

History Comes *Alive!*

~ Tales From the City Archives ~



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The Historic Elections of 1963

Photos courtesy the Archives of the City of Los Angeles

The 1963 City Council election was one of the most important in our City's history. What made it historic is that at no time previously in the City's past had the representation of its citizens changed so quickly and with such profound effects.

people. The City grew in size to meet the demand by allowing development of rancho lands and by acquiring property by annexation and consolidation.

A community could choose to become part of Los Angeles by a majority of its voters approving the proposition during an election. The voters of Los

voters of Los Angeles readily took full advantage of the recall, initiative and petition process as they also continued to annex communities such as Watts in 1926 into the fold.

By 1950, the African-American population in Los Angeles was in excess of 167,000, according to the federal census. Mexican-American public health educator Edward R. Roybal was elected to the 9th District in 1949 and became the first non-Anglo elected to the Council since 1880. The next woman elected to the Council would be 23-year-old Rosalind Weiner Wyman in 1953, two years before Estelle Lawton Lindsay's death at 87. The 1960 census showed a doubling in the African-American population to 332,000. By the beginning of the 1960s, the civil rights movement in America had slowly

turned down a chance to improve himself. By 1961, Lindsay had worked to become an assistant county supervisor under Supervisor Kenneth Hahn. When Councilman Roybal was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1962, Lindsay was appointed to the 9th District seat on Jan. 28, 1963, until a special election for the office could be held April 2. That primary ballot also had an open seat in the 8th District being vacated by Kenneth Hahn's brother, Gordon. The candidates included former probation officer and lawyer Billy G. Mills.

The 10th District was different because there were two contests on one ballot. Councilman Charles Navarro had been elected City Treasurer in 1961, and Joe E. Hollingsworth was appointed to finish his term. The process that led to Hollingsworth's appointment angered many in the Watts area who had wanted a recently retired LAPD officer named Tom Bradley to be appointed instead. The 1963 primary election gave the voters of the 10th District two questions to answer – who would finish the three months of Navarro's unexpired term, and who would represent the district for the next four years.

When the votes were counted, Lindsay led the field of five candidates with 11,649 votes, or more than 43 percent of votes cast. Billy Mills overcame three other candidates to win the 8th District seat, with 11,162 votes out of a total of 28,247 votes cast for a final victory of 39.5 percent. But Tom Bradley was the big winner of the day. He had a 60 percent majority of 18,017 votes on the unexpired three months of Hollingsworth's term and 58 percent on the upcoming four-year term with 17,776 votes out of a total of 29,626 votes cast.

Since neither Lindsay nor Mills had won a majority, the May 28 general election proved that the earlier results were not a fluke. Lindsay won with 16,508 votes out of 29,733 votes cast for a 55 percent victory. Mills won his contest with 64 percent of the electorate, claiming 16,448 votes out of 25,406 cast.

Gilbert Lindsay was re-elected for a total of 28 years until his death in 1990. Billy G. Mills was re-elected until 1974, when he was appointed a Superior Court judge and left the Council. Tom Bradley went on to be re-elected to the Council unopposed in 1967 and went on to bigger and better things afterward as Los Angeles mayor for 20 years. He became the first African American to be elected mayor of one of the largest cities in the United States.



Gilbert Lindsay (third from left) is sworn in by City Clerk Walter C. Petersen (on right, holding the oath book) on Jan. 28, 1963.

The earliest records in the City Archives date from 1828, when California was the territory of Mexico. The *ayuntamiento* was the forerunner to the council system. The two *alcaldes* (mayors), *sindico* (city attorney) and a varying number of *regidores* (aldermen) passed laws by majority vote, held regular meetings limited to three hours and recorded their proceedings for posterity. Everyone living in the pueblo was a Mexican citizen or became citizens, as in the case of Abel Stearns. The electors who chose their leaders were also men. The American adoption of California in 1850 would change the faces of Los Angeles leadership.

The Hispanic mayors after 1850 were few: Antonio F. Coronel (1853-54); José Mascarell (1865-66) and Cristobal Aguilar (1866-68, 1871-72). The members of the Council also reflected the increasing influence of the Midwestern population shift as later mayors named MacDougall, Workman, Bryson and Eaton were elected from their ranks. The real estate boom and bust of the 1880s brought the estimated population of Los Angeles from 11,183 in 1880 to 50,395 by 1890. The Southern Pacific Railroad reached the city in 1886 and increased the population in the County by an estimated 120,000

Angeles would also have to approve via a majority vote at the polls. A consolidation such as the San Fernando Valley involved unincorporated land within Los Angeles County. Annexation occurred when an established city such as Hollywood would undertake this process in 1910. The new citizens of Los Angeles were promised access to the better level of services and lower costs associated with a larger community and its wholly owned utilities. The municipal records created by the previous government would become part of the holdings of the City of Los Angeles. However, the greatest asset acquired through either annexation or consolidation were the people who were now citizens and voters of Los Angeles.

The City of Los Angeles made local history by electing its first woman to the Council in 1915. Estelle Lawton Lindsay had been a journalist, among other things, before being elected to the Council representing the Third Ward. The local press made a big deal when she became the first woman acting as mayor for one day on Sept. 11, 1915. Lindsay's election occurred four years after women were first allowed to vote in California municipal elections. The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gave all women the right to vote in 1920. The

allowed greater opportunities to African Americans and other minorities. What role would Los Angeles take – as leader or follower?

The rise of three specific men really demonstrated how far the City had progressed on the national stage.

Mississippi-born Gilbert Lindsay never



From left: Tom Bradley, Gordon Hahn, Billy Mills and Gilbert Lindsay. Mills replaced Hahn in the 8th Council District in 1963.