

CITY HISTORY TRAIL



ENGLISH



WATER

Water is an essential component of our daily lives. Water from the Los Angeles River was vital to the early growth and development of the City of Los Angeles. However, in our communities, water supply and management is hidden from the public view and is often taken for granted. We hope this water-themed City History Trail will foster a better understanding and appreciation of our precious water resources.

Beyond its historical significance, the goal of this trail is to celebrate sources of water within El Pueblo and make water infrastructure more visible. Sustainable water management in the Los Angeles Basin is as critical for current and future generations as it was for the founders of our City.



Many settlements in the New World began with a plan and promise for opportunity. Los Angeles' roots originate from the Spanish colonial planning design which features buildings surrounding a public square. La Plaza is that place of beginning, and it is from here that a city of millions grew. This City History Trail describes these origins and ensuing developments as Los Angeles grew outwards from humble beginnings to its place on the world stage.

The City History Trail was designed and developed by Amigos de los Rios, a 501(c)3, in 2014. Our mission is to create a more livable, sustainable metropolitan region, and to create a 'Mountains to Sea' multi-benefit green infrastructure network throughout the LA Basin. The City History Trail is part of a greater network of trails and greenways celebrating the natural and cultural history of our urban area.

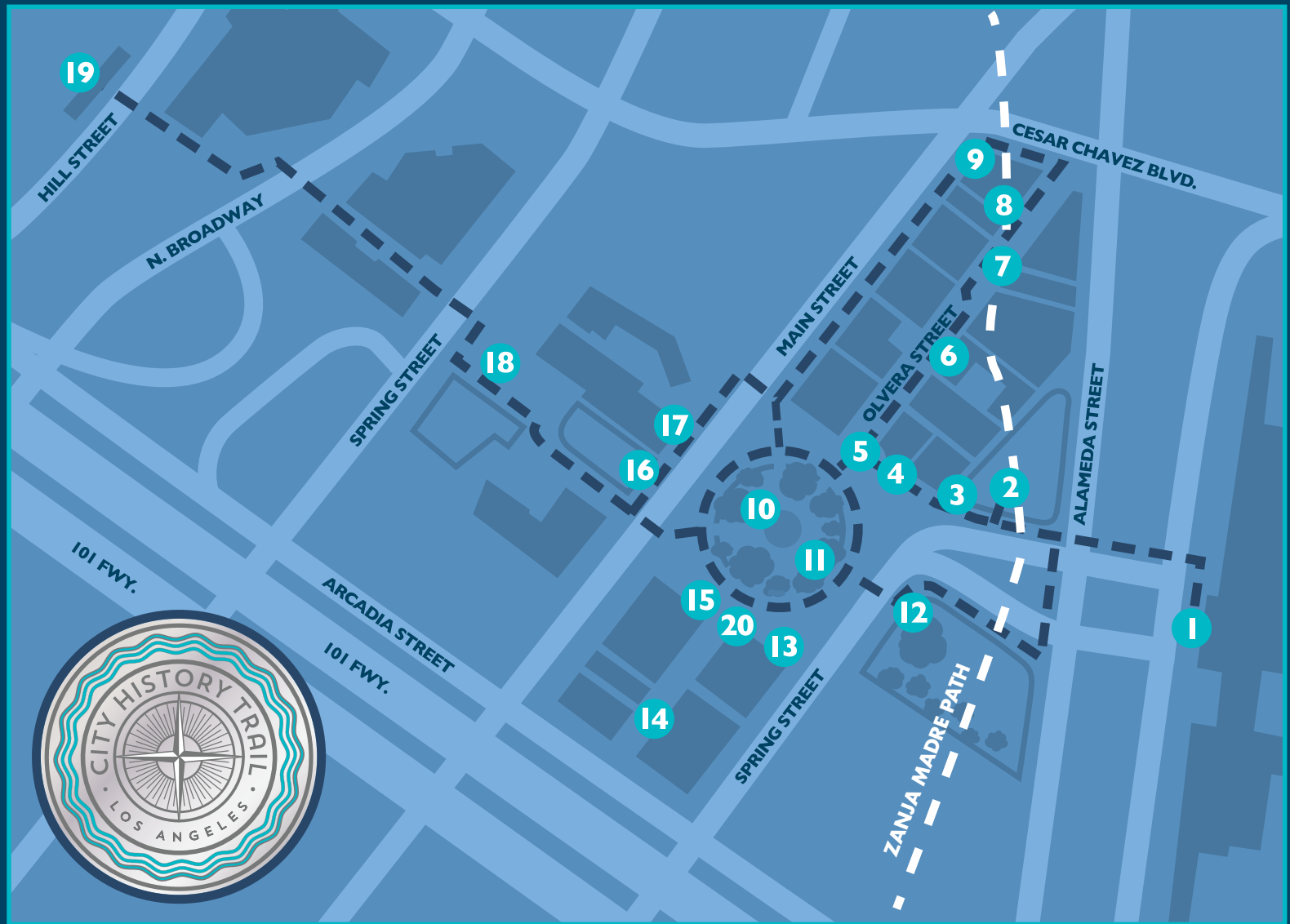


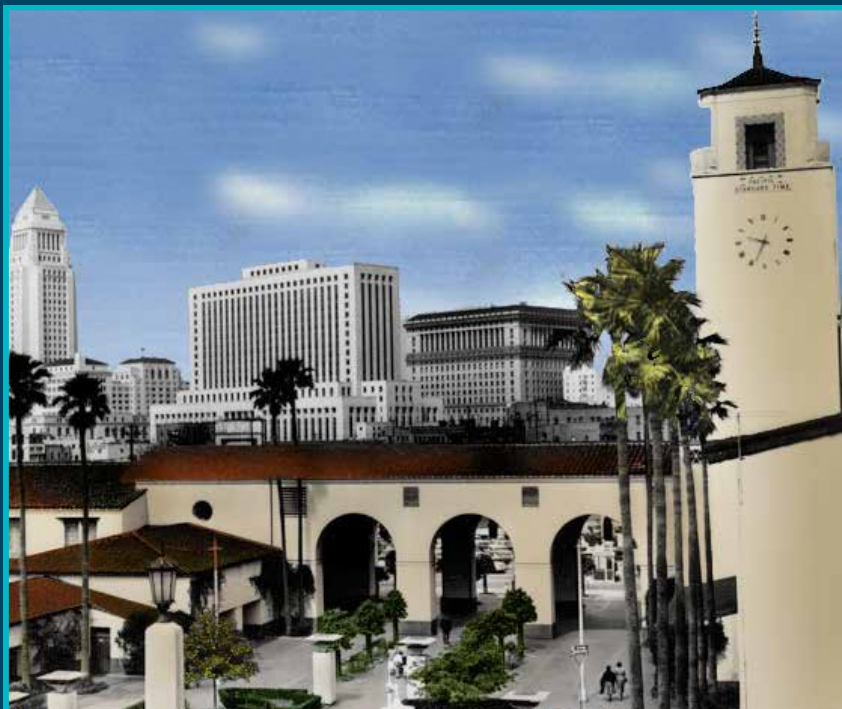
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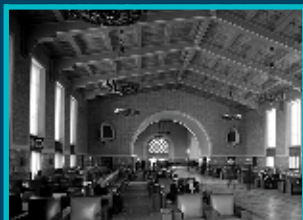
CITY HISTORY TRAIL

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View of station courtyard to City Hall Tower



Interior view, c. 1939

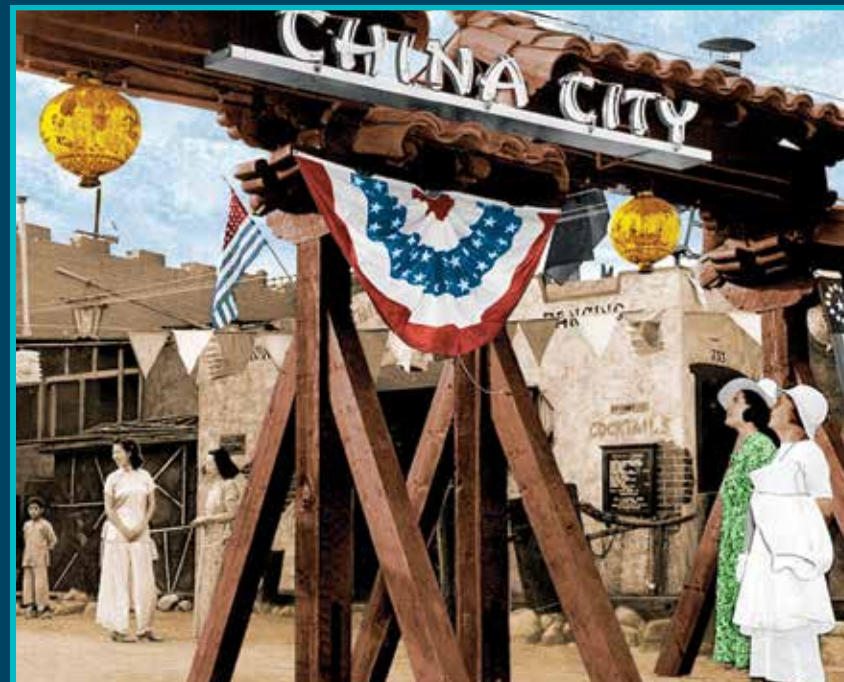


View from City Hall tower to northeast of construction, c. 1935

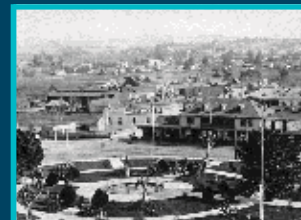
1 UNION STATION

Transportation Center

Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal opened in May 1939, combining the largest station in the Western United States, a passenger station service for the Santa Fe, Union Pacific, and Southern Pacific Railways, and the Pacific Electric Railway. Built on the site of the original Chinatown, it was designed by leading architects of the time in a combination of Streamline Moderne, Mission Revival, and Spanish Colonial Revival styles. John and Donald Parkinson led a team of designers they had when building the City Hall. The building features landscaped courtyards and architect Mary Colter's design for the last Harvey House restaurant.



View looking Southeast from Vickrey-Brunswick Building roof, showing Lugo Adobe at the south side of the Plaza and the early Chinatown beyond, c. 1890



Entrance to the new Chinatown, c. 1939



1838 Lugo Adobe, c. 1885

1 CHINATOWN

Pre-Union Station Urban Clearance

Site of the original Chinatown in Los Angeles, the history of Union Station area is intertwined with the difficult experiences of Chinese immigrants settling in the United States. During a depressed economy following the Civil War, a mob numbering in the hundreds rioted in Old Chinatown and lynched nineteen Chinese men and boys in 1871. Known as the Chinese Massacre of October 24, 1871, this is considered the largest mass lynching recorded in American history.



Mexican Independence Day, Church of Dolores, Guanajuato



Painting of Father Hidalgo



Replica of the Church of Dolores Bell

2 PLACITA DE DOLORES

WAR! Mexican Independence from Spain

In front of the Church of Dolores in Guanajuato, Hidalgo mustered an insurgent army on the onset of war for Mexican Independence. Famously known as "La Noche Del Grito," the church bell rang at 5:30 AM with Father Hidalgo calling the people into arms. Placed nearby this sign is a replica of the church's bell which was presented to the City of Los Angeles by the Mexican government in 1968. Artist Eduardo Carrillo created a mural of three hundred hand-made tiles representing the actions by Father Hidalgo y Costilla on the night of September 15th, 1810.



Antonio Aguilar Barraza, "El Charro de Mexico," Mexico's first multi-media star



Star on Hollywood Walk of Fame



Antonio Aguilar Barraza during a recording session

2 PLACITA DE DOLORES

"El Charro de Mexico"

Coming to Los Angeles from Villanueva, Zacatecas, and initially calling La Plaza home, Antonio Aguilar Barraza (1919–2007) became Mexico's first multi-media star. Known as "El Charro de México", or the horseman of Mexico, he was reknowned as a rodeo performer and singer-songwriter of ranchera music. Beginning in the 1940s, he recorded over 150 albums, selling more than twenty-five million records. He is credited for re-popularizing Tambora music and was honored with a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame for his work in the recording industry. Starting in 1952, Antonio Aguilar also appeared in 160 movies and went on to writing, directing and producing.



Drawing depicting a village of the Yang-na Native Americans



Natural environment: Eagle Rock, c.1928



Century Plants in Twin Lakes Parks, Chatsworth, c. 1937

3 COUNCIL TREE

The First People

Native Indigenous people have lived in present-day California a millennia before Spanish colonization. The local Shoshone tribal name was the Tongva, hunter and gatherers who lived in dwellings of weeds and twigs by a year-round water source and a large Sycamore tree known as the council tree. Their village was known as Yang-Na, the largest of several dozen villages in the area with a population of about two hundred. Before the arrival of Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo at Santa Monica Bay on October 4, 1542, the native population knew no outsiders. It is believed they lived compatibly with one other and their surroundings, which provided ample sustenance. Cabrillo named the area, “La Bahia de los Humos” (the bay of smokes) caused by their cooking campfires.



Plaza Methodist Church WPA photograph, c. 1935



Agustine Olvera



Wedding party

4 PLAZA METHODIST CHURCH

Church and Community Service

La Plaza Methodist began social welfare outreach programs in the then-downtrodden Plaza area in 1899. Originally the church services were celebrated in the Tapia/Olvera adobe. The church expanded its community service programs, including medical and dental clinics, legal aid, education, job placement and counseling, and the founding of Goodwill Industries in 1918. The present church was designed by architects Train and Williams in the Churrigueresque style, and built in 1925–26 on the site of Agustín Olvera Adobe. La Plaza Methodist is the “flagship” church of a series of Methodist missions serving Mexican and other underprivileged immigrant communities.



Blessing of the Animals on Olvera Street, Los Angeles, c. 1933



Blessing of the Animals Mural



Blessing of the Animals on Olvera Street, c. 1948

4 BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

Celebrating Culture and History

El Pueblo has historically been a place for important seasonal community gatherings since the early 1900s. The location holds numerous ceremonies such as the annual Olvera Street "Mexican Marketplace" Anniversary Celebration and the "Fiestas de las Flores" Music Festival that takes place in El Pueblo during June where the plaza is redecorated as scenes from early Los Angeles. Another celebration, the "Blessing of the Animals" has taken place every April at El Pueblo since the early 1930s as seen in the photos above. Other celebrations include "Día de los Muertos" or Day of the Dead in October and November, Virgen de Guadalupe and Las Posadas Celebrations take place in December, Fiesta de la Candelaria in February, and Mardi Gras in March.



Olvera Street scene, c. 1930s



Christine Sterling, date unknown



Olvera Street scene, c.1930s

5 OLVERA STREET

"Los Angeles will be forever marked a transient, Orphan city if she allows her roots to rot in a soil of impoverished neglect."

—Christine Sterling, 1928

Formerly known as Wine Street, Olvera Street was renamed in honor of Agustin Olvera when extended northeast from La Plaza. He was Los Angeles' first judge whose adobe home formerly occupied the corner at La Plaza. A woman named Christine Sterling intervened in plans to demolish the nearby Avila Adobe, the oldest standing residence in Los Angeles, as she saw the building's historic value. Gaining financial support from Harry Chandler of the Los Angeles Times, she oversaw the recovery and rehabilitation of the Adobe and created the present Olvera Street, her version of an old Mexican paseo with shops.



Front porch and marker of Avila Adobe on Olvera Street, c. 1956



Avila Adobe, 1930



Dancers in front of Avila Adobe

6 AVILA ADOBE

The Oldest Remaining House in Los Angeles

Plans to demolish this abandoned adobe structure in 1928 were intervened by Christine Sterling who saw the building's historical value. Sterling contacted the owner who sold her the failing property. In addition to La Placita Church, it is the only surviving structure in Los Angeles from the Spanish Colonial era. It was constructed in 1818 for Don Francisco Avila, a wealthy rancher and former alcade (mayor) of the settlement in 1810. This house was briefly occupied in 1846 by Commodore Robert Stockton, the American naval commander during the Mexican-American war. With financial assistance from Harry Chandler, Sterling funded the restoration, and by early 1930 completed the transformation of Olvera Street. It is now a public museum, and is a part of the Los Angeles Historic District.



Los Angeles' first water reservoir at the center of the Plaza



Performers at Olvera Street, c. 1936

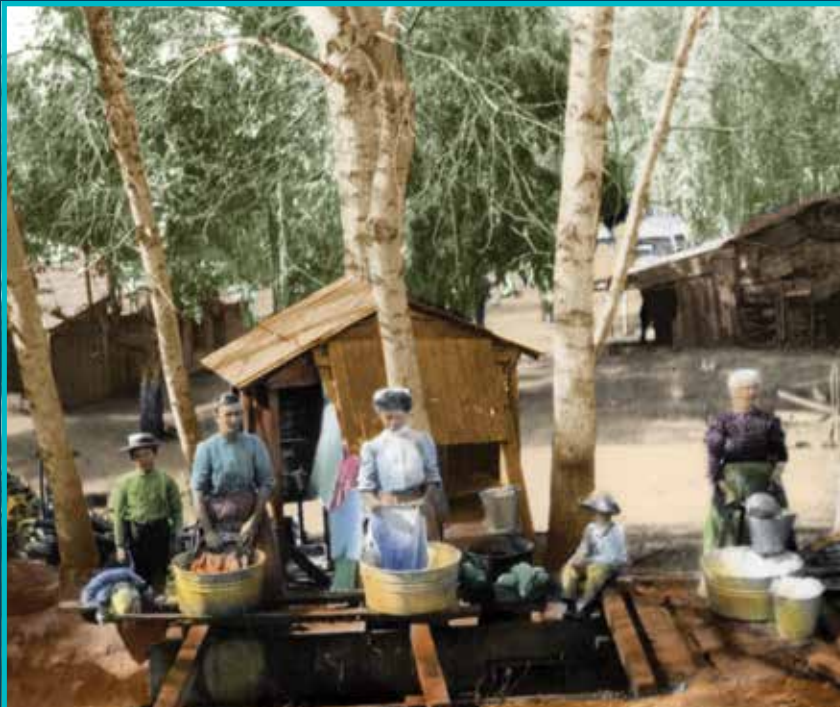


Guitar player and women, c. 1936

7 ZANJA MADRE

Life Water Source for the City

Zanja Madre, the source of life sustaining water, also known as "Mother Ditch," dates from the 1781 establishment of El Pueblo. The Río Porciúncula (Los Angeles River) was prone to floods. Major flooding in 1810 forced the final siting of La Plaza further uphill to its present location; this flood changed the course of the river across low land to empty into the Ballona Creek. Each event caused successive destruction of El Pueblo's early water supply infrastructure. This would continue with losses of the Los Angeles River waterwheel and related dams in 1832 onwards until the infamous paving of the Los Angeles River in the twentieth century.



Women washing clothes at the Zanja Madre, c. 1900



Unearthing the Zanja Madre



Waterwheel at the Los Angeles River, c. 1863

7 ZANJA MADRE

Life Water Source for the City

Zanja (or Zanja) Madre or "Mother Ditch," a dirt trench built in 1781, served as the original water source for the developing pueblos of Los Angeles at the time. It carried water from a dirt and brush dam built across the Río Porciuncula (Los Angeles River). The dam, various waterwheels, and reservoirs were improved after multiple flood damages. The water course itself was first improved as a series of carved logs but later remade as a subterranean brick vaulted watercourse. It remained in use until 1904.



Roberto Berdecio in front of the completed mural, 1932



View of mural from rooftop



Restoration of the mural

8 SIQUEIROS MURAL

"America Tropical" by Mexican Muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros

Commissioned by the Plaza Art Center, the anti-colonial political theme of this mural painted on the side of the Italian Hall was controversial from the date of its 1932 unveiling. Using modern materials and techniques, David Alfaro Siqueiros and a team of artists painted the symbolic mural highlighting a crucified Mexican peasant on a cross surmounted by an American eagle with armed guerrilla soldiers on one side. Because the mural was easily visible from the newly created Olvera Street, it resulted in successive coats of whitewash and Siqueiros' visa not being renewed. Recently restored, América Tropical is considered a referential source of the Chicano mural movement.



Portrait of David Alfaro Siqueiros



David Alfaro Siqueiros in front of his mural



Manuel Suárez and David Alfaro Siqueiros

8 DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS

A Revolutionary and an Artist

As a founding member of the Mexican Muralist Movement, David Alfaro Siqueiros believed that art should be created in public spaces. He wanted his work to be reflective of the environment where it was created. He began organizing and leading unions of artists and working men. His communist activities led to numerous jailings and periods of exile. He produced thousands of square feet of wall paintings. When Siqueiros arrived in Los Angeles, the Plaza at El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument was already a place of political free-speech. He began teaching fresco techniques to young artists at Chouinard Art Institute and soon forged long term relationships with influential people which led to his being commissioned to create the mural at El Pueblo de Los Angeles.



Banquet dinner party, c. 1919



Italian immigrant family



Foot race, c. 1910

9 ITALIAN HALL

Prominent Los Angeles Italian-American Social Club

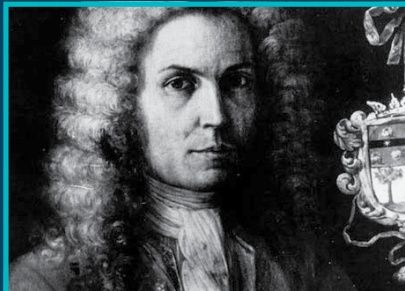
The Plaza area used to be the original location of "Little Italy" and nearby Sonoratown, home to a large community of Italian immigrants drawn by the climate and opportunities of Los Angeles. This community center, constructed in 1908 for Italian-American Los Angelinos, served as a location of numerous social, cultural, charitable and fundraising events such as the celebration of "vendemmia" or autumn grape harvest. Politically, it also became a center of labor and free speech movements. Many of the city's first wineries, irrigated by the Zanja Madre, were Italian-owned and were the origin of the original name of Olvera Street: Wine Street. By 1869 the wine capital of California became downtown Los Angeles.



Northwest corner of La Plaza; view taken in the direction of Sonoratown. The first gas lit street lighting in Los Angeles were installed in the area; one lamp post is visible at the corner of the Plaza, c. 1860



L.A. Gas Company tanks and the Pico House at the right side of La Plaza, c.1875

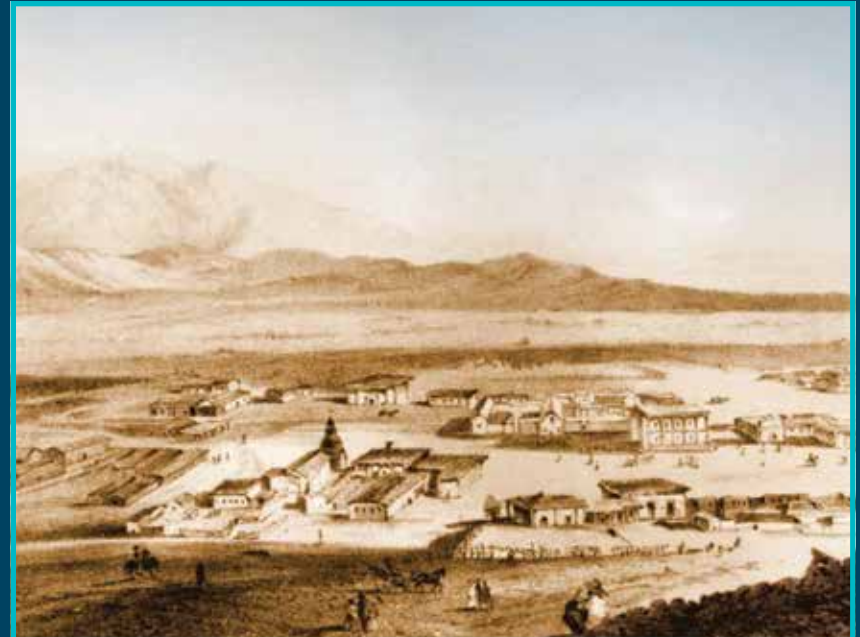


Painting of Felipe de Neve

10 LA PLAZA PARK

Settlers of Los Angeles

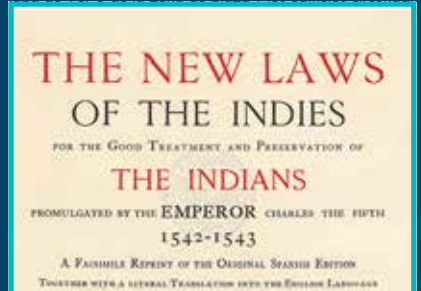
Both Spanish colonial and Mexican governors encouraged settlement by their citizens with incentives, particularly farming. While governor of Alta California from 1775 to 1782, Felipe de Neve ordered a settlement here on August 26, 1781. A new community named El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles, in short El Pueblo de Los Angeles, was established on September 4, 1781 at a site occupied by the indigenous village Yang-Na. These original settlers were an ethnically diverse group known as Los Pobladores. The initial forty-four inhabitants documented in a detailed census included Spanish, indigenous Tongva, African, mulatto, Mestizo, Zambos, Amerindio, and Mexican.



Hancock sketch of Pueblo and surrounding Ranchos, c. 1855



1873 map of plaza area and its surrounding buildings



The New Laws of the Indies

10 LA PLAZA PARK

The original town square

Spanish founded El Pueblo of Los Angeles in 1781. The Laws of the Indies, (leyes de Indias) issued by King Charles I on November 20, 1542, were used in the colonization of the Americas. Protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, these laws also outlined a city planning organization. In accordance with this law, La Plaza was created as the central square surrounded by church and other important government structures. Street-grid orientation at a forty-five degree angle ensured two exposures for sun and breezes. The settlement's first two sites were compromised by seasonal flooding while the third site was sufficiently distant from the river to become permanent.



Statue of King Carlos III



View of Plaza Park



View of the Plaza showing the Old Plaza Church, c. 1950

11 KING CARLOS III STATUE

King Carlos III

Built in the 1820s, the plaza was the center of the city's commercial and social activity, and still remains as the heart of many celebrations and festivals. Three important figures in the city's history can be found in the plaza: Felipe de Neve, Father Junípero Serra, and King Carlos III of Spain. King Carlos III of Spain ordered the founding of El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles in 1781. This statue was presented in 1976, in honor of the 200th anniversary of American independence. It was dedicated in the Plaza by the king and queen of Spain, Don Juan Carlos and Dona Sofia on September 30, 1987.



Father Serra statue in Plaza Park, c. 1960



Photograph of Father Serra Park

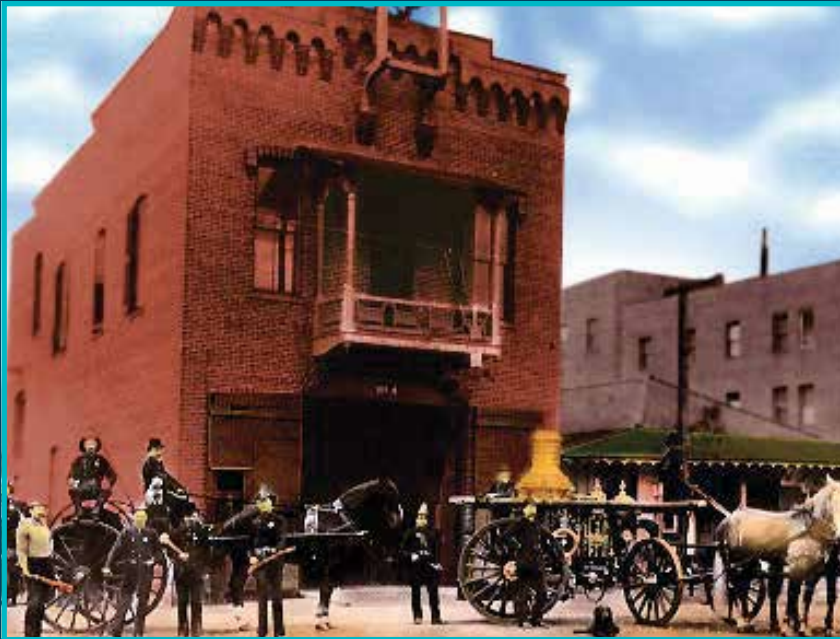


View of Father Serra Park

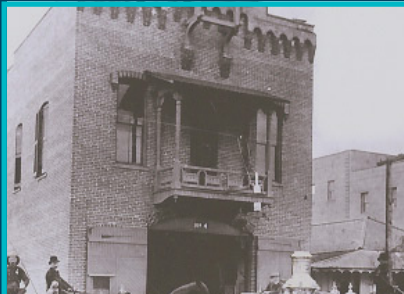
12 FATHER SERRA PARK

Father Junípero Serra

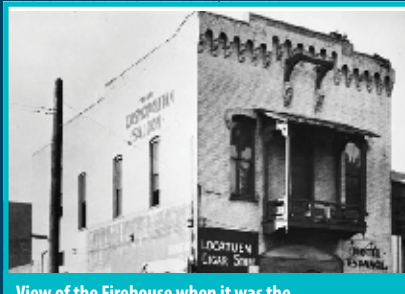
Junípero Serra Park was named after Franciscan Father Junípero Serra, the missionary Father who was responsible for the founding of the missions from San Diego to Sonoma. Father Junípero Serra came to Mexico from his native Majorca in 1749 at age 37. Following expulsion of the Jesuits, Fr. Serra was placed in charge of the Missions in Baja California. In 1768 the King of Spain's Viceroy in Mexico launched a "Sacred Expedition" to establish Spain's presence northward. Fr. Serra directed religious affairs, with Don Gaspar de Portola the military and civil functions as governor of Alta California. The Viceroy's intention was to establish Missions in San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey Bay, and Drake's Bay. Fr. Serra was occupied with the Mission in San Diego from the launch of their expedition in 1769.



Los Angeles' first fire station, near the Los Angeles Plaza, c. 1884



Plaza Firehouse Museum, c. 1960



View of the Firehouse when it was the Cosmopolitan Saloon

13 FIREHOUSE MUSEUM

Engine Company Number 1

The first fire house built in Los Angeles in 1884, Engine Company No. 1, was initially staffed largely by volunteers. Designed by architect William Boring, it included a unique turntable removing the necessity for horses to back in. The station was relocated in 1891 due to a property ownership dispute, with fire services not returning until after 1897. By that date, the transition to a fully professional force had already occurred. The building served multiple uses as a saloon, cigar store, poolroom, boarding house, drugstore and Chinese market. It is now the Plaza Firehouse Museum which displays nineteenth century fire fighting equipment.



Lunar Festival Parade



Hellman/Quon building built in 1900



Original building

14 CHINESE AMERICAN MUSEUM

The Chinese immigrant experience in Los Angeles

French immigrant Philippe Garnier built the Garnier Block building in 1890, leasing it to Chinese-American merchants prior to completion. This structure became the de facto center of the Chinese immigrant community over the successive decades, with La Plaza being a central gathering place of the community originally located in the area of the present Union Station. Chinatown's prominent social organizations, benevolent associations, schools, and shops have been accommodated here over the years, including the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Chinese Mission. Religious institutions occupied the upper floor, located per Chinese custom to be closer to heaven.



Don Pio Pico in 1852 with his wife and their two nieces



View from Fort Moore Hill looking down at Pico House



Railway track part of the East L.A. and San Pedro Street Railway, c.1878

15 PICO HOUSE

Los Angeles' first grand hotel

This grand hotel was the tallest building in Los Angeles. Completed in 1820, the building stood three stories high. Pio Pico, the last governor of Alta California during Mexican rule from 1845 to 1846, sold some of his many land interests to raise \$85,000 for the construction. Designed by one of Los Angeles' most prominent architects, Ezra Kysor, this Italianate style structure boasted thirty-three rooms, with running water and restrooms on every floor, an interior court with an aviary and fountain, and a grand staircase. Kysor also designed the adjacent Merced Theater, Garnier Building, and the original St. Vibiana's Cathedral.



View of Church Cemetery



Early sketch of Church and Cemetery



Aerial view of commercial development, c. 1925

16 CHURCH CEMETERY

"Campo Santo" Parish Church Cemetery, 1826–1844

With its first documented burial recorded on March 3rd, 1826, this site was the only Catholic cemetery in Los Angeles for nearly twenty years. The excessive use by more than 660 documented internments during that period and many more undocumented burials as well, led to its closure for health reasons in February 1844. The site subsequently was developed with commercial buildings until these were demolished and replaced by a parking lot in the 1950's. A garden memorializing the original cemetery's location and the departed was created as part of the La Plaza rehabilitation project.



Front view of La Placita Church



View from Pico House of Church cemetery wall, c. 1890



View from La Plaza, c. 1920

17 LA PLACITA CHURCH

Los Angeles' Parish Church

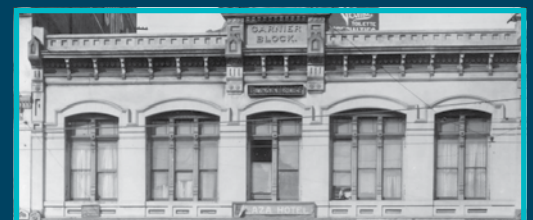
Construction of La Placita church commenced in 1818, with its dedication in 1822 at the north side of La Plaza. Located midway between the mission of San Gabriel and San Fernando, La Placita was El Pueblo's "parish mission" church to serve the growing population. The church has been expanded and remodeled several times, losing its Victorian Style open cupola tower for a more Mission-style influenced belfry at the end of nineteenth century. A second nave was constructed at the north side of the original church in the 1960s. La Placita provides the local population with multiple religious services and outreach programs.



From left to right: Vickrey-Brunswig and Plaza House buildings, c. 1960



Vickrey-Brunswig Building, c. 1920



Plaza House/Garnier Block, c. 1918-1920

18 LA PLAZA MUSEUM

Mexican-American Cultural Center and Museum

Two late Victorian-era buildings were rehabilitated by the County for La Plaza de Cultura y Artes, a Mexican-American Cultural center. The two-story Plaza House was constructed in 1883 as a commercial retail and office building, which later became a rooming house with various shops, including a popular Mexican Restaurant, and County offices. The five-story Vickrey-Brunswig Building, completed in 1888 as apartments over ground floor commercial spaces, was later transformed into the Brunswick Drug Company headquarters. Both structures suffered from fires and general deterioration and were red-tagged as unsafe to occupy until their rehabilitation with the reconstruction of lost Victorian decorative details in 2006 to 2009.



La Plaza and its ornamental Victorian fence in the foreground, Pico House, Vickrey Building, Plaza House, Campo Santo cemetery behind the wall, and La Placita church, c. 1890-95



Communist League May Day Rally, La Plaza, c. 1940

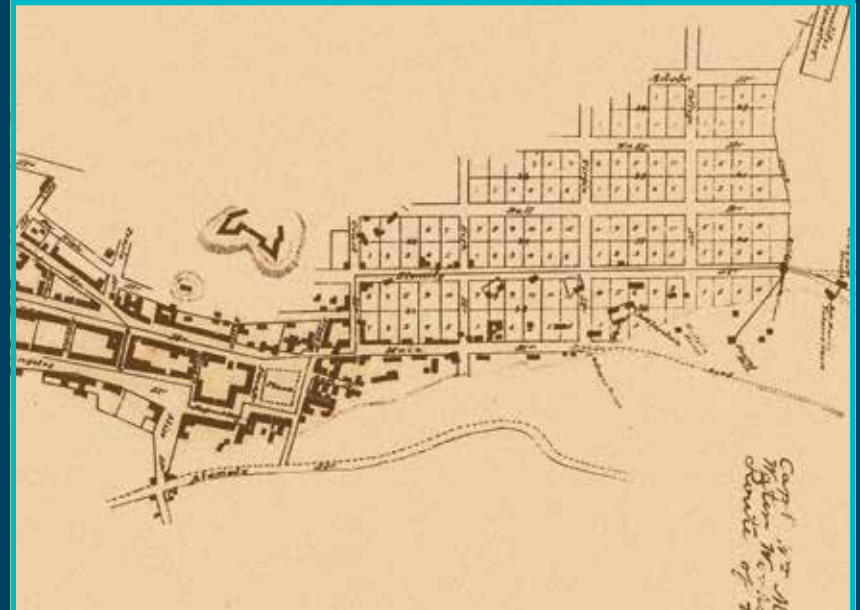


View from La Placita 1890 storefronts at the thriving commercial center of Los Angeles, c. 1920

18 LA PLAZA MUSEUM

A Vibrant Cultural Center

In 2004, the County of Los Angeles, Chief Administrative Office funded a complete shell and core rehabilitation and restoration of the 1883 Plaza House Building and the 1888 Vickrey -Brunswig Building. These contributing structures to the La Plaza historic district were to be adaptively reused as a Mexican-American Cultural Center. Their site fronting the northern side of La Plaza was one cornerstone of the earliest social and commercial center of El Pueblo. At the foot of what remains of Fort Moore Hill, structures in this area were predominantly one story residential adobe constructions with the occasional brick or wood structure until the commercial development supported by the real estate boom in the 1880s. Designed at the peak of Victorian-era influence and during a real estate construction boom in Los Angeles, these buildings can be classified stylistically as examples of the High Victorian Italianate Style.



Moore's Map of the Old Los Angeles Water Works, "Route of the Log Pipes"; The two-pointed angular fort wall is set directly overlooking La Plaza



Jacob Phillip's Beer Hall, later known as the Banning Residence on Fort Moore Hill, prior to its removal, c. 1887-8

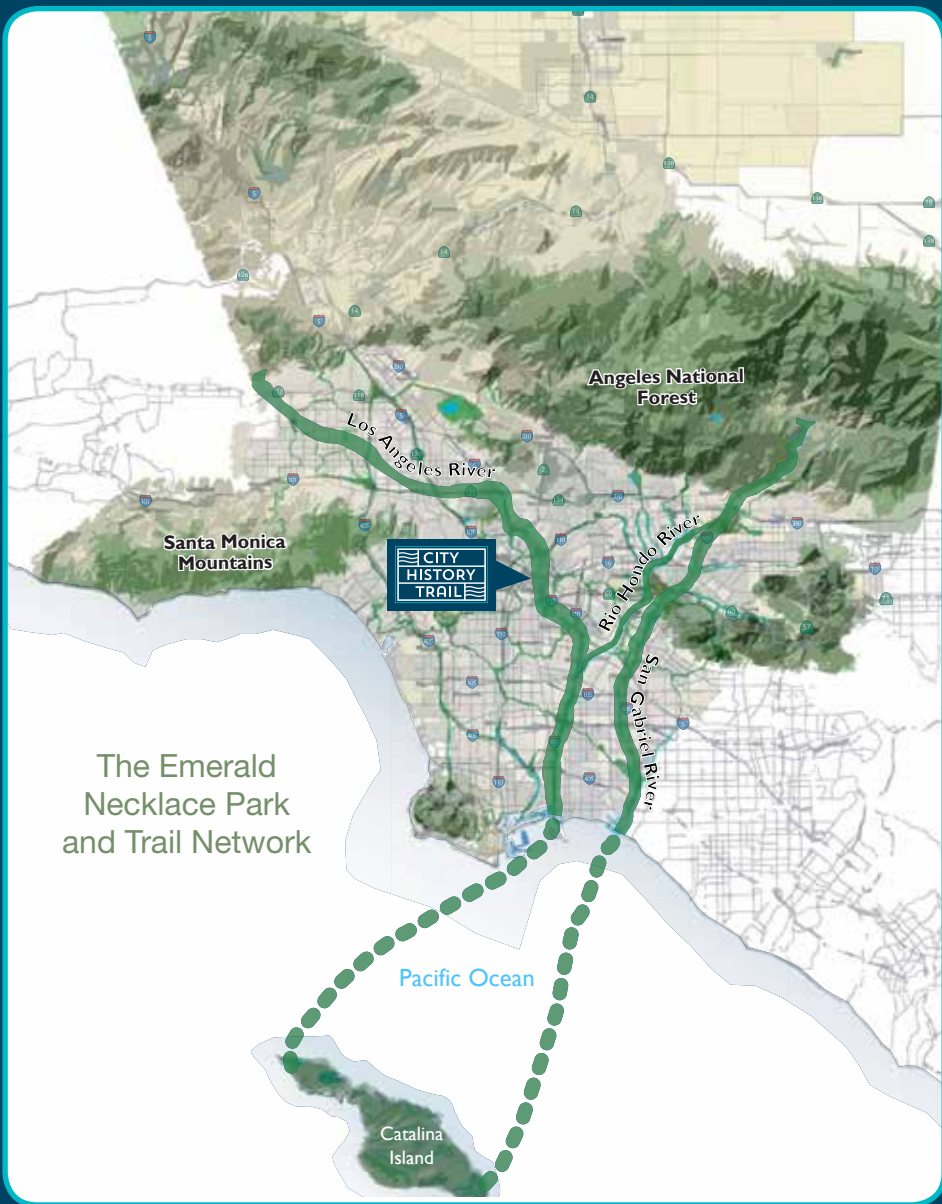


Construction of the Hollywood freeway; City Hall tower in the background, c. 1948

19 FORE MOORE MEMORIAL

Fort Moore

Originally named the Post at Los Angeles, a simple barricade was initially constructed by American Army troops in 1846 at the onset of the Mexican-American War. Enlarged to a breastwork approximately four hundred feet in length, it was designated Fort Moore in 1847 during the occupation of El Pueblo, the largest settlement in Alta California at that time. Built overlooking La Plaza, it was only partially completed—without the side facing away from the square. The garrison withdrew in 1848 leaving the post abandoned. In 1948, a large portion of the hill was removed in order to extend Spring Street and freeway construction.



Scan to discover more about Amigos de los Rios and the Emerald Necklace!