HISTORY OF SOLANO COUNTY LAW LIBRARY
By Jonathan Watson, Law Librarian
April 2014

SOLANO COUNTY LAW LIBRARY: LOCATIONS

Since its establishment, Solano County Law Library has been housed in three separate locations:

- **Courthouse and Hall of Records** (1878-1911):
  Although Solano County Law Library had yet to be established, there is evidence that attorneys kept private law libraries in the courthouse. In 1888, District Attorney George A. Lamont saved his private library from a fire that destroyed the courthouse.

  On March 31, 1891, A.B. 691 established law libraries—mandating that they be located in the county seat and that a Board of Trustees must be appointed to oversee library operations. Although News Notes of California Libraries (1907) lists the founding year as 1885, it was Solano County Ordinance No. 22 (passed July 1891) that established Solano County Law Library and its Board of Trustees—which was comprised of Judge Abraham J. Buckles (a Civil War veteran who was an educator before entering the legal field), President of the Board of Supervisors R. J. R. Aden, O. P. Dobbins, John M. Gregory and Mr. Lamont.

  According to the Solano County Archives, in the minutes written for May 1, 1905, the Board approved the monthly salary of $25.00 for an employee to serve as the Law Librarian upon the recommendation of Judge Lewis G. Harrier. However, no candidates are cited in the records. Judge Harrier’s love of legal books was evident in a Saturday Bee article (April 28, 1906), which reported that he had sent his private law library from Vallejo to Charles S. Wheeler, Esq. in San Francisco.

- **Solano County Courthouse** (1911-1970): According to News Notes of California Libraries (October 1919), Solano County Law Library was staffed by one employee, and served the public Monday-Saturday from 9:00am-5:00pm. The Law Library contained 3,933 volumes with 84 additions, received $1.00 from civil filing fees, and an annual income of $500.00. In the building now referred to as the “Old Courthouse,” 1970s records show that the Law Library had encompassed Rooms 325 and 326 and a secondary facility in Room 140. From 1967-1990, a Vallejo branch existed solely for court staff at the Solano Justice Center. It was created when the Solano Justice Center underwent renovations to make space for clerical offices, courtrooms, and record divisions.

- **Hall of Justice** (1970-present): The current Hall of Justice was originally Armijo High School. The Law Library is located in the original building and used to be the science room. In the late 1980s, the Law Library almost relocated to the first floor (bordering Texas Street). By 1990, it was decided instead to expand the Law Library’s existing space on the third floor. As a result, the Conference Room was added (formerly the Office of the Court Translator).
1891-1938: Louise Morrill and Her Family

According to News Notes of California Libraries (1907), the Superior Court Judge was listed as being in charge. Judge A.J. Buckles (whose judgeship began in 1884) was the first judicial officer to oversee the Law Library's operations. From 1910-1938, Louise Morrill served as the Law Librarian. During her tenure, she also worked as a Judicial Secretary for Judge Buckles and Judge O'Donnell.

She was born on October 16, 1874 in Brooklyn, California (a former city in Oakland). The only daughter, she relocated with her family from Brooklyn to Montezuma (a former township in Solano County). The Morrills had strong agricultural roots, though law, business and government eventually became family traditions:

- Lewis Morrill (Father; 1830-1912): According to The Morrill Name in America, Lewis migrated from New York to California in October 1849. He originally worked in the mines before settling as a farmer in Suisun. His wife Louise (née Stevens; Ms. Morrill's mother) was an Ohioan.

- Fred Lewis Morrill (Brother; 1866-1937): According to The Morrill Name in America: “Fred L., Oldest son of Lewis, is located at Fairfield, near Suisun. Like his father, he followed along the agricultural line... fruit raising, co-operating in with canny of his products, which are the choicest and bear Morrill brand. The business is exclusive, consists of private orders given in advance.”

Mr. Morrill possessed a family bible that traced the family's genealogy from 1632. According to City Council Agenda 2005-11-15, he served as the first City Clerk for Fairfield from 1904-1920. In News Notes of California Libraries (1909), Clara Morrill is listed as Solano County Law Library's Law Librarian. She is most likely Mr. Morrill's daughter (Louise Morrill's niece). There is the possibility that Clara Morrill is the stenographer mentioned in Barry Eberling's article “Old courthouse reaches its centennial” (November 27, 2011) who was "sad to see" the pre-1911 courthouse be demolished.

- Lewis F. Morrill (Nephew; 1890-1977): Son of Fred Morrill; according to City Council Agenda 2005-11-15, Mr. Morrill followed in his father's footsteps, and served as the Fairfield City Clerk starting in 1923. For 17 years, he also worked as the Assistant County Clerk. Lewis then served as County Clerk for twenty-three years until his retirement in 1963. His years of service were honored in City Council Resolution 1976-200. His wife Vera was active in the Suisun Wednesday Club—participating in events like planting a redwood tree on Solano County Free Library’s lot. According to City Council Agenda 2005-11-15, Mr. Morrill's home used to be located at 1026 Texas Street, and was considered as a historical site. However, Mr. Morrill's background did not meet the National Register of Historic Places' criteria, and his home was torn down.

- William S. Morrill (Brother; 1869-1905): He passed away at the age of 35, survived by a widow and two children. In Estate of McCormack (1969; 2 Cal. App. 3d 492), there was a dispute regarding his son William's estate.

- Claire A. Morrill (Brother; 1871-1945): His wife was Theodora Willis, whose father William Ladd Willis wrote History of Sacramento County California (1913). Various sports magazines mention the game Mr. Morrill hunted on the Morrill Ponds.
Ms. Morrill’s visits to Alice Curtis, daughter of Supervisor William Curtis, at Oak Park were mentioned in society columns (Sacramento Daily; March 26, 1893 and January 6, 1897). Ms. Curtis would later become an enigmatic historical figure, as she died mysteriously of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in 1902.

In 1914, Ms. Morrill had applied to be the County Librarian for Solano County Free Library. The position ultimately went to Clara B. Dills, who then worked as the County Librarian from 1914-1930. The 1920 U.S. Census shows that Ms. Morrill lived with her mother in the Suisun Township.

Ms. Morrill continued working at the Law Library until her death on March 14, 1938 during an emergency throat operation.

Many gathered to mourn her passing. Attendees included relatives such as nephew Deputy County Clerk Lewis F. Morrill, and long-time friends Judge William T. O’Donnell, Deputy District Attorney K.I. Jones (the aforementioned men served as her pallbearers). Anna Kyle, county supervisor of music and active participant in Solano County Free Library’s affairs, performed hymns.

In 1927, a resolution was passed to honor Ms. Shaftel’s contributions as Library Associate (1980-2004) and Library Assistants (2004-present). The resolution also acted as paraprofessional staff.

Ms. Shaftel passed away on March 14, 1938 due to an emergency throat operation. Attendees such as Deputy County Clerk Lewis F. Morrill, long-time friend Judge William T. O’Donnell, and Deputy District Attorney K.I. Jones gathered to mourn her passing. Anna Kyle, county supervisor of music and active participant in Solano County Free Library’s affairs, performed hymns.

1938-1987: Judicial Secretaries as Law Librarians

From 1938-1987, the Law Library was staffed by Judicial Secretaries that worked for the Judge of the Superior Court. News Notes of California Libraries and other records listed the following individuals:

- Meriam MacLean (1939-1942)
- Madeline Chadbourne (1942-1944)
- Anna Marie Peterson (1944-1947)
- Virginia Ehnelade (1947-1950)
- Helen E. Reynolds (1958-1964)
- Marion M. Grant (1964-1966)
- Thelma L. Gert (1966-1973)
- Laurel Richardson (1967-1968)
- Patricia J. Tubbs (1977-1978)
- Patricia Marianno (1978-1979)

1987-Present: Contract with Solano County Library

In 1987, Solano County Library began overseeing the Law Library’s operations. The Law Librarians now possessed MLS or MLIS degrees:

- Carey Rowan (2003-2008)
- Jason Agnew (2008-2011)

- Jonathon Watson (Library Associate: 2005-2011; Librarian: 2011-present)

1Later, in 1945, Ms. Chadbourne was acquitted of murder charges after shooting and killing her husband in self-defense.

2Secretary to Judge Horace J. Sherwin. Ms. Grant also oversaw the Vallejo branch’s operations. Kathy Green (now Coffin; Vallejo Librarian; she retired in 2010 after working 39 years for Solano County—last position held was Assistant District Attorney), Deputy Sheriff Jim Archer (who succeeded Ms. Green), and Extra-Help Library Assistant Theresa “Terry” Ritts (who also filled in at the Fairfield location; promoted to Extra-Help Library Associate while working at the Law Library from 2006-2013) maintained the collection or staffed the facility when needed.

3Secretary to Judge Thomas Healy.

4From 1998-2005, the Law Library affiliated with the Jail Library due to a partnership amongst the County of Solano, Solano County Library, Solano County Inmate Welfare Fund, and the Solano County Jail Library.


6Ms. Moore wrote articles about Law Library news [including one about her Library Assistant Susan Carpio (now Godin!) for Voir Dire.

7In 2005, a resolution was passed to honor Mr. Shaftel’s 25 years of service to Solano County Library.

8As of 2008, Ms. Rowan has been the Library Director for Contra Costa County Public Law Library. In 2010, a resolution was passed to honor Library Associate Marilyn Pye’s 39 years of service to Solano County Library. She was the Law Library’s first Library Associate, and worked during Ms. Moore’s and Ms. Rowan’s tenure.

9In 2009, Mr. Watson and his mother Jo-Ann became the first mother-son duo to graduate together from San Jose State University’s MLIS program. She also worked as an Extra-Help Library Associate for the Law Library from 2009-2011.