

Carnegie a local showpiece

Originally it was Livermore's public library. Now it houses an art gallery and local history displays. But no matter how the city has used the Carnegie Building on Third Street, the handsome structure has been one of the town's showpieces for many years.

The Renaissance-style brick building has become an important part of the community. Not just because its wood-trimmed interior provides space for classes and local organizations. Or because people enjoy relaxing on its sloping lawn or sitting at picnic tables under the trees in the well-kept garden.

What makes the two-story former library remarkable is that it serves as a daily reminder of Livermore's past.

And on Sunday, residents will be able to help celebrate the Carnegie Building's past at an open house sponsored by the Heritage Guild. The one-day display of old photographs, books, papers, and other memorabilia will mark the 70th anniversary of the building's construction.

Although the building was built as a library, it was not Livermore's first, says Barbara Bunshah, of the Heritage Guild. Ever since the town was founded there were private subscription libraries. And in 1908, the Livermore Free Public Library was established.

But the building — on First Street between J and K streets — housing the town's first public library was too small for the 5,000 volumes in circulation. So the library trustees applied for a Carnegie grant.

About the turn of the century, industrialist Andrew Carnegie gave grants to cities and towns for the construction of libraries. For the Livermore library, Carnegie granted \$10,000,

and the City of Livermore pledged to come up with the same amount over a 10-year period.

Noted San Francisco architect William H. Weeks designed the building. Weeks, Mrs. Bunshah adds, was the architect of several Carnegie libraries in California during the early 20th century.

Although half the money for the building's construction came from outside the area, much of the materials used were local products. The

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buff-colored brick on the outside came from nearby quarries, as did the terracotta for the relief ornamentation over the front door.

After its completion in 1911, the Carnegie Building was used as a library for more than 50 years. By 1966, however, the building was just too small for the 31,000 volumes the public library had acquired.

"We had books on the window sills, in freestanding shelves, books in the bindery,"

Mrs. Bunshah recalls. She worked in the Carnegie Building when it still was a library. Having a large number of books out on loan all the time was the only way the library managed, she says.

After the library moved into its new home on South Livermore Avenue, the Carnegie Building was used for Livermore Area Recreation and Park District offices. The district, in other quarters now, still manages the building, and rents space to new tenants — the Livermore Art Association and the Heritage Guild.

Although it has been in constant use for the last 70 years, the building has changed little. The slate roof was redone approximately 10 years ago, Mrs. Bunshah says. And then, as part of the town's centennial celebration in 1977, the Recreation and Park District used an all-volunteer crew to sandblast, repaint, and in general, restore the exterior.

To make sure the building looked as it would have when it was built, district director Dorothy Svets consulted with historical architect Bob McCabe, who worked on Ravenswood in Livermore and Old Sacramento.

On the inside, little work has been done, although the interior has been carefully maintained. A carpet covers the front half of the floor but the wooden boards are the original ones. Mrs. Bunshah points to the marks left by the first bookcases, which are now used to house Heritage Guild displays. Although the handsome painted glass light fixtures are not original, they date from the mid-1920's.

The public is invited to the Heritage Guild's free open house, which will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sunday at the Carnegie Building.