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Florence Riford Library in La Jolla: A Historical and Vigorous Civic Place

Zheng Hong¹

¹ Political Science Department, China University of Political Science and Law

Correspondence: School of Political Science and Public Administration, CUPL, 27 FuXue Road, Changping District, Beijing, China, 102249. Tel(h): 0086 10 58909396. Email: hongz@cupl.edu.cn / zhh77_6@hotmail.com

Abstract

Florence Riford Library is a public library with more than a century years old. Its special spaces and decorations such as College Corner, lab, History Room and catamaran sculpture are the features. The historical elements are emphasized by the place they are located and their efforts in purpose. The donor wall reveals the reason why Riford Library can get abundant funds and works excellent. The various activities in the library deposit the social capital by the residences' place attachment, which make the library a vigorous civic place.

Keywords: La Jolla/Riford Library, Donor Wall, Civic, Social Capital

Florence Riford Library is a branch of San Diego public library. It locates in the heart of La Jolla---a pearl in west coast of Pacific Ocean. Not only sunny beach but also artists' and scientists' inhabitation make it wealthy and open. This article investigates the special features of Florence Riford Library in space comparing with the two libraries nearby---North University Community Library and Pacific Beach/Taylor Library, analyses the functions and connotations of the special spaces, explores the reasons why the La Jolla/Riford Library is both a historical and vigorous public space.

The three libraries are all the branches of San Diego public library, serving the communities nearby. The North University Community is in the northeast of Riford Library about 5 miles away. The Pacific Beach/Taylor Library is in the south about 3 miles away. The buildings of the libraries are the property of San Diego government. The books are circulated among the libraries. Compared with the other two libraries Riford Library has some specialties in space design and arrangement.

Part One: the Spatial Specialties in Riford Library

A community library is generally made up by circulation desk, reading area, book storing area, rooms for community meetings or group study, new book exhibition area, donor wall, patio and etc. A library is not only

for borrowing books but also provides public space for community. So the daily working of the library reveals the spirit of the community.

The Riford Library covers 25000 sq. feet, much larger than the other two libraries(The Taylor Library is 12,484 sq. feet, The North University Community Library is 16,020 sq. feet) because of the Joan and Irwin Jacobs Annex, which is added to the main building in 2004. It is a 2-story building with basement. So the Riford Library has more space to hold the books and accommodate other rooms. Among these rooms the unique one is the History Room which locates in the 2nd floor. This room is designed to hold multi-media materials about La Jolla history, such as La Jolla Newspapers from 1970s, books describing La Jolla, oral histories on tape, photos, slides, and phonebooks. It even preserves the historic newspapers on microfilm (1919-1969).

Below the History Room there is a lab. 3D printers, microscopes, tubes and beakers stand on the table. The 3D printer used to be placed in the room facing the gate. With microscopes coming they were moved to the current room and the science lab came into being.

Besides the gate at the right hand 'College Corner' holds the books related with the exams. It is a real corner covering only about 4 m². The U-shape shelves cling to the walls from the desk to the ceiling are loaded with books. The corner is also good for an individual study because of its size, desk and chair.

The History Room, lab and College Corner are the special spaces in the Riford Library. Except for these fixed settings there are some decorations revealing the elegant taste. Behind the gate door at the left hand a bronze bust of Mrs. Florence Riford stands, who donated the land to the library. Her oil-painting portrait hangs above the door. On the right hand a long table is set to display a vase holding a bunch of fresh flowers. The flowers are offered and changed every day by the floarr group in the community. The door area is fabricated with memorial and delicate meaning.

Inside the library in children's area the small wooden tables and arm-chairs are in the classical style, of which the legs and the arms are in streamline. In the entertaining area there is a Chinese antique wooden closet. It is about 2 meters tall and 2 meters wide. These furniture are donated by the local residence. In the west wall there is a faked fireplace, above which hangs an oil-painting picture of La Jolla beach.

The most remarkable ornament suspended in the atrium of the annex is an abstract boat's hull, a catamaran, the inner face of each half lined in gold leaf. The stairs from the ground to the second floor offers an ascending view to watch it. The designer explains the idea of the atrium that 'All these individual elements combine to form a symbolic vessel of learning, the journey of exploration in La Jolla Library's 'Voyage of Discovery'. (see Photo 1)



Photo 1 by the author in the March of 2020

These special equipments and ornaments, which are not necessary parts of a public library and donated by the local residence, are the features of the library. They decorate the space and make the space alive.

Part Two The High-Lightened Historical Elements: to be Memorized, Honored and Cherished

The history of the Riford Library can be traced to La Jolla Reading Club in 1894. Besides the circulation desk inside the window there is a big poster with pictures recording the landmarks in the development of the library. The names of donators are in bold. (See Photo 2) In contrast the Taylor Library can be traced to 1914. The name is to memorize Vern Taylor and Erma Taylor who donated \$3.75 million to purchase the land and construct the building. In July 12, 2014 the City Council of San Diego, Mayor of San Diego and California Assembly signed the 100 anniversary proclamations, which outlined its development. The documents were posted on the wall of passageway from the circulation desk to the community room. (See Photo 3) No photos are displayed. The two libraries are almost in the same age. But the historical information displayed is different not only in the amount but also in the way.

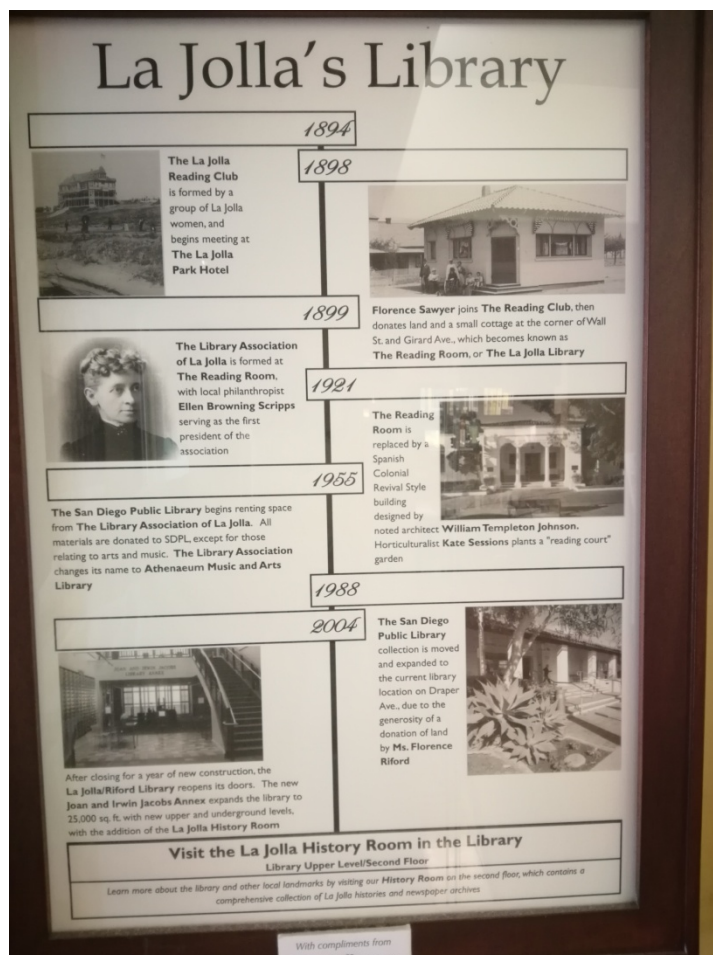


Photo 2 by the author in the March of 2020

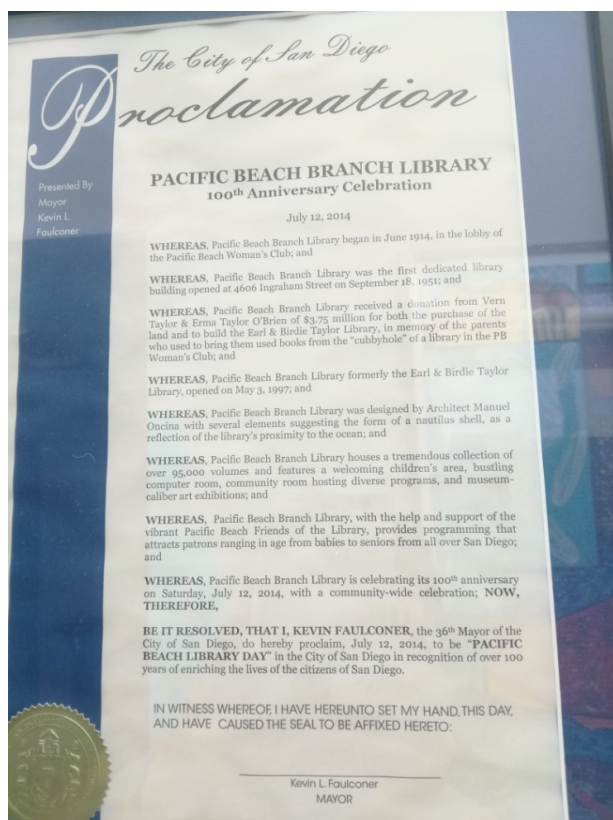


Photo 3 by the author in the March of 2020

On the wall of lobby hangs a wooden-framed board on which recorded the names of every presidents of 'Friends of La Jolla Branch Library'. (See Photo 4) This NGO has its website and works as the coordinator of the library staff and takes charge of the donations. It is their efforts that make the library excellent. This board is for memorizing, rewarding and honoring. Actually every public library has its 'Friends of XXX Library'. Their endeavors are behind the scene. In these three libraries only the Riford Library has the memorizing board.



Photo 4 by the author in the March of 2020

The La Jolla History Room is established in 2004 with the building of the Annex. This room is not only for store and exhibition but also collecting the past information and making it into digital forms to keep it forever. Every Monday Wednesday and Friday there are volunteers to comb the information about La Jolla history and type it into the computer. They also record the oral history. With the continuous work the local history is well-knitted. So more and more persons and issues are open to the public. Why does a rich history contribute to the community? Because the history is the common memory of the community. The richer the history is, the more possibility the current local residence can find their ties with the community and the closer they feel to the community. So the history is the common treasure to the community. The History Room and the volunteers' work are to make the community united and connected.

Part Three Money Matters: the Donor Wall

Public library runs by the public finance. It needs the donation to work better.

There are three Donor Walls in the Riford Library. Two of them are on the walls besides the door of community room in the lobby, and the last one is on the wall connecting the hall and the Annex. (See Photo 5 and 6) A minimum of \$1000 donation can get an acrylic plaques, each 12 inches wide by 4 inches high, engraved with donor names and sentiment the donor wants to express. There are around 400 plaques all together. Most of them have been engraved. Besides the Donor Wall there is a statement which explains the donation affairs with thankful words. The inviting sentence 'There is still a place for your name or your family's name' is in bold and italic style.



Photo 5 by the author in the March of 2020



Photo 6 by the author in the March of 2020

In Pacific Beach/Taylor Library there is a metal donor belt on the middle part of wall. On the belt the donation is marked by the logos. Each logo represents certain amount of money. The minimum is \$5000 with nautilus as the logo. There are 9 logos with donators' names all together. There is no statement explaining the donation affairs. (See Photo 7)

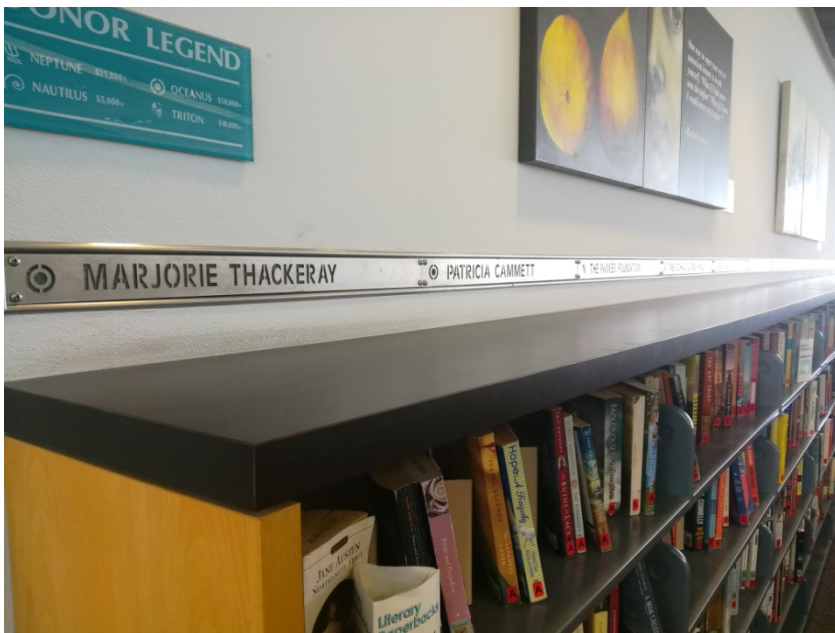


Photo 6 by the author in the March of 2020

In North University Community Library the donor board is on the wall leading to the community room. This library was built in 2007. The donor board is made up by many hexagonals which are in perfect tessellation. Each hexagonal is reserved for one donor. About one third of the hexagonals are engraved. There is no statement about donation affairs. (See Photo 7)



Photo 7 by the author in the March of 2020

Comparing the donor areas in the three libraries the one in the Riford Library is the best not only in the place and design but also in the information it shows. It is clear that the donors are not to show off. But the recipient should publicly show their appreciation. So the prominent place is necessary, which make the donation a glory. What's more, it is startling that a donor wall leap into the eyes. The tidy plaques line up just like an army group, which is impressive to the visitor. Another detail needs consideration. The minimum donations in the Riford Library is one fifth of that in the Taylor Library. That is a reason why there are less donors' names showed in donor belt. Which is better? The donor wall or donor belt. It is hard to compare. One is in grand style, the other is exquisite. But for collecting money the donor wall seems more effective. And it is more important that by using donor wall more persons can involve in the donation and donation tends to be popular.

Donation has its political meaning in modern society. It is a way to show donators' contribution to community, which is not compulsory. So it is a civic virtue to donate. The donor wall is a place to honor the donators and praise the virtue.

Money matters because more money can make the library run better. It is of vital importance that the donator is highlighted in the donor wall. So the money has the profound effect that is to trigger the civic contribution.

Part Four Activities in the Libraries: a Vigorous Civic Life

Space as a physical being is different from Place as a social being because the latter contains persons' activities, feelings and emotions. Public library is a Place. All these three libraries offer various activities. These activities can be sorted into three categories.

Firstly volunteers' activities. Volunteers' help is welcomed in any library. Middle-school students are likely to be volunteers in the library because serving the community is required by the school. Volunteers can do many works. So here only the institutionalized volunteer work is to be compared. 'Do your Homework @Library' is an activity launched by the San Diego Library, which aims to help the students finish their homework in library. But not all the branch libraries carry it out. Only the libraries with proper volunteers can actually make it. The Riford Library offers this service on every Wednesday afternoon from 12:30 to 5:00. The Taylor Library just offers the space but no volunteers every Monday to Thursday 3:00-7:00pm. 'Friends' Bookstore' is a part of library. It sells the books magazines and disks from the donated ones. The money from the selling donates to the library. The work in Friends' bookstore is taken by the volunteers. The Taylor Library has no particular room for

this function but there are books for selling shelved in the corridor to the community room and the corner in front of it. The scale of the Friends' Bookstore in the Riford Library is much larger than the other two. It even sells the shopping bag printed with the façade of the library building. It reveals to some extent that it can offer much funds. Another volunteers' work is in History Room mentioned above.

Secondly front-desk scheduled activities. These activities are scheduled and shown in the library website. Most of these activities are routine ones, such as Lego Builder Club in Riford Library on every Wednesday afternoon 4:00-5:00, QiGong in Taylor Library on every Tuesday morning 11:30 am-12:30 pm, Babies and Books in North University Community Library on every Monday 10:00-10:30 am. Taking the activities showed on the website in March 2020 as an example. There are 81 activities to be offered in the Riford Library, 79 in the Taylor Library, 50 in the North University Community Library. It needs to be clarified that in Taylor Library every Monday to Thursday in the afternoon the 'Do your Homework@library' does not need special effort to organize. So in the Taylor Library 63 activities can be counted. Before it there is an 'After School Happy Hour' which mainly offers students computer games. It is attractive to the elementary school students. Playing before studying is a quite smart way to improve the study.

Most of these activities aim to provide the entertainments and exercises to the older adults and preschool children. Besides these the first Saturday afternoon Middle School students can meet for the book club and they have their Teen Council in Riford Library. Local Merchants' Association also meets here. Kite-flying is a special activity in Taylor Library since it has a spacious playground and meadow. So Kite Making Workshop is a feature in the library. Also the Pacific Beach Planning Group meets every other week here. North University Community Library provides more activities for the preschool children. But it holds 'Fun with French' and 'Aloha Ukulele Strummers' which is favored by the youth. So every library has the activities with its own feature.

Thirdly self-scheduled activities. The study room in the Riford Library is scheduled by the users as showed below. (See Photo 8 and 9) The similar seminar room in the North University Community Library needs to be scheduled by the users at the front desk. (See Photo 10 and 11) It reveals that in Riford Library with more than one hundred years some spontaneous order has formed. There is no study room or seminar room in the Taylor Library because of the limited inner space. But the most interesting and remarkable note in the board of Taylor Library is written by the organizer. As showed in the photo below. (See Photo 12) Maybe it is the primary phase of formal meeting. It is very valuable because the organizer believe that he/she can find the fellows in the library, which he/she trusts.



Photo 8 by the author in the March of 2020

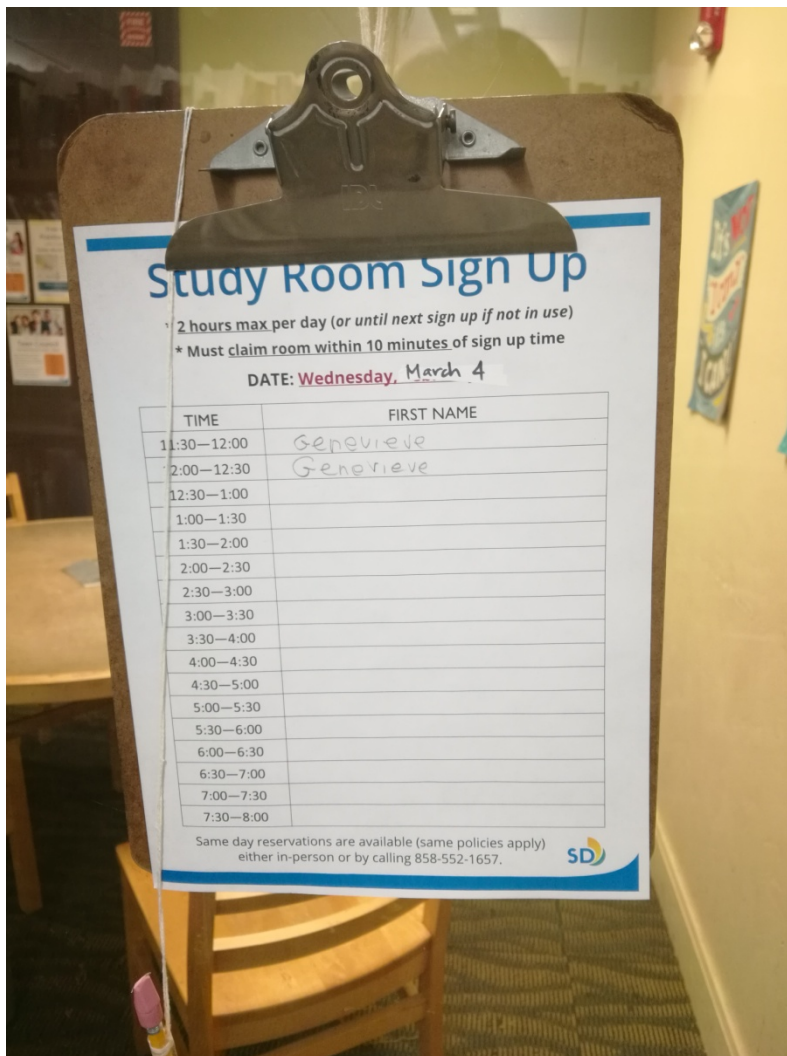


Photo 9 by the author in the March of 2020



Photo 10 by the author in the March of 2020

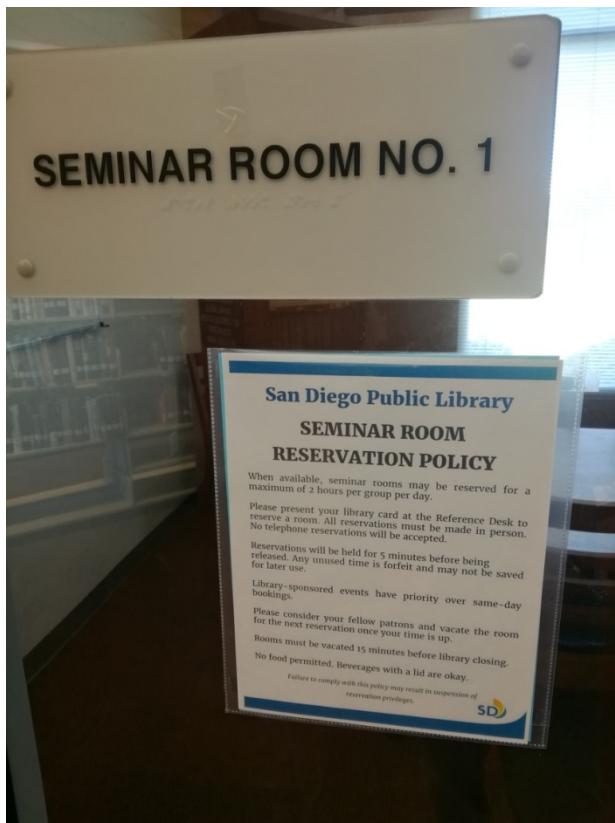


Photo 11 by the author in the March of 2020

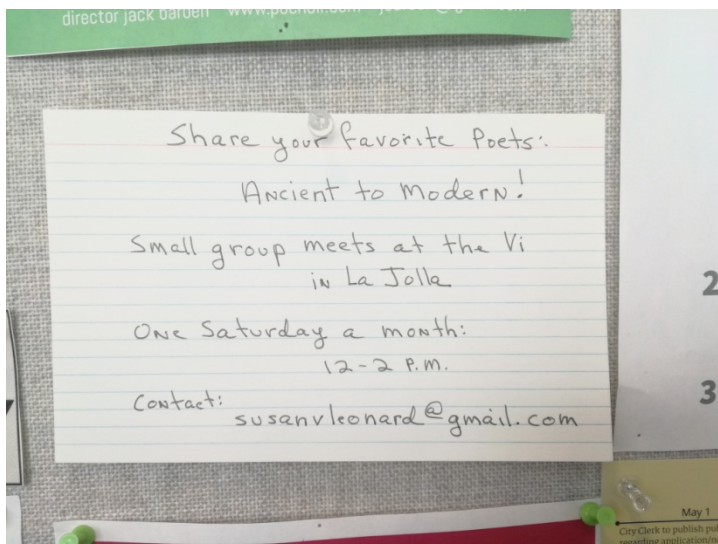


Photo 12 by the author in the March of 2020

It is because of these various activities that the libraries become a place, a part of local residents' life. When they have the activities they not only enjoy themselves but also know each other more. Thus social capital is accumulated. Furthermore they believe that they are a part of the community. The place attachment is a civic identification in disguise.

Riford Library is excellent in modern equipments and activity organizing. So the social capital and civic identification are deposited. These positive attitude toward the library spark local residents to devote more money or work to the library. The abundant funds and volunteers make the library a place with civic spirit---devotion---not only donate money but also take care of the library and community as their treasure. Riford

Library is a model as a civic place. Its visual beauty from its historical background and vigorous activities based on the modern equipment make the space meaningful and self-motivated.

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