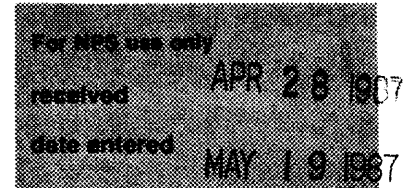


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 22

22. Venice Branch Library
610 California Avenue

Significance:

The Venice Branch Library, a notable design of local architect David J. Witmer, is significant for its cultural and historical role in the Venice community.

Although Venice was an incorporated city between 1903 and 1925, it did not have its own library. Instead, it was serviced by a branch of the Los Angeles County system which was opened in a rented store front in 1912. In 1925, Venice was annexed to the City of Los Angeles. The Venice Branch Library was the second public building to be constructed by the City as part of an ambitious building program which included a police station, a public bathhouse, and lifeguard stations.

David J. Witmer was a member of a family which had come to Los Angeles in the late 1880s. The family was successful in Los Angeles real estate and banking. Witmer began his architectural practice in the early 1920s, and in 1924 he was elected secretary of the Southern California chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He specialized in designing residences and schools. The Venice Branch Library was the only library he designed. Its unusual vertical bands of windows on the rear illustrate his concern to functional needs and the interior fireplace and vestibule show his attention to details.

Joe Croset, the contractor, began construction on the library in July 1929. It was finished in 1930 at the cost of \$48,000. At the formal dedication on April 7, 1930, Althea Warren, soon to be the City Librarian, presided over the ceremonies. Music was provided by the Venice Lynx Trio of the Venice Institute of Music. Noted Chautauqua lecturer, Geoffrey Morgan, gave a speech on "Books - the Keys to Everything".

Since its construction, the branch has served the cultural needs of the Venice community. More recently it was one of the first libraries in Los Angeles to receive special funds under the Federal Library Services and Construction Act of 1965. The library used these funds to expand library services as well as provide innovative services to the community. The branch expanded its Spanish language collection, as well as providing art exhibitions. Classes were taught in celestial navigation, belly dancing, and yoga. The library was one of the first to have a computer and offer workshops in computer education. One unusual program was providing activities for gang members such as dances and social events.

The library which is nestled in a neighborhood of small bungalows and beach cottages retains a strong sense of time and place and is part of a thematic nomination of Los Angeles Branch Libraries to the National Register of Historic Places.

BRANCH LIBRARIES, LOS ANGELES, CA
#22 Venice Branch, 610 California Ave.
1 inch=60 feet

