

History Comes *Alive!*

~ Tales From the City Archives ~



by Hynda Rudd
City Archivist (Retired) and Club Member



OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS, ONLINE

The City now offers a database of LA's elected officials.

Photo by Michael Locke

In last month's *Alive!*, you probably read a notice that the City is now offering a database containing the names and years of all our elected officials, from the beginning to now. The database, called "Los Angeles City Officials, 1850 to the Present," is a great development!

Here is some more information about the database, and why it's important.

The Los Angeles history project was initiated by the Works Project Administration in the 1930s during the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It sought to identify and record the terms of office of individuals who, over the years, served in the government of the City of Los Angeles. It includes all elected officials who held the offices of mayor, city attorney, city controller and members of the City Council; and all appointed commissioners who served on the various municipal boards. The City Clerk at the time, Robert Dominguez, secured the assistance of librarians from the City's Library Department and directed them to use the Common Council and City Council Minute Books to develop the project.

Work on the project was interrupted briefly in 1939 when Mayor Fletcher Bowron (1938-53) came to its rescue and assigned it to the staff of the Municipal Reference Library, a division of the Library Department. At that time there was no City Archives. Data compiled by the project for the years 1850-1965 was published in four volumes including an index, but work on the project was inexplicably halted.

As the City's Records Management Officer and first Archivist, now retired, I was approached by the late noted historian Dr. Doyce B. Nunis Jr., who urged me to revive the project and update it through 2010. With the support of the Los Angeles City Historical Society, I obtained a grant from the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation to support the work, which included consolidating the data in the published four books with the updated information in this computer-based program. Future updates will be the responsibility of the Records Management Division of the City Clerk.

A user guide tutorial is available to assist the researcher. The database includes organizational charts that show the changes in the structure of the City's government since 1850. Previous publications have focused on various aspects of Los Angeles municipal government, including in-depth studies of the evolution and maturation of specific functions. This project identifies the movers and shakers who participated in the overall government of the city since 1850. This information will be updated periodically

by the Records Management Division of the City Clerk. The main body of this database consists of a chronological record, term by term, of all City officials (elected and appointed), numbering between 40,000 to 60,000 individuals, with many duplicate names like Tom

Bradley, for example, who have served the City since its incorporation in 1850. There are seven indexes that enable the researcher to focus more precisely on the area of interest. Personnel involved in updating the

project through 2010 included: myself as principal investigator, Thomas L. Head as computer systems consultant and indexer, Michael E. Holland as research assistant, Marlene M. Reichenbach as typist and proofreader, and Susan J. Burnett as the author of the user guide. The City

The Background History of the Evolution of Los Angeles City Government Officials

Todd Gaydowski is in overall charge of the project.

Researchers should be aware of some issues relating to the subject matter of the database. From 1850-75, the City received all its direction from the California State Assembly; from 1876-88, the City received its first charter from the State of California; from 1889-1924, the City had its first Home Rule Charter. This charter had been amended a number of times; from 1925-99, the charter, also amended many times, took the City into the modern era; and since 2000, the City abides by the current charter.

The City Council has had two different titles: Common Council from 1850 to 1878, and City Council from 1878 to the present. Second, political term limits have varied over the years for the City government: One-year terms were from 1850-89, with elections each year; two-year terms were from 1890 to 1904, with elections every two years; three-year terms (only one time) went from 1906 to 1909; and, from 1909 to 1923, there were elections every two years for two-year terms. From 1925 to the present, elections occur every two years for four-year terms for mayor and council seats. On the year when there is no mayoral election, no mayor is listed for that year. This is the same for Council seats also not up for election. Elections for the council were based on district even or odd numbers. Today there are 15 in all. The same holds true for those appointed officials not appointed or reappointed during that election year.

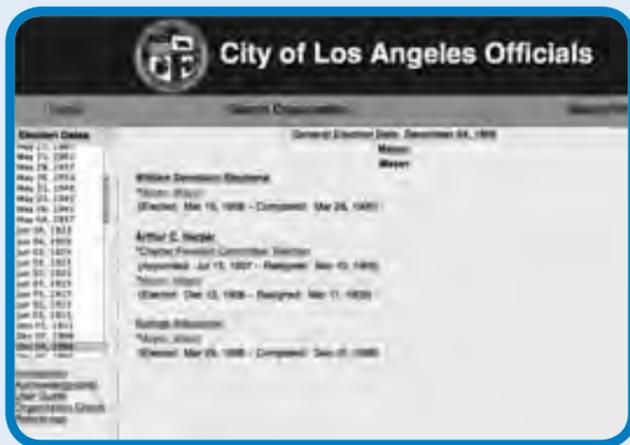
Over the years, the City Council has varied in numbers and components within each jurisdiction as well as the two titles listed above. From 1850 to 1869, Councilmen were known as members; from 1870 to 1877, there were 10 members in three wards; from 1878 to 1888, there were 15 members in five wards; from 1889 to 1909, there were nine members in nine wards; from 1909 to 1924, the Council was only listed as having nine members; and in 1925 to the present there have been 15 members in 15 districts.

Notice to Researchers

This database program is not a narrative history. It is only a compilation of individuals, both men and women, who held certain offices at certain times from one City government election to the next, beginning in 1850 to the present time.

For further information regarding individuals, offices, time periods, etc., please see the reference link.

ACCESS THE NEW DATABASE HERE:



[HTTP://CITYCLERK.LACITY.ORG/CHRONOLA](http://CITYCLERK.LACITY.ORG/CHRONOLA)



From left: Marlene Reichenbach, typist; Susan J. Burnett, author of the user guide and tutorial; and Hynda Rudd.

Personnel involved in updating the

Clerk's Systems Division, managed by Greg Allison with assistance of Richard Truong, Dennis Hoang, and Yong Lee, are responsible for adapting Head's computerized database for the City Clerk's Web page. Records Management Officer