

History Comes Alive!

Tales From the City Archives



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Photos courtesy the Security Pacific and Herald-Examiner collections, Los Angeles Public Library photo archive, Christina Rice, Acting Sr. Librarian.

In the 1878 California charter it was mandated that heads of all City departments turn in an annual report to the City Council. To this day, the mandate continues.

I thought you might find it interesting to read the health officer's report from 1879. The following report was dated Nov. 13, 1879 and signed by Walter Lindley, M.D., Health Officer. Punctuation, grammar and capitalization are left as they were written in the original report.



The City in 1880: The business block on Third Street, between Utah and Oregon (now Santa Monica Boulevard).

The Health of 1879



Circa 1883: St. Vincent's Hospital in its second building, at Beaudry and Sunset, on a hillside overlooking Sonora Town (now known as the Olvera Street district). The original Los Angeles Infirmary (later to become St. Vincent's Hospital) opened in 1856 in the Sonora Town Adobe.

Lindley begins his report with the following statement: "While the city has made favorable progress during the last ten months ... none has advanced more marked than in its sanitary condition, and in the manner of collecting vital statistics."

He continues:
With special pride to the system of sewerage that your Hon. Body have inaugurated by small pipes. The large sewers that were first used in Los Angeles are being discarded by sanitary engineers the world over. During the year the Temple Street Sewer and the Fort Street Sewer have been constructed to the great advantage of the portion of the city near those streets.

The great need of the city is a sewer on Alameda Street that will drain First, Commercial and Aliso Streets and China Town and the vicinity of the new depot. [The original Chinatown was where Union Station is today, the new depot mentioned above. The old Chinatown had many tunnels underground for various reasons. Nothing is conclusive to the author, but there were rumors of drug dens within the underground passages.] There is a demand for a sewer on Spring Street that I am confident will be completed ... at an early date.

Chinatown

This is the crying sanitary evil of Los Angeles. The Chinese are crowded into a number of old dilapidated buildings in the heart of our city. Their habits of living are filthy in the extreme. Soon after I had the honor

of receiving an appointment from you I attempted to enforce the cubic air law that requires 500 cubic feet for each person in a sleeping apartment. The attempt was ineffectual...because of the prejudice against what is called Chinese persecution.... Death rate is high among them in Los Angeles....even though our mortality report [shows] that the death rate is not excessive.

A Resort for Invalids

The city of Los Angeles has become renowned the world over as resort for invalids ... which behooves us ... for the preservation of the lives of our own families to put in the very best sanitary condition ... we have the health giving sun almost every day of the year ... we have the ocean breeze just tempered by hills and orange groves ... we have the best altitude for health ... we have the most equable temperature in the civilized world, we have in fact everything that God could give us to make this a healthful city [but]As a great portion of our population is composed of elderly people ... there are many deaths of persons who were too much diseased to be benefited [by favorable city conditions and] died very soon after their arrival.

We have been almost free from Scarlet-Fever and Diphtheria during the last year there being but one death in the city from the former and four from the latter.... [There was a report] issued by the Board of Health urging the people to put their premises in

good condition and giving them directions for the prevention of disease.

Mortality Report of the City of Los Angeles

For the ten months beginning January 1st and ending November 1st 1879, total number of deaths including still births 175. Estimated population 16,000, annual rate per thousand 13.1. Fifty of the deaths in this report occurred in our hospitals.

Report of Births in the City of Los Angeles

For the ten months beginning January 1st and ending November 1st 1879, there were 223 births ... 119 males and 104 females. The above list is incomplete.

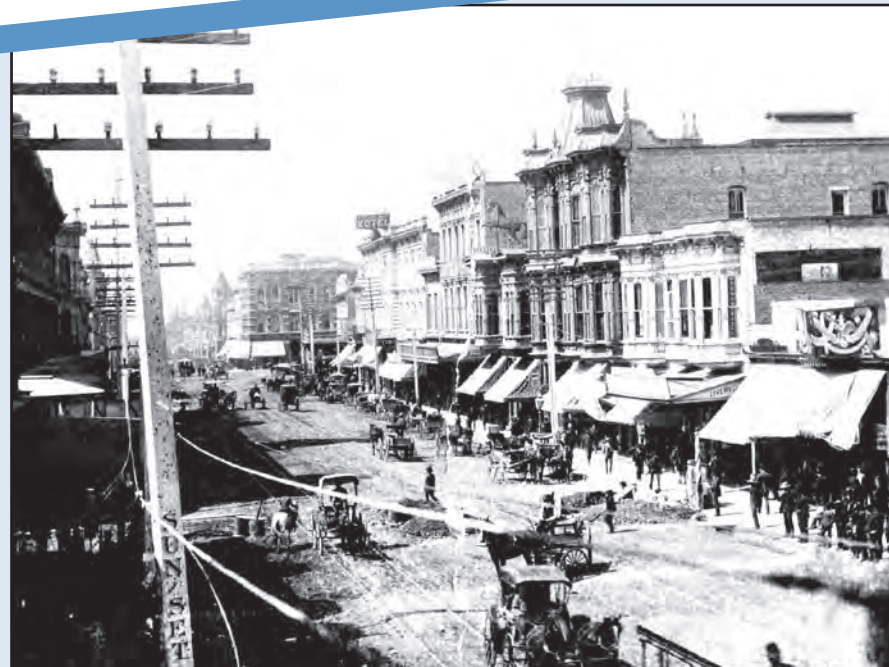
Diseases and Deaths

Category separations are difficult to read in Dr. Lindley's report, so only the illnesses and deaths are being listed when possible to read.

Diseases: Scarletina, Diphtheria, Croup, Whooping Cough, Typhoid Fever, Diarrhea, Dysentery, Cholera, Spinal Meningitis, Syphilis, Alcoholism, Rheumatism, Cancer, Tubercular Meningitis, Epilepsy, Bronchitis, Pneumonia, Gastritis, Euteritis, Hepatitis, Bright's Disease. Deaths: Old Age, Teething, Still Born, Burned by Kerosene, Masturbation.



The City in 1880: Men and carriages in front of Louis Roeder's dealership in wagons, carriages, and buggies at Spring and Second Street.



The City in 1880: View of N. Main Street. The cross street in the foreground appears to be Sunset.