

## DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF OUR COMMUNITY AT THE DOWNTOWN LIBRARY

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One of the great unknown treasures of Redwood City is the Karl Vollmayer Local History Room, located on the mezzanine level of the downtown library. The Vollmayer Room houses numerous primary source materials related to the development and history of Redwood City. Being located in a library, the collection of course contains many books about our history, including historical yearbooks and city directories, but the collection runs much deeper.

Thousands of historic photos are arranged by subject, and document the people, educational institutions, buildings, natural features, organizations and industries that have made Redwood City what it is today. Historic newspapers date back to 1852 issues of Redwood City's own San Mateo Times Gazette, whose building on Main Street incidentally housed the first incarnation of the Redwood City Public Library. Newspaper clipping files provide subject access to articles from decades gone by, and collections of the papers of notable historical personages and organizations provide a firsthand view of history in the making.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and old aerial

photographs provide a vivid picture of the evolution of the built environment over the last 150-plus years. In fact, the Vollmayer Room provided access to many of the images and stories that were celebrated during Redwood City's sesquicentennial (150th) year last year.

Just one example of the poignant stories contained in these collections is a collection of letters and other documents known as the Morrish Collection. Elmer Morrish was a Redwood City banker who handled local affairs such as finances and property management for Redwood City's residents of Japanese descent when they were sent to internment camps during World War II, and the letters back and forth between Morrish and the families in the camps paint a vivid picture of this important time in our history. This one-of-a-kind personal collection was the primary research material utilized for the recently published book *Citizen Internees: A Second Look at Race and Citizenship in Japanese American Internment Camps*, by Linda Ivey and Kevin Kaatz. *Citizen Internees* was named one of the Outstanding Titles for 2017 by Choice (a publication of the Association of College and Research Libraries). Co-author Kaatz is a board member of the Archives Committee, the all-volunteer organization that oversees the RCPL Local History Room.

The Vollmayer Room is staffed by a dedicated group of local volunteers who are experts in local history and genealogy — listing all of their credentials would require its own column. The Vollmayer Room has provided source materials for several books by prominent local historian John Edmonds, including *Vanished Towns of San Mateo County*, and volunteer Jim Clifford has written numerous articles on local history for several regional magazines and newspapers.

In fact, The Archives Committee publishes its own quarterly *Journal of Local History*. The most recent issue features such diverse subjects as the Docktown tank house, the history of the Sequoia High School team name (Cherokees) and mascot (Raven), the KGEI Radio building in Redwood Shores that transmitted military radio during World War II, the Grand Hotel, the Ryan family and much more.

The Vollmayer Room is open to the public Tuesday through Thursday, 1–4 pm. Next time you visit the downtown library, take a few moments to explore the unique and invaluable local history resources available there. For more information, visit [www.rwc-localhistory.com](http://www.rwc-localhistory.com).

*Editor's note: This article is supplied by Derek Wolfgram, library director at the Redwood City Public Library.*