

History Comes Alive!

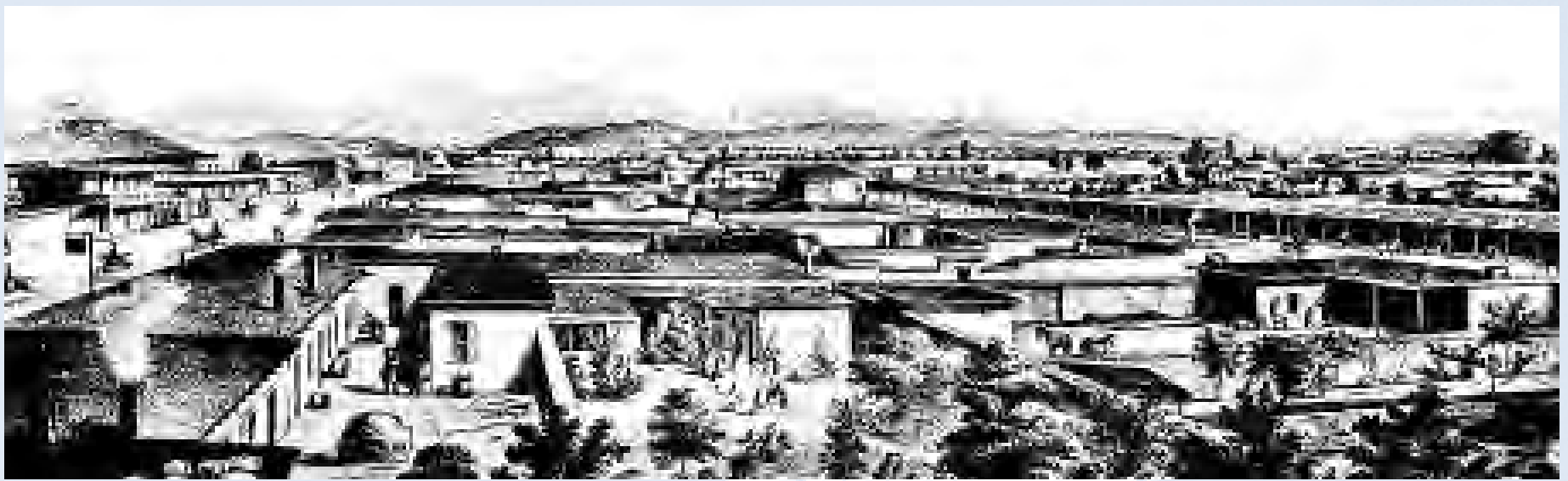
Tales From the City Archives



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First L.A. Neighborhood Was a Council Decision

Photos are from the Security Pacific Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Archive, courtesy Carolyn Cole, Director.



A view of adobe buildings in the early Los Angeles.

El Pueblo, the "Plaza," was the first neighborhood in the City of Los Angeles. This neighborhood had three sites in its history dating back to 1781, when Felipe de Neve, New Spain's governor of California, selected a site and named it El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles Sobre el Rio de la Porciuncula. That year, 44 settlers came Sept. 4 to the site that became home, not far from the Native American settlement of Yangna.

Around 1815, when the population was between 300 and 400, the Plaza suffered from an earthquake and flooding and moved northwest to a site closer to the present location. Between 1825-30, when the population grew to 770, the Plaza moved to its present site.

Los Angeles officially became a City in 1835. Between 1781-1850, the governing body for Los Angeles was Spanish, then Mexican. During 1847, the Mexican Council, known as the Ayuntamiento, made decisions based on government needs to change the design of the first official neighborhood in the City. The following historical records of the governing body come from a translation of the original Mexican records. Both are found in the Los Angeles City Archives. It should be noted that many of the names in these records, and their descendants, have become influential, many times over, in the history of Los Angeles.

At a special meeting Aug. 25, 1847, Councilman Gallardo stated that he had asked for a special meeting of Council to lay before it the following facts:

"Gentlemen: The Committee of which I am Chairman is unable to arrive at a final decision because of the opinion of the experts, Messrs. Esteban Munoz and Nicolas Feliz, it is necessary to square the 'Plaza,' wherefore I beg the Honorable Council to duly weigh this necessity and authorize the Committee accordingly to make that square more true, the Committees on Police and Streets co-operating for the protection of their respective dispositions ..."

Thereupon the Syndic (city attorney) said that as a member of the Police Committee he was ready to serve, but in no case would he allow himself to get mixed up in the affairs of Augustin Olvera and Juan Sepulveda. Mr. Gallardo replied that this was an independent matter and asked that his proposition be approved; which was done.

The same Mr. Gallardo continued remarking that he had noticed that new buildings in process of construction had builders disregarding the lines laid down by the Police Committee, thereby causing damage to the streets. He then begged the Council to delib-

erate the following proposition:

"That it be made known by means of public notices, that whosoever intends to build a house and lay down new foundations shall notify the Police Committee so that they can satisfy themselves that the construction will proceed on correct lines, and should this notice be neglected, on work be done infringing upon such lines, a penalty consisting in forfeiture of the lot, to which additional punishment may be added in aggravating cases, shall be meted out ..."

After discussion, that proposition was approved, whereupon the Council adjourned. It was signed by Jose Salazar, Rafael Gallardo, Jose Antonio Yorba, Jose Vincente Guerrero, and Ygnacio Coronel, Secretary.

The next day, Aug. 26, 1847, another special meeting was held by the Ayuntamiento. This meeting was once again headed by Mr. Rafael Gallardo as follows:

"Your Committee appointed to report on the protests of Juan Sepulveda, Augustin Olvera and Mr. Cabrera, relating to the street alignment recently marked off for their houses by the Street Committee, has judged proper, that to enable it to submit a well digested report, steps should be taken to first measure the four sides of the 'Plaza' for the purpose of making it square...In this manner we [will] succeed in giving the 'Plaza' a better shape than that it now has, besides leaving undisturbed the houses of Messrs. Sepulveda and Olvera.

"Futhermore, if you see fit to carry out this project and leave a street open between the 'zanja' and the hill, then the house which Mr. Cabrera proposes to build will stand in the way ... Should you therefore decide to adopt the proposed plan we would suggest as a matter of justice that Mr. Cabrera be given another lot and that he be indemnified for whatever expense that change may cost him. Above all your Honorable Body will resolve upon what may seem equitable with due regard to the beauty of the Town and the convenience of the public."

After the matter was discussed and adopted by the Council, the Syndic made a motion that the plan by the Special Committee be made part of the proceedings and that the following proposition be carried out:

"In view of the fact that in making additions to the 'Plaza' in order to square it

the lines demarked by the Committee fell into the lot of Pedro Cabrera, I propose that a Committee composed of Councilmen be appointed with instructions to tender Mr. Cabrera the lot next to his own, which it is believed to be an improvement on the latter, and to give him as an offset of the damages that he may suffer the use of the prison labor on such days as the Honorable Council may select ..."

After discussion, that proposition was approved, with the Alcalde (Mayor) Salazar and the Syndic Guerrero being placed on that Committee.

The Syndic next called attention to the filthy condition of the "zanja" and submitted the following proposition:

"The undersigned member of your Honorable Body respectfully submits that the principal canal of the City needs cleaning out in certain portions where there is an accumulation of dirt and rotten stuff, wherefore he prays that tomorrow you address an official communication to the Water Overseer directing him to take such prisoners as are under arrest for light offenses and make them remove all the filth, which is doing so much injury to the Town. And they can also make use of my yoke of oxen, which I hereby make known ..."

The Council then adjourned, and the proposition was signed by the above Councilmen from the previous meeting.

At the Council meeting Aug. 28, 1847, the following discussion on the "Plaza" plan was presented by Mr. Salazar and Mr. Guerrero, the new members of the Special Committee. The report and proposition follows:

"[Our] purpose of inducing Pedro Cabrera to give up his lot, which they regretted, to have to take to carry into effect the project of squaring off the 'Plaza' on the lines measured off by the Special Committee encharged with that duty, and which cam be seen in the plan* now before Council, has made a proposition to the said Cabrera offering to give him another lot in exchange and to indemnify him for his expenses, but Cabrera refused, saying that when he took the lot which now falls into the street, he did it because its principal front faced the 'Plaza' and that no other lot would be of benefit to his interests, wherefore, the Committee, seeing the impossibility of coming to any understanding. Has come to the following conclusion. That since that lot extends away from the view of the 'Plaza,' particular attention should be paid to the buildings which shall form the Square, and that Cabrera and Ylario (Hilario) Varela be allowed to remain where the preceding Committee located them. Your Honorable Body, however, will determine what ever may be just, and will notify Cabrera without loss of time."

After sufficient discussion, the foregoing report was approved.

After further research, I believe that this is the last formal document in these minutes on the subject of redesigning the 'Plaza' at that time. *The plan for the reconstructed "Plaza" can be found in the City Archives, Box B-1367, Vol. 4 (1835-1852), folder 2, page 548, written in red ink.



Early Los Angeles.