

History Comes Alive!

by Hynda Rudd,
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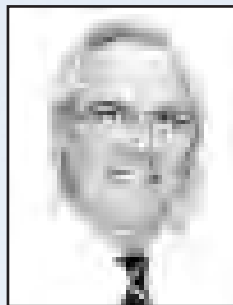
Tales From the City Archives

Olympic Gold

■ Looking at the challenges and ultimate success of the City's 1984 Olympics.

With the advent of the 2006 winter Olympic Games in Torino, Italy, this month, and interest in the summer Games returning to Los Angeles in 2016, it seemed appropriate that Los Angelenos should review our past involvement in this international spectacle. The author of this article, Anton Calleia, was steeped in the managing and organizing of the City's bid for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

Mr. Calleia, was for 20 years one of Mayor Tom Bradley's top aides, was Project Manager of the City's bid for the 1984 Olympic Games. He served the City for 28 years, retiring in 1993 as Chief Executive Assistant to the Mayor. (He was a member of the transition team that helped Mayor Richard Riordan launch his administration. He also served as Council President John Ferraro's appointee to the Charter Reform Commission, and is a member of the board of the Municipal Improvement Corporation of Los Angeles.)



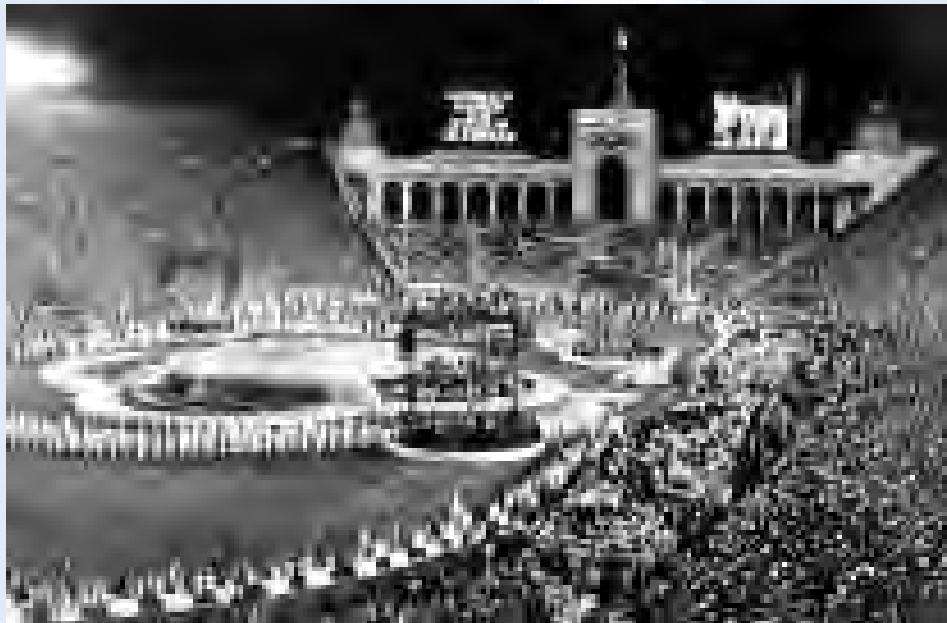
Anton Calleia, the Project Manager of the City's bid for the 1984 Olympic Games.

It should not come as a surprise to anyone that Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, shortly after his election, expressed his personal support for the effort to bring the 2016 Olympic Games to Los Angeles.

Ever since its successful hosting of the 1932 Games, Los Angeles has been on a constant quest to bring back the Games, succeeding spectacularly in 1984. Berlin hosted the 1936 Olympics, and World War II caused the cancellation of the Games in 1940 and 1944. But Los Angeles was back in the running for 1948, 1952, 1956, 1960 and 1964 Games, each time being eliminated from the competition before it reached the final selection by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

A bid for the 1976 Olympics, organized by a committee headed by John B. Kilroy, made it all the way to the IOC in 1970. The competition then was from Moscow and Montreal; and the IOC avoided the appearance of taking sides between the Cold War rivals, the United States and the Soviet Union, by awarding the Games to Montreal. At the time, the official reason given by the IOC for the choice of Montreal was that Olympic rules prohibit the Games from being a part of larger celebration, i.e. our National Bicentennial.

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The Closing Ceremonies of the 1984 Olympic Games at the Coliseum.

the Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games (SCCOG), which remains active to this day. It was an easy guess that the 1980 Games would go to Moscow. But Mayor Tom Bradley and the leadership of SCCOG, particularly its President John C. Argue, believed Los Angeles had to stay in the running for the 1980 Games if it had to have any chance of being awarded the 1984 Games. So, a Los Angeles delegation, headed by Mayor Bradley, went before the IOC in Vienna in 1974. As had been expected, the 1980 Games were awarded to Moscow, but Los Angeles made important IOC friends at that meeting.

The choice of a host city for the 1984 Games would be made by the IOC at its session in Athens in 1978. But as the City's quest progressed, two issues began to dominate the public debate:

1. The 1972 Olympics in Munich had been marred by a terrorist attack that killed eleven of the Israeli athletes; and
2. In its preparation for the 1976 Olympics, Montreal had incurred a public bonded indebtedness in excess of \$1 billion for construction of the main stadium, several arenas and an Olympic Village to house the athletes.

Would Los Angeles be inviting a terrorist attack, and would it bankrupt the City treasury if the City were to host the Games?

Talk radio provided a ready soapbox for self-appointed vox populi, who talked up the terrorist threat and predicted that the taxpayers would be left holding the bag. Consistently negative coverage by the Los Angeles Times did not help. Yet public opinion polls showed that a significant majority of Los Angeles residents favored hosting the Games if the City could be shielded from financial liability. As far as the terrorist threat was concerned, very few people felt it should affect the City's decision.

From the start, Bradley, had insisted that "the Games pay for themselves" – that the City would not carry any financial responsibility. Elements in the international Olympic movement had never heard of such a notion, and some considered it an affront to the IOC.

In Athens the 1984 Games were provisionally awarded to Los Angeles, and it took months of negotiations with the IOC to get them to accept a totally privately run Olympics, with the City completely protected from financial liability. A final "take it or leave it" type of letter from Bradley convinced the IOC that the City would not back down. The IOC accepted the City's proposal.

As far as the "terrorist threat" was concerned, very few people felt that should affect the decision whether to bid for the Games. The terrorists were not going to intimidate us.

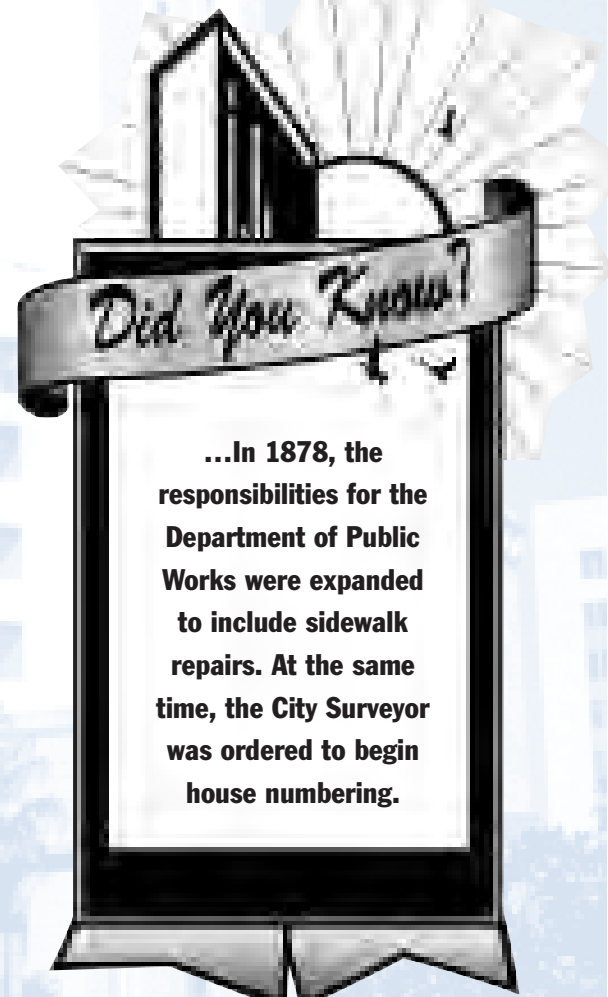
In the end, the 1984 Games in Los Angeles were a huge success. Athletes from 140 nations participated in a festive atmosphere of friendly competition. Regretfully, the Soviet Union stayed away, retaliating for the U.S. boycott of the Moscow Games as a protest over the Soviet's war in Afghanistan.

Financially, the 1984 Olympics were an even greater success. They generated a surplus of \$225 million! Of this amount, the U.S. Olympic Committee received about \$135 million, and about \$90 million became an endowment to the Amateur Athletic Foundation (AAF). To date, the AAF has provided \$14 million in grants for youth basketball programs, \$4.2 million for youth soccer programs, \$6.2 million for track and field organizations, and \$6 million to promote swimming among youngsters.

Will the Games be as successful in Los Angeles in 2016?

Why not?

This article was written by Anton Calleia, the Project Manager of the City's bid for the 1984 Olympic Games. He is now member of the board of the Municipal Improvement Corporation of Los Angeles.



...In 1878, the responsibilities for the Department of Public Works were expanded to include sidewalk repairs. At the same time, the City Surveyor was ordered to begin house numbering.