarketing Association launched a drive, in conjunction with Bowker magazines, to ask publishers exhibiting at ABA (the American Booksellers Association) in New Orleans to donate a single copy of each of their titles to the library.

Betty Gay, director of the Central Library, asked that libraries and others planning to give books first let LAPL know what books they have available, and then hold on to them until they can be accepted.

Losses were particularly heavy where the seventh stack tiers collapsed down into the sixth. Lost on the seventh tier were backfiles of periodicals in social sciences, history, business, and literature. The whole



collection of monographs in the 500s (science) on the sixth floor was lost. The microfilm collection, on which LAPL has spent a great deal, is mostly damaged, although some can be restored.

Art periodicals, which were in the arson area and off limits for several days, suffered badly; many were swelled up with water before they could be sent to freezers. The library will be especially hopeful of replacing

them. Also, the U.S. Patent Collection, a complete file of patents, was lost when firemen drove the fire west and through the patent area.

The library had expected to move into temporary quarters later this year while extensive remodeling and an addition were under way. The project architect has reported that work on the library can be started six to eight months sooner than expected; the library hopes now to reopen in the fall.

More good news: besides the saving of the much-treasured façade, the building has suffered no major structural damage.

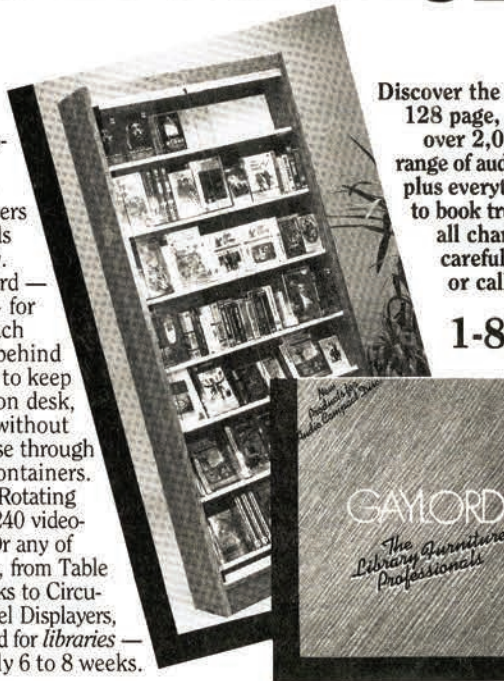
While Los Angeles was fighting to save its libraries, 6,235 miles away, in the Ukraine, the Soviet Union was fighting the spread of radiation and fighting also to keep information about it from spreading. According to one report, however, *Pravda* found time to spread the news of the fire at the Los Angeles Public Library.

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OhioLINK:
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LJ's Statewide
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Survey

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT
Books on Aging—
Plus, The Spanish
Bookshelf

Elizabeth Martinez
City Librarian
Los Angeles
Public Library

FIRST NOVELS

The city's landmark library, gutted in 1986 by the worst library fire in U.S. history, debuts October 3 after extensive expansion, renovation, and restoration

RISING FROM THE ASHES:

L.A.'s Central Library Reopens

By Robert G. Reagan & Francine Fialkoff

THE BELEAGUERED Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) system finally has something to celebrate. On October 3 the system's Central Library reopens, following a \$213.9 million rehabilitation and expansion. Marked by a day-long festival, a black-tie dinner, and daily special events throughout the month, the reopening marks the eagerly awaited climax to a disastrous arson fire that temporarily extinguished plans for the "new" central library.

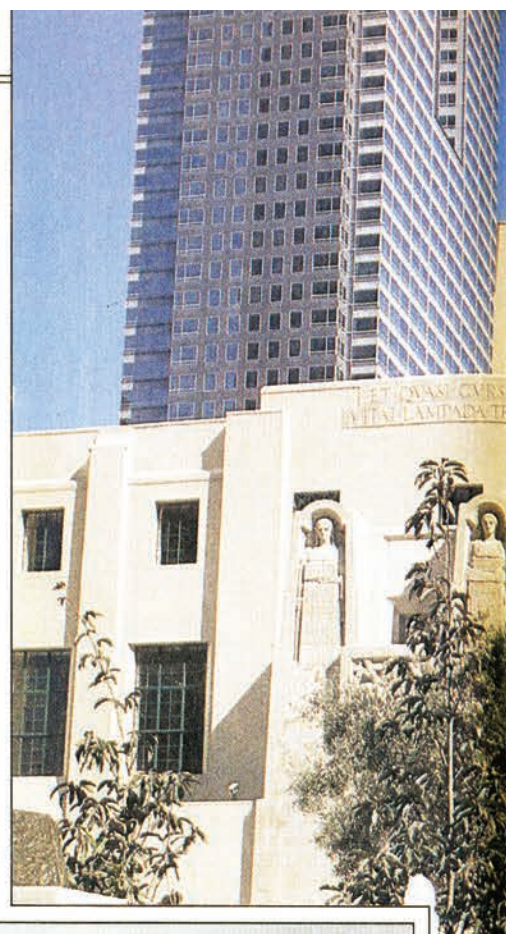
As City Librarian Elizabeth Martínez is quick to point out, the rehabilitation of the facility represents far more than the debut of a building and its collections: "It is a prime example of what can be accomplished when civic leaders, foundations, corporations, private citizens, and a dedicated staff work diligently together to provide for the common good."

Headquarters for the 121-year-old LAPL system, the ambitious Central Library project includes the renovated original library, the Goodhue building, built in 1926; the new Tom Bradley Wing that doubles the space of the previous facility to 540,000 square feet; the Robert F. Maguire III Gardens, a 1.5-acre urban green space; and a state-of-the-art automated catalog and circulation system.

Since becoming City Librarian in 1990, Martínez has

not only directed the Library Department staff but also has worked in concert with the Board of Library Commissioners and other city departments in moving the complex project through the countless development and approval stages. Martínez also serves on the Board of Directors of the Library Foundation of Los Angeles, the recently incorporated fundraising arm of the library. She believes strongly that "In these times of diminishing public funding, it's important to enlist the support of corporate leaders and library boosters in the community."

Thanks to the backing of staff and civic leaders and an outpouring of public support, the Central Library has been able to rebound from tragedy, as *LJ*'s brief account reveals.



Robert G. Reagan is Public Information Director, Los Angeles Public Library, and Francine Fialkoff is Executive Editor, *LJ*



PHOTO BY JIM CACCANO

1981 Ambitious Expansion Plan Launched

Opened in 1926, the Central Library, a dramatic-looking, then-modern facility, had long since outgrown its bounds by the 1980s. Over two million books were crammed into the building, and some 85 percent of the collection was housed in closed stacks. There was no air conditioning, and public parking was available only on weekends. The facility had no fire suppression system and had been cited numerous times by the Fire Department for its deficiencies.

Amid controversy, library staff, city officials, and community members discussed plans to improve the antiquated facility. Some wanted the landmark razed and replaced with a new structure; others sought to preserve this City of Los Angeles-designated monument, also listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

After many false starts, the Board of Library Commissioners and the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), with direction from Mayor Tom Bradley and the City Council, formulated a building plan in 1981. It called for renovating the Goodhue facility, doubling the library's size with an addition, restoring the gardens, and constructing an underground 942-space parking area.

Funding was to come from a variety of public and private sources. The plan included the CRA's sale of tax increment bonds; the sale of the former West Lawn, with the library retaining a permanent easement for the gardens; and fees paid by private developers for the right to build on

Two disastrous arson fires could have rung a death knell for the LAPL Central Library, but the city, the library staff, and the community refused to let it die



sites near the library at a greater density than would otherwise be permitted. In addition, the historic building was to be sold to an investor who would gain tax credits and who would lease the building back to the city with a buy-back option after 20 years. (At press time, the L.A. City Council had rejected such an agreement with Philip Morris & Co., see *Late Bulletins*, p. 13.)

The city retained the architectural firm of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates to design the renovation and expansion.

1986 Arson Fires Strike

On April 29, 1986, the ambitious program was interrupted when a disastrous arson fire roared through the Central Library. More than 375,000 books were destroyed before the 300 firefighters from more than 60 companies extinguished the inferno. The library lost nearly a fifth of its treasures and the flooded, charred structure was closed to the public. Catastrophe struck again on September 3, when another fire was intentionally set and destroyed 25,000 more books. Despite an extensive investigation, the arsonist was never apprehended.

The April 29 fire, termed the most difficult in local history by the Los Angeles Fire Department, not only destroyed thousands of books, but the water used to fight the blaze damaged many thousands more.

1986-1987 Thousands Volunteer for Recovery Effort

Once the flames were extinguished, a race against time began to freeze 750,000 volumes within hours to prevent their destruction by mold and decay. In an unprecedented groundswell of support, more than 1700 volunteers and 1000 library staffers from throughout the system worked around the clock, boxing 1.3 million books. The water-soaked volumes were quick-frozen and 600,000 smoke-damaged and undamaged books were placed into storage. The herculean effort was completed within days.

The Save the Books campaign also provided vital assistance to the library. With leadership from Mayor Bradley and ARCO Chair/CEO Lodwick M. Cook, and the help of individuals and organizations, Save the Books provided more than \$10 million to replace the volumes lost in

the fire. Among its many fundraising activities was a week-long telethon in January 1987, during which more than \$2 million was pledged. Celebrity participants included Henry Kissinger, Irving Stone, Alex Haley, Sidney Sheldon, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Steve Allen, Abigail "Dear Abby" Van Buren, and Arte Johnson.

1988 Groundbreaking

Despite their destructive effect upon the collection, the 1986 fires did not structurally damage the Central Library facility, and the expansion continued. On June 3, 1988, groundbreaking ceremonies were held at the library site.

1989 Unfreezing the Books

The 750,000 volumes, quick-frozen three years before, were removed from the freezers, dried by a state-of-the-art process, cleaned, and placed on the shelves of the Central Library's temporary home. It opened to the public on May 22, 1989.



1991 Celebrating "Topping Out"

On March 15, 1991, the placement of the last steel girder in the new structure prompted a "topping out" celebration attended by Mayor Tom Bradley, City Librarian Elizabeth Martínez, City Council President John Ferraro, Board of the Library Commission President Sanford P. Paris, and more than 200 library staff who signed the girder before it was put in place (see above photo).

1993 Bringing the Books Back Home

As the "new" Central Library neared completion, LAPL commenced perhaps history's largest book movement. Beginning June 7, 1993, the library transported more than 2.1 million volumes and other materials from the temporary location to its historic facility. In addition, 28.5 miles of shelving, nine subject departments, and LAPL's administrative offices and support services were also moved. In the first week, 800,000 volumes were relocated.



PHOTO BY JIM CACCARO

At the same time, the entire collection was barcoded for the new automated catalog and circulation system. Debuting at Central Library, the system will eventually encompass 1200 terminals and electronically link LAPL's Central Library and the branches.

October 1993 Welcoming the "New" Central Library

Seven years after the worst library fire in U.S. history, the Central Library returns, twice the size of the original. In testament to the effectiveness of the staff and volunteers' efforts following the 1986 fire, approximately 95 percent of the water-damaged books are on the shelves, and nearly 80 percent of those show no visible sign of their trauma.

The rehabilitated Goodhue building displays the beautifully refurbished Lodwick M. Cook Rotunda (photo below); the KLOS Story Theater, a highlight of the Children's Literature Department; magnificent restored murals (top photo); and grand public spaces. The Tom Bradley Wing features a soaring eight-story atrium that provides access and natural light to seven of the subject departments and the new 235-seat state-of-the-art Mark Taper Auditorium.

In addition to its automated online catalog, the library uses compact shelving for book storage and a Translogic computerized book conveyance system featuring 17 delivery stations and, initially, 100 electrically propelled carts to deliver materials, since half the books in each subject department are housed in closed stacks.

New security and safety features include "card key" locks to limit access to some areas, nearly 100 security cameras inside and outdoors, and sprinklers throughout the building. The Robert F. Maguire III Gardens provide an urban oasis with art-filled public gardens and a café.

Once again, L.A. has its Central Library back. As a source of civic pride, the Central Library remains one of Los Angeles's most prominent landmarks and serves as a vital cultural, informational, and recreational resource.

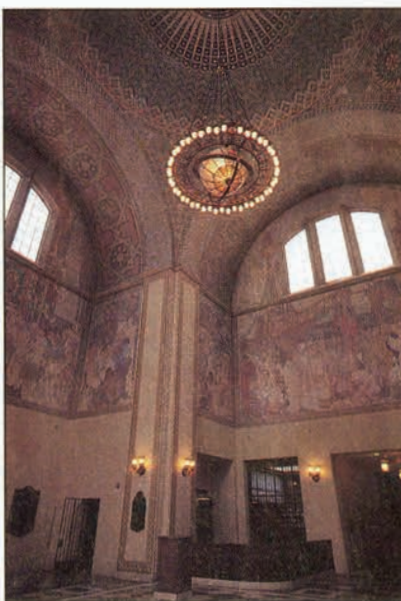


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