

History Comes Alive!

by Hynda Rudd,
City Archivist (Retired),
and Club Member



Tales From the City Archives



Councilman and Club Member Tom LaBonge (right), announces and delivers the book project to the City Council Sept. 26, and presented a Council proclamation to city historian Dr. Doyce B. Nunis Jr. (left) and Alive! columnist and Retired City Archivist Hynda Rudd (center).

Dedicated to L.A. Government

■ Two-volume book, produced by Hynda Rudd, is a landmark for City history.

On Sept. 26, the Los Angeles City Historical Society presented the City Council its very own history, in book form, from 1850-2000. This presentation was ably and adroitly accomplished by the Honorable Tom LaBonge, the Councilmember of the 4th District. This great nine-year endeavor ended up in the form of a two-volume, 1,000

page history, *The Development of Los Angeles City Government: An Institutional Memory, 1850-2000*.

The presentation of a two-volume set was made by Tom LaBonge, Fourth District Councilman and Club Member.

One thousand sets of the book were printed, and 400 of them have either been sold already or given to institutions of higher learning as part of the funding from the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. The remainder of the books is being sold through Loyola Marymount

University. Please see the contact information at the end of the article.

The interest in this two-volume City history, a one-of-a-kind in this country, has even drawn inquiries from Europe.

This book is an anthology with 32 pre-eminent scholar-authors and 26 chapters, and includes a prologue, epilogue, appendices and index.

On the facing page, you'll find the table of contents, just so you can see the depth and breadth of our City government history in this book.



1889 Fort Street City Hall

In 1889, a much needed city hall was built that would serve the City's present and future needs. The Romanesque revival structure was constructed of red sandstone, steel and wood, with a tower that extended well above the downtown skyline. The location on Fort Street between Second and Third Streets was to showcase the building and emphasize its importance. The Mayor's office and the Council chamber were on the second floor of the tower section.

The City, having spent more than \$300,000 for construction was able to provide space in the building for almost every municipal department, including the City's library. The Fort Street city hall remained in existence until 1929. In 1890, Fort Street was renamed Broadway.

The two-volume book produced by Hynda Rudd contains history that was made at every L.A. City Hall, including this one.

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The chapters have been broken into a number of categories:

PROLOGUE: By Dr. Doyce B. Nunis, Jr. Retired University of Southern California Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History and Retired Editor for 42 years of the *Southern California Quarterly*, the publication of the Historical Society of Southern California wrote "Los Angeles, 1781-1850." This incredibly well written historical journey covers the Spanish and Mexican rule of Los Angeles prior to its becoming a city by the Act of Incorporation from the State of California Legislature in 1850.

**PART I:
CITY GOVERNMENT:
ORGANIZATION AND CORE FUNCTIONS**

Los Angeles became a city on March 18, 1850, by the State's Act of Incorporation, but annual reports don't start really until required by the 1878 State Charter, which also required department heads to be responsible for tracking money received and spent for their programs. Law and order is provided by City



The two-volume set, *The Development of Los Angeles City Government: An Institutional History, 1850-2000*.

Attorneys, City Prosecutors and the Court system, which in the formative years was under the jurisdiction of the mayor. A more physical form of citizen protection came from what would become the City Fire and Police Departments. The Fire Department became a reality in 1872, as a volunteer organization by virtue of an ordinance. The Police Department, through many bumpy episodes over the years, and soon to be one of the leading police departments in the nation, began as a one-man operation with a City Marshal in 1850.

**PART II:
CITY GOVERNMENT:
INFRASTRUCTURE AND LAND USE**

While early Los Angeles was maturing, other aspects of life consisted of day-to-day living experiences. Water, the central necessity of life was, and continues to be, a primary issue of survival. By some accounts, Los Angeles was considered the most incredible city in the world because its source of water for human and animal consumption was almost nil. But L.A. had a destiny to fulfill. The history of drinking water concerned City fathers dating back to the Spanish and Mexican periods. The first Water Overseer was appointed in 1853. Water of another nature became important to our City through the Port of Los Angeles. The Harbor was granted to our City by the federal government, with provisions and Charter amendments in 1909, the same year the Board of Commissioners was established.

Other aspects of our developing City were the need of public works for municipal improvements. The first Board of Public Works included five members of Council, the Mayor and the City Clerk as secretary; this was in 1872. City planning was also a great necessity in the beginning. So was housing — our City grew by leaps and bounds for many reasons. The City Redevelopment Agency was a late starter back in 1948. Its responsibility was to "reverse vicious cycles of urban deterioration and disinvestments." And finally, transportation truly opened up the West.

**PART III:
CITY GOVERNMENT: SOCIAL WELFARE**

This section is devoted to government services that were dedicated to the needs of citizens. Public health in the early years of citydom revolved around sanitary measures and health menaces. In the early 1860s there was a smallpox epidemic. Was there a physician in the new City to care for the ill? By 1868, there was a doctor in the area appointed the first Health Officer. The following year, a Board of Health was organized to send the ill to a City hospital. Public education in Los Angeles became a reality in 1853, when the Common (City) Council passed an ordinance creating a Board of Education.

Recreation and parks was another facet needed in the life of Los Angelenos. In the 1880s, lands were finally designated for parks. The 1889 Charter mandated a commission to work with the Parks Department.

The Public Library became a reality in March 1878, a milestone in providing the City with a marked cultural advancement. And the Municipal Arts Department was established in 1927, bringing City government further cultural appeal for its constituents.

**PART IV:
THE CITY IN CONTEXT**

Aspects of City life evolves out of the beast itself, not always its government. These are things that any town, city or community becomes dependent upon such as the environment, who lives or works there, and the community itself. The patterns in this section refer to three such examples. The first looks at spacial (relating to space) and demographic evaluations from day one in 1850 through today. The second looks at neighborhoods and community empowerment in this enormous City.

**PART V:
BEYOND CITY HALL: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES:**

City government today is often dependent upon resources beyond its borders, for example, the joint power agreements with Los Angeles County and the State of California. Los Angeles, the one-horse town in the beginning, emerged in the latter part of the 20th century and well into the 21st as a world-wide competitor basically because of our powerful infrastructure of transportation, namely ports, planes, rail systems and freeways.

EPILOGUE: Dr. Raphael J. Sonenshein Professor of Political Science, the State University of California, Fullerton, Executive Director of the City of Los Angeles Appointed Charter Reform Commission and Executive Director of the Neighborhood Council Review Commission, gives a brilliant summation of our City government process from the past into the 21st century.

For those of you interested in furthering your knowledge about *The Development of Los Angeles City Government: An Institutional History, 1850-2000*, ask for it from your local library, or it can be purchased through Loyola Marymount University. Please contact:

Dr. Jennifer Magnabosco

The Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Center for the Study of Los Angeles

Attn: Los Angeles City Historical Society Book Request

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