

EXCELSIOR BRANCH/COMMUNITY
PROFILE
JULY 1975

COMMUNITY

GEOGRAPHIC AREA

The area that Excelsior Branch serves is a rather large district, bounded by the Southern Freeway (highway 280) on one side, the Daly City County line on another, and McLaren Park and University Mound on the third. Through the center of the area runs Mission Street, with its wealth of small neighborhood shops, Italian and Mexican delicatessens, donut shops, etc. Two other shopping areas, just off Mission Street, are the Ocean-Persia area, and Geneva Avenue. Most necessary shopping can be taken care of in the neighborhood.

THE PEOPLE

One of the most racially mixed areas of the City, it was traditionally Italian with a smattering of Irish Catholics. In recent years, the neighborhood has experienced an influx of Latin American peoples (Mexican and Central and South American) from the Inner Mission area in search of single-family housing. Most speak English, especially the children, though parents may read only Spanish; and many have relatives or friends staying with them direct from the home country. An even more recent and noticeable group is the Filipino contingent - they are moving in in ever increasing numbers and many of the children use the library; the younger ones seem well integrated, but the junior high age are very clannish. As a whole, they are very cheerful and friendly - and noisy!! Besides these large groups, which seem well organized politically, there are also representatives of almost every other ethnic or language minority present in the City: Chinese and other Asian peoples, Samoan, Fijian, middle-eastern, European and Black. Needless to say our International collection gets good use. For the most part, the people are in the low to middle working classes, though Margot Matterson Doss stated in a 1968 article that there is more money per capita in the bank in the Excelsior than in Pacific Heights. Whether this is still true, we don't know, but the people are upwardly mobile and probably do have savings in the bank. However, the older Italian families who were the original inhabitants, are dying out and being replaced by younger families, perhaps still struggling. As was stated before, the houses are mostly detached one-and two-family dwellings, the kind with backyard gardens and washlines. A large percentage of families own their homes, by all reports, and many are young families with children.

HISTORY/SCHOOLS

Originally, the neighborhood grew up around the old Corpus Christi Church, which was started in 1897 by Archbishop Riordan, (as in Riordan High!!) to serve the Italians who worked on the truck farms in the area. It developed as a largely Catholic area, and Epiphany Church was opened in 1914. Both parishes started schools, which are still very active, and the children who go there now provide a sizeable block of the children using the branch; relations are very cordial with both school faculties and administrations. The schools serve neighborhood Catholics, for the most part, though some children come from out of the area-and as was stated before, the old families were mostly Italian and Irish, the newer ones Latin American and Filipino; all of these are Catholic groups, and there has been some political feuding among the groups for control of the parishes.

OTHER SCHOOLS

Besides the two parochial schools, we have quite a variety of other educational establishments. Within walking distance, is the Discovery Center School on Ocean Avenue. Listed in the Guide to Alternative Education, it is a private school providing child care services from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Classes are large (averaging 45) and teachers provide the child care as well as education. Needless to say, they are all dedicated, and have a bad habit of just appearing at the library door with 15 to 45 kids. This school has been our only problem in the last couple of years, and that a minor one.

There are other alternative schools in the area, but they have not made contact with the library and do not seem to be listed anywhere.

Of the several public schools in the area, Monroe and Excelsior are within walking distance; presently Excelsior is being used to house schools being earthquake-proofed, so we are never sure whether there is anyone there or not. Also within our jurisdiction but too far away for much interchange are Cleveland, Guadalupe, Longfellow and San Miguel. The junior high's are James Denman and Luther Burbank, and the high schools are Balboa and St. Johns. City College is just out of our territory, near Ingleside, but many of the students either live in the area or use the branch. Of course, we also get students from the Children's Literature classes at State College.

PRE-SCHOOLS

There are quite a few pre-school groups within our service area, but they consist mainly of Tiny Tots at the three major playgrounds: three classes at Cayuga playground, three classes at the Alice Chalmers playground, and two classes at Excelsior playground. All of these are too far for the children to visit the library, so the children's librarians visit as often as possible, trying for once a week with each class. The Mission YMCA has a nursery school, called Sesame Street, which has four or five classes, most of which visit the library every week or two during the school year. The Child Care Center in Excelsior School has five pre-school classes, but they are heavily restricted in their movements outside the building, so the teachers use the library as a source of books to read to the children, and only bring the classes for special programs. A new nursery school opened in July, 1975, the Excelsior Cooperative Nursery School (formerly Lake Merced Nursery School) - and we are more than happy to welcome them, as they are the first full nursery school in the area, having classes all week long, rather than once or twice a week as the other groups do. As might be expected from the type of community Excelsior is, there is a crying need for nursery schools and child care centers.

ORGANIZATIONS

Though the community has been one of the most recent to become politically active it is developing quite a bit of political muscle and know-how. COMO-the Coalition of Outer Mission Organizations- has become a power to reckon with in City Hall. Broken down into block clubs and interest groups which meet separately, it also has a senate on which Ms Cullen (Excelsior Branch Librarian) is a member for the library. Several of the smaller groups meet in the library meeting room. The local YMCA board, to which Ms Cullen is also a representative, has recently been reorganized and is planning much more extensive activity (Sesame Street) has been their main strength previously). Other, more casual groups which meet in the area are the Rotary Club (which seems largely social) the Excelsior Merchants'

(who meet once a month - Ms Cullen attends, and gets support for the library), The Philippine Society of Corpus Christi, the Coalition of Senior Citizens groups working for a senior center for the district. On the institutional rather than organization level, we have the Convent of the Good Shepherd, on University Mound, which is in the process of turning its accredited high school for wards of the court into one with open enrollment (classes from there have used the library); they also plan to open their facilities, including swimming pool to the public. There are several half-way houses nearby, the Alemany Mental Health Center, homes for the elderly, including the Jewish Home two blocks away.

THE BRANCH

HISTORY

Excelsior was the tenth branch to be opened in San Francisco, starting in 1925 on Ocean Avenue. The most recent in a storefront at 4465 Mission. The gentlemen at the real estate agency there now occasionally come in with mail that has been addressed there. The new branch at the corner of Cotter and Mission was built at a cost of \$400,000 and opened in October 1967, with a dedication on June 12, 1968. The official seating capacity of the children's room is 38, the adult room 56, and the meeting room 60. The official book capacity is 53,000; a book count made in the summer of 1974 showed over 38,000 books actually on the shelves or in circulation, of which 15,203 were children's books.

STAFF

Present staff consists of four regular civil service librarians (3 adult and 1 childrens) two CETA librarians (1 adult and 1 childrens), one regular 3616, 3 CETA 3610's, 4 pages (50 page hours), 6 NYC and Horizons workers. Twenty people working in the branch at one time or another during the week. We are open Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights until 9 p.m., till 6 p.m. Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Besides which, Excelsior staff is frequently called upon to cover schedules in the three one-librarian branches in the cluster - there are only rare days when the full complement of full-time staff is able to work within the branch. Nonetheless, the likelihood that each person using the branch will receive the help he or she needs has made the building a very active and popular place. The building itself also invites people. While the entrance is not striking, it is not a negative factor, and within the building, the patron is met with a cheery view, lots of windows and a spacious feeling, bright bulletin boards and a sense of movement. The back work areas are comfortable for staff, with a well-designed staff room. The shelving in the back room was rearranged to provide access to the public rest room without entering staff areas. At the same time, portions of the room were set aside for adult librarians and for children's librarians for work and storage - this has worked quite successfully and gives us more freedom of movement.

PROGRAMMING

There is a full round of programming, in the traditional sense, at Excelsior. The adult librarians provide a series of weekly films on a theme, held on Tuesdays in the afternoons and evenings. Once a month there are films for senior citizens, usually on a travel theme, held in the afternoon. Occasionally, a special evening program is planned, such as music, macrame, crochet, poetry, etc. Of course, children are allowed to attend those programs in which they are interested. As far as outreach goes, Ms Myers is in charge of the Bookbridge program from Excelsior, and also visits some senior citizens homes to read to groups.

Children's programming has been strictly traditional during the past year, consisting of pre-school story hour (held twice on Wednesdays), film# filmstrip programs when-ever possible, story-hours twice a month since there have been two children's librarians. And during the school year, we have worked extensively with the many pre-school groups and have taken those school-age classes whose teachers expressed a desire to introduce the children to the public library. Now, during the summer, of Ako, film# course we have reading aloud (twice a week), and Summer Reading. Our filmstrip & story program biggest offering, or at least the most apparently successful one, is that for the last six months there has almost always been a librarian to talk to in the children's room. This has had the desired effect of increasing our business at a phenomenal rate (juvenile circulation was 25-30% two years ago, and is now usually over 40%). Since circulation statistics are about all we have to go on, it is interesting to note that juvenile (and branch) circulation has gone down steadily, with occasional upwardturns, since the new building opened, but especially since there has been only one children's librarian. This should indicate that it is too big a job for just one person, no matter how dynamic.

THE CHILDREN'S LIBRARIANS AT THE BRANCH SINCE THE BRANCH OPENED ARE:

Elizabeth Wright and Patricia Sullivan - 1967 to 1969
Donna Parks and Carol Zajchowski - 1969
Karey Wehner - 1969-1971
Gail Greenseid - 1971-1972
Linda Geistlinger - 1972
Alice Jacobs - 1972-1973
Sally Houston - 1973
Patricia Smith - 1975

BRANCH LIBRARIANS:

Anne Kincaid - 1967-1969
Marian Oberstein - 1969-1970
Versa Cullen - 1970-

Sally Houston
Patricia Smith
July 18, 1975