

# History Comes Alive!

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Tales From the City Archives

## Unusual City Archives Entries

■ Here are some points of interest from the L.A. Archives.

Photos courtesy the Security Pacific Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, Carolyn Cole, photo director

The following are records from the City Archives. The first one is our oldest record, dating from 1827. The others are a census from 1836; the first City Seal from 1854-1905; an 1879 Health Officer's report to the City Council; and finally the first City automated record, the annual report of Mayor Cameron Thom in 1883. Enjoy!

Cameron Thom's residence in 1886, at the southeast corner of Main and Third Street downtown.



### 1827

The City's oldest record was written in Spanish and later translated in the mid-19th century. It is a plea by a man named Hilario Machado, a retired Corporal of the Company of the Port of San Diego. He is writing this letter to Don Franco Maria Ruiz, Retired Captain. Machado claims he presented himself before the Commandant of said Port, requesting for early retirement from the army due to illness. He noted he served faithfully in the military service. Machado was then given permanent retirement.

This letter, written by an embarrassed Machado, asks the Superior authority, Don Franco Maria Ruiz, "to assist me monetarily, with any amount whatever, as I have a family and am very much in need. I implore that aid be extended to me from the neighboring Missions or from the Military tax imposed in this town." This missive was dated June 8, 1827.

As you can see by the photograph of this letter, there is a two-and-half inch left margin for a response to the Machado letter. There were two responses to Machado's letter. Finally, on Oct. 10, 1827, Machado was notified he would receive the following, 1,216 "ps," one bit and 9/8 grains.



### 1836

The first census of Los Angeles was translated into English and listed as the "Register of the City of Los Angeles and its Jurisdictions - Year 1836." Dr. Doyce B. Nunis Jr., Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History from the University of Southern California and an authority on southern California history, provides us with important information about the title of this census. Granted Los Angeles became an American city in 1850 by virtue of the California State mandate. But by virtue of the Mexican Congress on May 23, 1835, "The pueblo of Los Angeles in Alta California [was] erected as a city." There were two early annexations at that time, referring to the term "jurisdictions" in the census title. The first were the Missions of San Gabriel and San Fernando in 1826. The second group was ranchos during the 1830s: San Pedro, Santa Gertrudes, San Rafael, San Jose de Garcia Simi; and Santa Ana. The population in 1836, recorded during the Mexican era, as 2,228. This historic document lists familiar names of Feliz, Lugo, Sepulveda and Verdugo.



### 1854 - 1905

The City's first seal was proposed by City Councilman Ezra Drown on Jan. 30, 1854. The verbatim statement from the Common Council Minutes read:

"Mr. Drown proposed that the City provide itself with a seal, to be attached to public documents requiring the same, and that the Secretary attend to this matter. The seal showing in its center a bunch of grapes and leaves of the grapevine, the whole surrounded with the following inscription: 'The Common Council of the City of Los Angeles,' which, being put to discussion, was agreed to and the Secretary instructed to see it done."

In 1905, as the City was maturing and becoming more cosmopolitan, the City Fathers decided that Los Angeles was no longer just an agrarian City and had our current City Seal designed and described in Ordinance 10,834. A City Attorney from England was the creator of the seal. What is interesting is that Los Angeles County decided to use the cluster of grapes for its seal after the City of Los Angeles did away with it.



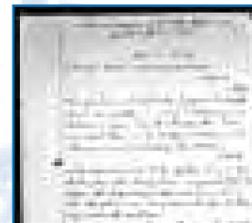
### 1879

By 1879, the City of Los Angeles was given its first Charter mandated by the state of California. One of the major occurrences on how City government was to conduct itself was to require department heads to write annual reports to the City Council.

In a report filed Nov. 13, 1879 by Dr. Walter Lindley, Health Officer, Lindley praises the new sewer systems in Los Angeles, with the exception of the "sanitary evil" in Chinatown, with dilapidated buildings and overcrowding. He notes the situation "is so bad that a committee was formed of the Chief of Police, the City Engineer and the Health Officer were to report on the sanitary conditions of [old] Chinatown."

His other statements included that Los Angeles had become a haven for invalids as a resort community. He praised the orange groves and the temperate climate. In another area of his responsibilities, he noted that, from Jan. 1 through Nov. 1, 1879, that 223 babies were born, 119 male and 104 females.

His mortality report stated that there had been 175 stillbirths, and 50 of those deaths succumbed in City hospitals. There are also lists of mortalities by diseases broken into categories that are difficult to decipher.

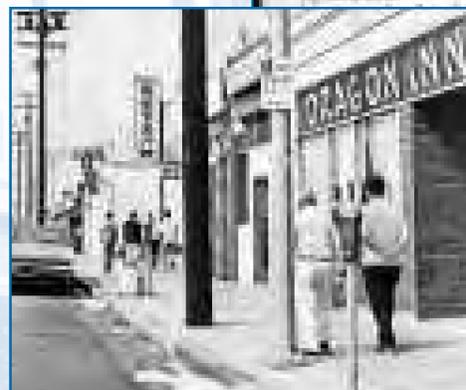


### 1883

In 1883, Cameron Thom was the mayor of Los Angeles. His term was from 1882-84. Under his administration, the third City Hall on Spring and Second Streets was built. During his tenure as mayor, the first typed document was recorded. It was written to the Honorable Council and dated Nov. 10, 1883, possibly considered an annual report. Those were Victorian times, and this report had distinctive flourishes of words not found in today's governmental procedures. For example, Thom wrote in the beginning of his report, "I beg leave in a very general way to report that our moral, sanitary and business condition is good." He continues:

"As an indication of the first, I direct your attention to the fact that more churches and schoolhouses have been finished, and are in course of erection within your limits than can be found elsewhere in the entire land, where the population is not greater than ours. As proof of the second, I call your attention to the statistics of your Health Officer for the past twelve months; and in no direction can you turn your eye, or bend your ear without seeing, and hearing unmistakable evidences of a thrift, and prosperity that within itself almost partakes of the marvelous."

The document represents, with many corrections and additions in pen, a true human aspect to government not to be found in today's historical records. It is a true jewel!



Old Chinatown on Spring Street.