

SOUTH PASADENA LOCAL HISTORY
SOUTH PASADENA PUBLIC LIBRARY MATERIALS
SUBJECT: MARENGO SCHOOL

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PREPARING PLANS FOR NEW SCHOOL

Architect Norman F. Marsh has been awarded the contract for preparing the plans for the new school building to be erected on the site recently purchased by the School Board on Marengo avenue, between Bank and Rollin streets. It is expected that the working plans will be ready about September 1st, and that the work of construction will be begun immediately thereafter.

The building will be two stories high and in the form of a letter H. It will probably be of concrete construction, and made as near fireproof as possible. There will be eight class-rooms, and the basement will be fitted up with two large rooms, one for sloyd work and the other for domestic science. The architecture will be in the Mission style, and the building will have a red tile roof.

The extreme length of the building will be 120 feet and the wings will have a depth of 70 feet. The plan of construction will insure an abundance of light in every room. There will be no dark corners anywhere. In short, the building, in addition to being one of the most artistic in this part of the country, will be modern in every respect.

The school will be equipped with a water purifying system and the force blast system of heating and ventilation will be used.

Marengo School

South Pasadena Record

August 12, 1909

Page 1, Column 1.

MARENGO SCHOOL

By 1909 the area east of Fair Oaks Avenue was rapidly changing from groves and pastures to town lots, and new homes were going up almost daily. Residents were eager to have a school, but less eager to have one in their immediate neighborhood. Some property owners refused to sell land to the school board, and the people of Oneonta Park threatened a lawsuit if the board attempted to build there. Henry E. Huntington finally agreed to sell a lot at Marengo Avenue and Bank Street, but only on the condition that the school board not attempt to build in Oneonta Park.

The eight-room school opened in September 1910. It was surrounded by orange groves and had a streambed—the San Pasqual Arroyo—on its eastern border. Crossing the gully was a great adventure. Youngsters would slide down one bank and clamber up the other. Stratford Avenue eventually covered part of the arroyo, and from Oak Street to Huntington Drive an open concrete flume was built in the streambed. To the children this was the “sankey,” a word corrupted from the Spanish *zanja*, or irrigation ditch. It was an ideal setting in which to play Paris Sewers.

In 1919 eighth-graders Ward Ritchie and Pat Kelley founded the *Marengo Literary Leader*, which sold for five cents a copy. A fellow eighth-grader, Lawrence Clark Powell, published his first writings in the paper. His contributions ranged from prose sketches of the desert to a thrilling serial influenced by the Fu Manchu stories of Sax Rohmer.

Ward Ritchie established a fine press in 1932, setting up his first shop in a garage behind his family's home on Milan Avenue. The American Institute of Graphic Arts has honored the typographic excellence of many books designed and printed by Ward Ritchie. Over the years Ritchie published a number of Lawrence Clark Powell's books on literature, including *The Alchemy of Books*, dedicated to the memory of Nellie Keith, South Pasadena's first city librarian.

Ritchie and Powell have both paid tribute to Mattaline Crabtree, who taught at Marengo for thirty-three years. Powell once described her as “a soft-spoken steel-gripped Kentucky mountain woman” and as one of the great teachers in his life. In a letter written soon after the death of Miss Crabtree, Powell said, “I never forgot the lessons she taught us in the third grade: that all men are brothers, that work and play can be richly blended, and that the more one gets from life the more he owes it in return. She had the true teacher's supreme gift of making study a joyful activity.”

When Marengo's mission-style building went up in 1910, it boasted cooled air, filtered water, and a hygienic drinking fountain. Fireproof, but not earthquake-resistant, the building was abandoned as unsafe in 1947 and demolished a year later. Classes continued in a temporary building until 1955, when Marengo erected six new classrooms and a kindergarten building.

In 1961 Marengo became the first school in the state to make use of a portable classroom that could be folded, trucked to the site, and erected in twenty-four hours. The folded roof rose slowly into place when a large balloon was placed beneath it and inflated—a process likened by the *Los Angeles Times* to a poppy unfolding in the springtime. Installed as a temporary measure, the portable buildings at Marengo were finally abandoned in 1985 and replaced by a new wing with five classrooms and a learning lab.

South Pasadena
Public Schools



Until 1947 Marengo students attended classes in this mission-style schoolhouse. *Courtesy of South Pasadena Public Library.*



Emily Pryor, seated at the left, posed with her students at Marengo School around 1925. Miss French is at the piano. *Courtesy of Priscilla Roth Feigen.*

Marengo's Class of 1920

by Jane Apostol

Noted printer and book designer Ward Ritchie discovered the delights of the South Pasadena Public Library back in 1914, as a third grader at the Marengo Avenue School. When Jane



Harry W. Ritchie

Cavenagh, president of the library board of trustees, invited him to speak on March 3 at the annual brunch honoring library volunteers, he accepted with enthusiasm. Five of his former classmates also attended the program. For them it was a double celebration: the centennial year of the library and the 75th anniversary

of their graduation from Marengo.

"We were an exceptional class, a bookish group," says Ritchie. He and his friends competed to see who would be first to read all the books in the library. Many of his own books — those he has written, designed or printed — are now in the library collection. Ritchie's first literary

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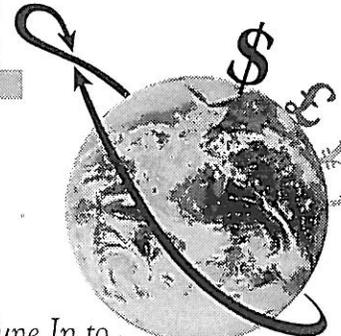
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venture was as co-founder and co-editor of *The Marengo Literary Leader*, a lively periodical that sold for five cents a copy.



Lawrence C. Powell

After graduating from Occidental College and taking a few law classes at USC, Ritchie decided to make a career of books. In 1932 he established the Ward Ritchie Press, setting up his first shop in a garage behind his family's home on Milan Avenue. Over the next forty years, books from his press consistently won awards for fine design and printing. Now settled in Laguna, Ritchie does printing on an

antique Albion hand press, and he continues to design books. His work still is garnering awards.

"The South Pasadena Public Library is part of me and always will be," Marengo graduate Lawrence Clark Powell once remarked. He dedicated his second book to City Librarian Nellie Keith, who let him borrow as many books at a time as he could carry home on his bicycle. A

prolific author, Powell launched his literary career on *The Marengo Literary Leader* and since then has produced an unending stream of books and articles. In a distinguished second career, Powell served at UCLA as university librarian, director of the Clark Library, and founding dean of the library school. When he retired in

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*Class of 1920,
from page 14*

in Shanghai met another world traveler, a young woman from San Diego. They married in 1931 and have just celebrated their 64th anniversary. Extensive travelers, they have been to Sweden five times to visit relatives and recently made their fourteenth trip to Hong Kong. Until 1981 Venberg was in the insurance business. He began collecting fire engines and fire company memorabilia and around 1960 organized a museum, now located in an old firehouse in San Diego. The museum is named the Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company, in honor of San Diego's first volunteer company. Venberg makes his home in Rancho Santa Fe.

Charles Ledgerwood remembers walking to Marengo from his house at Stratford and Oxley, going past orange groves, and hearing the water pumps in the orchard. He attended the College of Agriculture in Davis and was a lab assistant to one of the first professors conducting research on disease-resistant tomatoes. After



Marion Marsh

graduation Ledgerwood worked for Del Monte as a plant breeder, specializing in tomatoes. Eventually he gave up the job, which took him away from California, and went to work in Watsonville and Salinas as manager of a seed store. In 1933 he built his own seed store in Carlsbad, and he is still active in the business. Ledgerwood's father was South Pasadena's first fire marshal (he drove an 80-gallon pumper), and he suggested the idea for the city's first rose parade float, a floral magnet. (South Pasadena holds and attracts.)

From Marengo and South Pasadena High School, Marion Marsh went to UCLA, where she majored in history. After graduation she worked for many years as assistant to an attorney. Since retiring she has been a dedicated volunteer: at the Pacific Asia Museum, Oneonta Congregational Church, and South Pasadena Public Library. Her volunteer work at the library began in 1950 and continued until 1994. She served as vice-president and as president of the Friends of the Library, and for twelve years was on the volunteer staff of the Friends Bookstore. She has another special tie to the library. Her father, Norman Foote Marsh, designed the six-room Carnegie Library that opened on Oxley Street in 1908, and Marsh's firm worked on the remodeling in 1930, when the building was moved to its present location. Marion Marsh lives in South Pasadena.

Two other members of the Class of 1920 — Kathryn Ahlswede Durfee,

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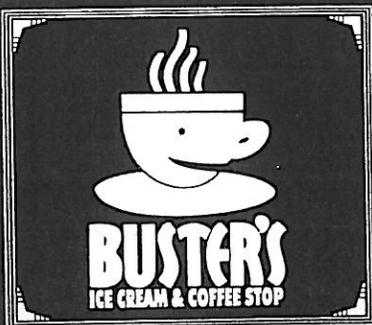
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Class of 1920,
from page 9



Malcolm Archbald

1966, the original library building at UCLA was named in his honor. In 1971 Powell became Professor in Residence at the University of Arizona. From his home in Tucson he continues to write and to indulge what he has called "A Passion for Books."

Malcolm Archbald has fond memories of sliding, fireman style, down the twenty-foot pipes in the

boys' section of the Marengo playground. He also remembers the chauffeur who drove one of the youngsters to school and lingered to play ball with the boys. Arch often bicycled to the library from his home on Brent Avenue. In high school he was student body president, with the impressive title of Commissioner General. He graduated from Pomona College, studied law at USC, and practiced in Los Angeles and Santa Barbara until retiring about ten years ago. He enjoys reading, traveling,



Charles Ledgerwood

and visiting old friends — Marengo alumni among them. For many years he has made his home in Santa Barbara.

Vic Venberg's most vivid memory of Marengo is of recess time during World War I, when Miss Crabtree led the boys in military drill. He also remembers bicycling to the library from his home on Milan Avenue. After graduating from UCLA, Venberg took a trip around the world and



Victor Venberg

See Class of 1920, page 35



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Class of 1920,
from page 35

who lives in San Mateo, and Marjorie
Stacy, who lives in Oregon — were
unable to attend the reunion.



Kathryn Ahlswede



Marjorie Stacy

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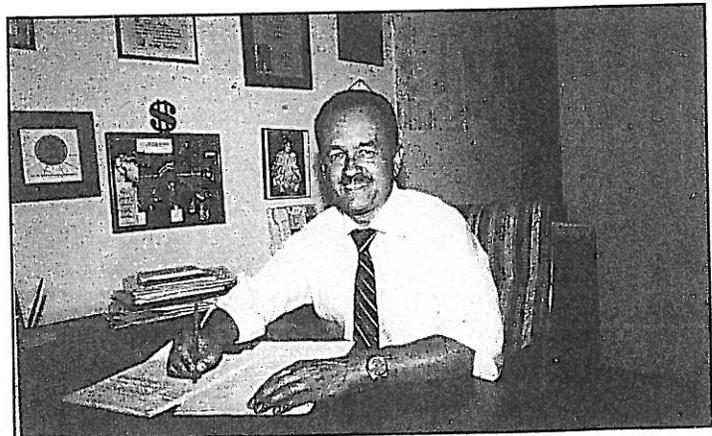
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