

Library Landmarks

There are many sites around town that, though they may not qualify for official registers, are local “landmarks” in their own right. Several of them have been in and around the Library for generations, including Awston the Ostrich, the large Moreton Bay Fig Tree, Leo Politi’s artwork in the Children’s Room, and more!

Awston the Ostrich

Upon entering the South Pasadena Public Library, people often ask about the large, stuffed ostrich on display in the glass case. What is the importance of an ostrich to South Pasadena? Now they need question no further. A display highlighting the history of the Cawston Ostrich Farm, founded in South Pasadena, is installed in the ostrich case. Not only does the display share a lot of great information about Cawston’s, but hopefully it will answer the question, “What do ostriches have to do with South Pasadena?” once and for all. The case contains one-of-a-kind relics from the heyday of the Cawston Ostrich Farm and Boutiques, such as ostrich feather hats, ladies fans, ostrich eggs, store catalogs, many photographs, histories, and other memorabilia.

What about the stuffed ostrich himself, you ask? City Librarian, Jean Jones, saw this Steiff stuffed animal for sale, and due to the long history between the city and ostriches, she knew the Library just had to have it. She and her husband, MacDonald, donated the ostrich in 1982.

Moreton Bay Fig Tree

The largest tree in Library Park, and according to some largest in the city, the massive Moreton Bay Fig stands outside the west side of the Library off of Diamond Avenue. Enchanting for its sweeping canopy and dramatic buttressing roots, generations of visitors have strolled, picnicked, and let imaginations run wild underneath its branches. The Moreton Bay Fig Tree, or *Ficus macrophylla*, is native to east Australia. When grown on an open plain, a Moreton Bay Fig may spread out to a possible 150 feet in width. When crowded in its natural forest habitat (or in the case of the tree in Library park, next to a large building), it tends to grow more tall and narrow.

Over the years, there have been many stories about South Pasadena’s Moreton Bay Fig, its powers, and its origins. Some more mystical than others, the most recent—and most compelling—origin story comes from life-long resident of South Pasadena, Bill Kloezeman. Mr. Kloezeman recently shared that his father, Willem Garret Andries Kloezeman, planted the tree around 1930 when the Library was being remodeled. At the time, the senior Bill Kloezeman was working for the City’s Street Department.

Leo Politi's Murals in the Children's Room

The artwork that graces the walls of the Library's Children Room is much more than simply inspiring decoration. It is the earliest remaining example of a mural by internationally renowned and award-winning artist, Leo Politi. Politi originally painted the mural in 1957 at the request of City Librarian, Mary Murdoch. After agreeing to create the piece, Politi submitted a "small project" to show what he had in mind at a reduced scale, much the delight of the library staff. In a letter to Politi at the time, Marjorie Dobson, Children's Librarian, said, "We are delighted with the sketches that you sent, and can hardly wait to see the finished picture. I, being a children's librarian, am especially pleased that two of the children are reading books. We all like so much the small details that you always have in your pictures – the birds, the wee animals and now the butterfly."

When the Library underwent its extensive remodeling in 1982, Leo was asked to touch up the mural before the grand opening. Jean Jones, City Librarian at the time, contacted Politi to ask if he'd be willing to "refresh" his work. He enthusiastically agreed, in the end even offering to do the work for free. Though he expected to spend only the better part of an afternoon on the project, the artist in him found much he wanted to change in his nearly thirty year old piece. After nearly one month of work, Politi had completely repainted four of the panels and was working on the fifth. The new mural emerged with many striking differences. Most notably, the colors were significantly changed from muted tones to predominantly bright blues and greens, the flat lines became sweeping and full of flourish, and the featured cat was replaced with a dog.

Do you have a favorite Library Landmark that you would like to know more about? Email the Library's Reference Desk at Rdesk@ci.south-pasadena.ca.us to find out more!