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LOS ANGELES PLAZA

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LOS ANGELES PLAZA

Located in the heart of Los Angeles, the plaza is the center of what little remains of old California in that city. More than a hundred and fifty years have elapsed since the founding of the pueblo in 1781 by Felipe de Neve, governor of Alta California. The changes wrought during that period have erased the old landmarks of Spanish and Mexican days, with the exception of the plaza and one or two streets connecting with it. From the first, and indeed, throughout the Spanish, Mexican and early American periods, the plaza was the center of town life and the place of all political and social events. The flags of three countries which have claimed the pueblo's allegiance have been unfurled there. During stormy days of war and revolution, it was the scene of victory and defeat - the eye-witness of the vanquished in retreat and the triumphant entry of the conquerors. In peaceful interludes, the parades of gay fiestas and religious ceremonies made it the stage for their pageantry. On many nights, the town, in party dress, assembled at the homes of the aristocracy who lived about the plaza. Then, throbbing cellos and strumming guitars proclaimed an evening of revelry as caballero and señorita performed in gay fandangos.

Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles was the name

given the second pueblo to be founded in Alta California. It was part of the colonization scheme conceived by Felipe de Neve when he assumed governorship of the Spanish province in 1775. Governor Neve planned the establishment of pueblos in California to supplement the existing missions and presidios, in order to make the territory more self-supporting. On June 1, 1779, he issued a reglamento for the new settlements. The approval of the Spanish king for the founding of the pueblo of Los Angeles was received through Visitador General José de Galxez on October 24, 1781.[1]

The site chosen for the town was several leagues from Misión San Gabriel on the bank of the Porciúncula River, previously the location of a Yang-na Indian village. Settlers for the pueblo were recruited from Sonora and Sinaloa by Lieutenant-governor Rivera y Moncada. Those first families were not blue-blooded Spaniards, but a motley cross-section of humanity transplanted from Mexico. Bancroft describes them as " a strange mixture of Indian and Negro with here and there a trace of Spanish." He also gives a list of their names, races and ages:[2]

José de Lara, Spaniard, 50 years
of age, wife Indian, 3 children; José
Antonio Navarro, Mestizo, 42 years,

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1. J. G. Layne, Annals of Los Angeles, 4-5.
2. H. H. Bancroft, History of California, I, 345.

> wife mulattress, 3 children; Basilio Rosas, Indian, 68 years, wife mulattress, 6 children; Antonio Mesa, Negro, 38 years; wife mulattress, 2 children; Antonio (Felix) Villavicencio, Spaniard, 30 years, wife Indian, 1 child; José Vanegas, Indian, 28 years, wife Indian, 1 child; Alejandro Rosas, Indian, 19 years, wife coyote (Indian); Pablo Rodriguez, Indian, 25 years, wife Indian, 1 child; Manuel Camero, mulatto, 30 years, wife mulattress; Luis Quintero, Negro, 55 years, wife mulattress, 5 children; José Moreno, mulatto, 22 years, wife mulattress; Antonio Miranda, Chino, 50 years, 1 child. The last named was at first absent at Loreto. He was not a Chinaman, nor even born in China, as has been stated by some writers, but was the offspring probably of an Indian mother by a father of mixed Spanish and Negro blood.

The settlers arrived in the vicinity of Misión San Gabriel on August 18, 1781, after a long journey across the desert. They camped a short distance from the mission while recuperating from a smallpox epidemic which had broken out among the children of the party. On August 26th, Governor Neve issued the necessary instructions for the founding of the pueblo, in which the exact location and arrangement of the town and lots were carefully detailed. Following the usual plan of Spanish towns, a plaza was the geographical center from which the town was to radiate.[3]

> After selecting a spot for a dam and a ditch with a view of irrigat-

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3. H. H. Bancroft, History of California, I, 345.

> ing the largest possible area of land, a site of the pueblo was to be selected on high ground, in sight of the sowing lands but at least 200 varas distant, near the river or the main ditch, with sufficient exposure to the north and south winds. Here a plaza of 200 x 300 varas was to be laid out with its corners facing the cardinal points, and with three streets running perpendicularly from each of its four sides; thus no street would be swept by the wind, always supposing that the winds would confine their action to the cardinal points, but I think the Angeles winds have not always been well behaved in this respect. The house lots are to be equal to that of the available suertes of irrigable ground, that is, more than double that of the present inhabitants. The eastern side of the plaza is to be reserved for public buildings. After the survey and reservation of realengas as prescribed, the settlers are to draw lots for the suertes, beginning with those nearest the pueblo.

All the plans for settling the town were thus arranged by Neve prior to the day set for the formal founding ceremonies. The generally accepted date for that event is September 4, 1781.[4]

When the day arrived for the founding of the town, the forty-four pobladores made the trek from their temporary

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4. The exact date of the founding of the pueblo of Los Angeles has not been agreed upon. Bancroft, History of California, I, 345, gives the date as September 4, 1781. Engelhardt, San Gabriel, pride of the missions, 341-346, says that it occurred toward the end of the year.

camp near San Gabriel to establish their new homes about the plaza. According to the popular version, the town was founded with great festivities.[5] Mr. Guinn, a local writer, in a description of the event says:[6]

> At the founding of the pueblo September 4, 1781, the plaza was dedicated with solemn ceremonies. A mass was said by a priest from the Mission San Gabriel aided by the choristers and musicians of that mission. There were salvos of musketry, a procession with a cross, candlesticks, etc. The standard of Spain, with the image of our Lady the Queen of the Angels, (the litter carried by the women) was borne at the head of the procession. This procession made a circuit of the plaza, the priest blessing the plaza and the building lots, and it is said that Governor Neve made a speech, the first ever made within the limits of Los Angeles.

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5. Again, as in the case of the date for the founding of Los Angeles, authorities disagree in regard to the ceremony which took place on that occasion. Many descriptions of elaborate ceremonies, varying slightly from that of Mr. Guinn, from which I quote below, have been written by other authors. According to Engelhardt, San Gabriel, pride of the missions, 50-51, the only contemporary account of the founding of the Pueblo is in Friar Palóu's "Life of Friar Serra," in which there is no mention of such proceedings, and which only says that "escorted by a corporal and three soldiers, they founded their pueblo in the last days of December, 1781, under the title of Our Lady of the Angels of Porciúncula." Nevertheless, although there is authoritative account of founding ceremonies at the time of the pueblo's establishment, it is odd that they were omitted, for usually, in Spanish colonial days, such an important event as the founding of a town was accompanied by an elaborate procedure.
6. J. M. Guinn, "Plan of old Los Angeles," in Historical Society of Southern California, Publications, III, 42.

Following the founding of the new pueblo, the escorts who had accompanied the settlers to the place returned to Misión San Gabriel. Work began immediately, as the first families of Los Angeles took possession of their lots and fields. The houses were erected on the plaza, and thus began the custom of "plaza fronts" - a mark of social distinction among the important families of Los Angeles long after the American conquest in 1847. According to Neve's regulations, each settler was required to erect a substantial adobe residence on his plaza lot within five years. For the first season, temporary shelters were made of stakes driven into the ground, with poles over the frame-work, which were thatched with tules and covered with mud. During the first year, the settlement resembled the old Yang-na Indian village, which had stood on the same location, more than a Spanish pueblo. Before the next winter, the tule huts were replaced by adobe houses.[7]

The pobladores were busy those first years. They constructed their homes and the public buildings about the plaza, and also cultivated their gardens and nearby fields. All of the structures were of adobe. A public granary, officers' quarters, and guard-house were built on the one-

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7. C. D. Willard, History of Los Angeles, 84.

half of the eastern side; the other half was left open. The houses occupied the other three sides. A zanja, or irrigating ditch, was dug, which, running in the rear of the house lots, carried water to the southeast corner of the square — actually a rectangle. East of the plaza, between the zanja and the river, the thirty fields for cultivation were laid out. Marauding Indians made frequent raids, so that a temporary barrier was erected around the town as a safeguard for the townspeople, as well as to keep out the wandering herds of cattle. The original barrier was later replaced by an adobe wall. Before the end of the first year, three of the colonists with their families were deported from the pueblo for indolence "as useless to themselves and the town." Thus, at the beginning of the second year, only eight of the original families occupied their houses about the plaza.[8]

Harry Carr, in a modern impressionistic account of Los Angeles, gives a likely picture of the early settlement:[9]

> One of the earliest accounts of the pueblo that is to be found describes the loud and unusual smells—the filth and the dirt. I have seen small towns in the back country of Sinaloa that now look very much as our pueblo must have looked then —

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8. Layne, Annals, 30.
9. Carr, Los Angeles, city of dreams, 37-38.

filth and garbage thrown into the street, mangy dogs, and razor-backed, half-starved pigs rooting in filth. The early account described the dead animals lying around near the door ways.

They probably had ovens under ramadas in front of the houses, and the women doubtless spent most of their time grinding corn to flour on the metates - back breaking work. The women brought water in pots balanced on their heads, at first from the rivers and later from the zanjas. There was a spring that ran water into a pool where the old Times Building was first built at First and Broadway. This became a public washing place where the women pounded the clothes on flat rocks and exchanged gossip.

Judging from Mexico, which has changed very little in custom in the back-country towns, I assume that they slept on woven mats and that jerked meat, saddles, reatas, guns, hung from the cross-pieces of the ramadas and that their main diet was tortillas.

In 1784, a chapel was added to the other public buildings on the eastern side of the plaza. A priest from San Gabriel came over to the town to conduct services. Prior to that time, the settlers had attended religious services at the mission. In 1786, five years after the founding of the town, the colonists who had made good were given full ownership of their houses, lots, and fields. Retired soldiers drifted into the pueblo and remained as settlers. By the

end of the first decade, besides the chapel, guard-house, administration buildings and granaries on the plaza, there were twenty-nine dwellings in the town, located either on the public square or nearby. The population had increased to 139 individuals. The pueblo of Los Angeles was on its way as a successful community.[10]

Each year brought new people to the town. By the beginning of the 19th century, names which became prominent in later Los Angeles history were listed among the inhabitants — Alvarez, Cota, Domínguez, Figueroa, García, Pico, Reyes, Soto, Ruiz, Lugo, Sepúlveda and Verdugo. Since there was not space enough on the plaza for all of the important families to have residences with "plaza fronts," the others clustered their homes as near to the public square as possible, between it and the present location of the church, Nuestra Señora la Reina. All of the structures were flat, one-storied adobes with thatched tule roofs. Most of them had only one room, where the entire family ate and slept. The windows were small holes in the wall, sometimes closed by shutters.

The yards of the houses and plaza were starkly bare. No flowers, shrubs, or trees offered cool shade or a pleasing respite from the gray drabness of adobe walls and adobe color

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10. Layne, Annals, 30.

earth of paths and roads. Streets zig-zagged from the plaza, deep in yellow dust in summer and sticky, thick mud in winter. Through them, and across the plaza, ox-drawn, two-wheeled carretas plowed their way, and galloping horsemen kicked up the dust and mud. There was no slaughtering place - cattle and sheep were converted into barbecue meat in the front yards, the skulls and bones thrown out any place. Garbage and refuse of all kinds lay about to be trod over and stamped into the earth, unless the chickens, pigs, and dogs which wandered about at will unearthed a palatable morsel.[11]

The pobladores were easy-going. For the most part, they worked hard enough, as life in the early days was not easy and they had to raise their own food and make their clothes. Nevertheless, there was much gay life in the town.

The plaza was usually the scene of diversion where the fun-loving people whiled away many leisurely hours, watching cock fights, singing to the soft accompaniment of guitars, or lounging in the sunny open doorways on the square. The padres from Misión San Gabriel considered that, in general, the settlers were tooaddicted to the "mañana" habit, and did not condone what they termed a "worthless existence." [12]

A great deal of the hard labor

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11. C. D. Willard, History of Los Angeles, 103-104.
12. Ibid., 104-105.

> of the farms and households was done by Indians, who had been half-civilized and half educated at the Mission of San Gabriel, and who found life at the pueblo easier and more entertaining. Some of these worked the farms on shares, which gave the settlers plenty of time to attend cock fights and play the guitar.
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> The padres who came over from San Gabriel to take charge of the religious welfare of the citizens complained bitterly of the idle and worthless lives led by most of their parishioners. There was no school in Los Angeles, nor any attempt to instruct the young .... There was a good deal of disorder of a mild type - drunkenness, quarreling, and occasional fights - but murder seems not to have been frequent.

A guard was stationed day and night at the <u>cuartel</u> on the east side of the plaza, which prevented any riotous affrays. All of the male inhabitants of military age were required to enroll for service when needed. Indian scares continued, but the guard served as a threat. The old barrier which had been erected around the town was replaced by an adobe wall as an additional safeguard.

In 1811, plans were made for the construction of a new chapel on the plaza. Nothing was done about it, however, until 1814, when its corner-stone was laid. In the following year, the hard winter brought a deluge of rain which wrought havoc to the old plaza. After a steady two-

week downpour, the river overflowed and changed its course nearer the town. The plaza was flooded and several of the houses on it were destroyed. The site for the new location, on higher ground, was chosen by Governor Solá - on it, the present church, Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles was erected. Although construction of the new church was begun in 1818, the process was very slow; mainly because of insufficient funds, it was not completed until the early twenties.[13]

With the relocation of the chapel, the plaza was changed to its present position on North Main Street, so that the new church would front on the public square. One or two houses were demolished to provide a site for it. The land was taken from the pueblo common lands. After its abandonment, the old plaza was built over so completely that no trace of the first old houses, the house lots, or any boundary marking remained to reveal its original contours. When the old square was the center of town, the trend of the buildings had been to the north along the hills. With the shift of the plaza, the town extended southward. As the old plaza had been the center of pueblo life, about which the important families had grouped themselves, so the new plaza became the nucleus for the wealth and aristocracy of Los

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13. Layne, Annals, 12.

Angeles. New "plaza fronts" were laid out, and again those who could not have a house on the square built as close to it as possible on the connecting streets. The Lugos, Sepúlvedas, Ávilas, Olveras, Carrillos and Tapias were a few of the important people who constructed residences on the New Plaza.[14]

The Spanish pobladores, especially the women, were essentially a religious people. They regularly attended services at the chapel on the plaza, Nuestra Señora. From it, morning and evening, pealing bells regulated comings and goings. The religious patrons and saints were reverenced by the churchgoers, who loved the pomp and display of religious ceremonies. Hence, they always took an enthusiastic part in the ceremonies and gay fiestas which were held every year on the plaza on holiday and religious occasions. At such times, the garbage and refuse which littered the square was removed and the place thoroughly cleaned. Decorations of shrubbery, flowers, silk hangings and jewels transformed the plaza and created a festive air. Fiestas took place during the Spanish and Mexican periods, and after the American conquest American families joined in the celebrations with the Spanish people. In describing two characteristic fiestas,

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14. Layne, Annals, 12.

Morrow Mayo says: [15]

> Each year the Corpus Christi festival was held in the plaza, which was first 'carefully cleared of debris and dead cats.' Altars, decorated with silks, satins, and jewellry, (sic) were erected around the Square, a priest presiding at each altar. Carrying banners and flowers and robed in white, the celebrants marched round, pausing for formal worship at each altar. The progress around the Plaza took a couple of hours; twelve men, each carrying a huge candle, represented the twelve Apostles.
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> The feast of the Holy Week, however, was the main religious celebration in the Angel City, ending crescendo fortissimo on the seventh day with a public execution of Judas Iscariot. A gibbet was erected in the Plaza early in the week. On Saturday afternoon a life-size effigy of Judas was mounted on an ox-cart, driven through the streets, and finally brought to the gallows, where the populace assembled. One after another a dozen Mexican orators leaped to the scaffold and violently denounced the traitor, shaking their fists in his face and slapping him about. They accused Judas not only of betraying the Savior, but also of rustling horses, stealing chickens, cheating at cards; of being a gringo.... They had an idea, it seems, that Christ was a Mexican. All this time the crowd was working itself up to fever pitch. Finally, a squad of Mexican soldiers, the drums beating, marched up to the gallows, the

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15. ~~M. Morrow~~ M. Mayo, Los Angeles, 46.

commander gave the order, and a volley riddled Judas. This was the signal for a general fusillade from the crowd, which immediately let go with shot-guns, revolvers, and empty whiskey-bottles. Meanwhile the band played furiously, and the mob, drunk on both liquor and religious fanaticism, yelled, shot and hooted in triumphant glee as Judas was sent to the Devil until next year.

In March, 1822, news reached California from Mexico that Spain had released her Western possessions. An oath of allegiance was taken to the new mother country as the Spanish flag was lowered and that of Mexico was floated above the plaza. The twenty-five years of Mexican occupancy that followed was a period of revolution and difficulties between local political leaders. Turmoil and petty strife characterized stupid little civil wars between the north and south. Los Angeles was one of the chief storm centers of the revolutions, which centered on the rivalry between Los Angeles and Monterey to be the capital of California. Many times, the plaza echoed the sound of summoning drums and the tramp of horses as soldiers hastened from it to battle their countrymen.

The first armed revolt in California centered in Los Angeles. Manuel Victoria, successor of Governor Echeandía, in 1831, was a bigoted individual who annoyed the Californians by his high-handed ways as governor. In Los Angeles, Vicente

Sánchez, the alcalde, worked hand in glove with Victoria. He put some of the prominent Angeleans in the plaza jail, at the same time that the governor deported José Antonio Carrillo and Abel Stearns, two equally important citizens of the town. The Southerners decided to overthrow Victoria. A small army was recruited from San Diego and Los Angeles. Victoria heard of the plot and started south with some men. The two armies met near Cahuenga Pass.[16] As a result of the encounter, José María Ávila and Romualdo Pacheco were killed and Governor Victoria was badly wounded. The governor was taken to Misión San Gabriel. Ávila and Pacheco, both popular and much respected citizens of Los Angeles, were deeply mourned by the townspeople. It was a sorrowful procession that escorted the bodies of the two local heroes to their plaza homes and their bereaved families.

In 1837, Los Angeles' dreams of becoming the capital of California seemed fulfilled when Carlos Carrillo was declared governor of the province. Elaborate ceremonies marked his inauguration:[17]

> On the 6th of December, 1837, Governor Don Carlos Carrillo, 'accompanied by a magnificent cavalcade' so an old record says, entered

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16. Bancroft, California, III, 205-206.
17. Guinn, Story of a plaza, 250.

the Plaza, took the oath of office in the Juzgado or Hall of Sessions and at the head of his retinue he repaired to the church, where he listened to a solemn mass. For three nights, in honor of the occasion, the Plaza fronts were brilliantly illuminated and the big cannon on the square boomed forth the glad tidings that Los Angeles was the capital of California, and that she had a governor of her own.

Carrillo, however, was not recognized as governor of California. In 1838, the Mexican government appointed Alvarado to fill the office.

During the contest for the governorship, the Northeners and Southerners met in a battle at San Buenaventura, in which the men of the South were defeated. Some of the Angeleans were captured and the rest fled to their homes. Espinoza, one of Alvarado's men, went in their pursuit. Under cover of night, he entered the sleeping town with his troops, overpowered the small guard on the plaza and camped for the remainder of the night on the public square. In the morning, the aristocracy of the town opened their front doors and found the enemy lying in wait. After a search of the homes, several of the leading citizens, including Gil Ybarra, Carrillo and Pico, were captured and forced to return to Sonoma as prisoners of state.[18]

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18 Guinn, Story of a plaza, 250.

Increasing numbers of Americans entered California each year. Mexico, fearful that she would lose her province, on June 19, 1842, appointed Manuel Micheltorena governor of California, with orders to check the incoming gringos. When Micheltorena arrived, he brought with him a band of 350 men, whom he had recruited chiefly from Mexican convicts. These individuals were known as cholos, and, during their stay in California, earned the respect of the natives as experts in petty thefts. On his way north to the capital at Monterey, Micheltorena stopped at Los Angeles. The people of the pueblo were anxious to impress the new governor with the fact that Los Angeles was a good location for the capital. During Micheltorena's stay in the city, word arrived that Monterey had been captured by the Americans. Micheltorena decided to remain at Los Angeles, temporarily at least. He administered the affairs of state from the southern city for eight months. For the second time, a governor was inaugurated at Los Angeles. Again, Sanchez Hall, which then stood on the eastern side of the plaza, was the scene. Plaza fronts were brightly lighted and the cannon boomed from the square in his honor. An inauguration ball terminated the occasion.[19]

The same cannon which welcomed Micheltorena as

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19. Guinn, Story of a plaza, 250-251.

California's governor helped, at a battle at Cahuenga two years later, to overthrow him. That was also the last revolt among the Californians.

In 1845, Andrés Castro proclaimed a revolution against Micheltorena. The rebels marched on Los Angeles in January, 1845, surprised and captured the guard on the plaza and made their headquarters there. Pío and Andrés Pico, influential leaders of the town, were easily persuaded to join in the revolution, for Pío Pico saw a chance to obtain the governorship for himself. They converted the other citizens to the revolutionary cause. Pico and Castro mobilized their troops on the plaza and from there marched out of the town to attack Micheltorena, who had started south.

The two armies met near Cahuenga Pass. Each side had recruited about four hundred men, among them a number of Americans. After a fierce bombardment, the only fatality was one mule. The gringos on both sides got together, and it was the desertion of Micheltorena's contingent of Americans that decided his surrender. The victorious Southerners returned to Los Angeles where their anxious families and friends awaited news of the battle. The plaza that night was gay with triumph. Pío Pico was governor of California and Los Angeles the capital.[20]

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20. L. L. Hill, La Reina, Los Angeles, in three centuries, 28.

Pío Pico's governorship was short-lived. The American conquest of California began very soon. The Mexican period was ended and the gringo ruled. During the American occupation, Los Angeles and the plaza, at various times, were headquarters for the Californians and the Americans. After the battle of La Mesa, the last encounter of the conquest, the plaza witnessed its last military spectacle when the victorious Americans entered and took possession of the city.

At the moment when word came that the United States and Mexico were at war, Pío Pico was on his way north to quell another revolution being fermented by Castro. Upon hearing the news, the general and the governor of California joined forces to defend their country. Their headquarters were established at Los Angeles. When the two leaders took stock of their supplies, money and men, they realized that it was futile to confront the Americans without assistance from Mexico. Hence they relinquished their command to subordinate officers, and disbanded the army and legislative body so that the Americans would have no official body with whom to deal. Both Pico and Castro issued farewell messages and addresses to their people and on August 10th fled from Los Angeles to secure the aid of Mexico.[21]

Los Angeles was taken by the Americans without resist-

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21. Bancroft, California, V, 275-278.

ance, August 16, 1846, since the Californian leaders had fled the capital. The American flag was raised above the plaza and no active remonstrances occurred against the act. Perhaps all would have gone well had Stockton not gone north, leaving Captain Gillespie in command at Los Angeles. Gillespie handled the Angeleans unwisely. He refused to allow them to gather in friendly, social affairs, and was suspicious of every move. As the last straw, he imprisoned several prominent men in the plaza jail forno adequate reason. The people became rebellious, attacked Gillespie's headquarters on the plaza the morning of September 23rd and chased him up the hill back of the square. Later, he withdrew from the city and fled to San Pedro.

The Californians enjoyed a short spurt of success. In the end, however, Stockton recaptured the city. After several other battles, at the final encounter of the American conquest the combined forces of Stockton and Kearny defeated the Californians at La Mesa, just outside Los Angeles. Following the surrender at La Mesa, on January 10th, 1847, to the tune of their band playing "Yankee Doodle" and with flags and colors flying, the victorious Americans marched into Los Angeles, to the plaza. The Mexican flag was lowered and the American flag was hoisted to wave above the town square.[22]

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22. Layne, Annals, 39-42.

Stockton established headquarters at the home of Doña Encarnación Ávila, which still stands on Olvera Street, north of the plaza.

Thus a new era began in the history of Los Angeles and in the story of the plaza. From the moment the American flag was raised to fly above the town, old Spanish and Mexican days were on the wane. The American influence crept in very slowly at first and the old Mexican ways receded just as gradually. Hence, life in the town and about the plaza continued, much as it had before the conquest, for a number of years after 1850. The majority of the population were Spanish and Mexican. The Americans were mostly men who had settled in Los Angeles and married into prominent Spanish families. Spanish blood predominated, and Spanish customs held sway until the influx of Americans a few years later forced them to recede into the background.

A year and a half of military rule followed the capitulation at Cahuenga until the official peace treaty between the United States and Mexico was arranged, and until the Americans had successfully imposed their governmental system on Los Angeles. Fortifications known as Fort Moore were erected on the hill behind the plaza church. Three different battalions occupied the city before the local government was put in working order. The soldiers were accepted and well entertained by the best families of

the town, who opened their fashionable plaza homes to them.[23]

By 1848, the new city government of Los Angeles was organized. There was an American alcalde - Don Abel Stearns, but a native-born ayuntamiento, so that American and Mexican systems were worked out together. One of the first acts of the ayuntamiento was a survey of the town. Lieutenant Ord completed it on August 29, 1849. The plaza was used as the nucleus of the town by Ord, and for the first time the streets radiating from the plaza were definitely laid out.[24]

Mr. Layne, describing the plaza in 1850, says:[25]

> The center of life and activity, both business and social, in the Pueblo in 1850, and for several years to follow, was the Plaza.
> But while the Plaza was the center of the community, both geographically and economically, entering it was almost like entering a maze for the traveller from the east. He followed Aliso Road into Calle Canal, as Los Angeles Street was then called on account of the Zanja paralleling it, where he found his way blocked to the north by a long, low, adobe that closed the upper end of Los Angeles Street from side to side. This was the home of Ygnacio Coronel. To enter the Plaza, therefore, unless

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23. Hill, La Reina, 41.
24. Layne, Annals, 46.
25. Ibid., 50-51.

he proceeded on over to Calle Principal, and thence north, he must wend his way up a little narrow street, or alley just at the eastern edge of Los Angeles Street, running north from Aliso, called Calle de los Negros, or by the Americans, 'Nigger Alley.' This street, though but a block long, housed every vice known to man, and was long termed the most wicked street in California. The 'Street of the Negroes' carried on in sin and crime until it was abandoned upon the opening of Los Angeles Street to the Plaza in the eighties, and the old Coronel home was demolished.

Upon reaching the northern end of 'Nigger Alley' one found himself in a small quadrangle known as Ocampo's Plaza, so named because Francisco Ocampo, the owner, had his town house there. It was in this little square that most of the cock fighting, a most popular diversion of the paisano, took place. From Ocampo's Plaza, entrance was made to the Plaza de los Angeles at its present southeast corner, and one found himself at last, in the very heart of the City of Los Angeles.

There were but two other entrances to the Plaza in 1850, and they were from the north and south at the west end, it being traversed by Calle Principal which ran from the river south past the old church. From the north side of the Plaza, midway between the east and west ends, ran a short street, then called Vinate, now Olvera Street, and from the south, just about opposite Olvera Street, Sanchez Street gave an outlet for a short distance, but both were blind streets.

It was still "a mark of distinction" in the fifties to live on, or near, the plaza although prominent people had begun to build farther away from the center of things. The town still bore much the same appearance as it had earlier. Neither bricks nor wood had replaced the adobe houses. Some of these, however, had become quite pretentious. There were three two-storied adobes in 1850, two of them on the plaza - the Lugos and the Sánchez houses. Five residences sported tile roofs, which added a note of color to the drabness.[26]

In the years following the fifties incoming American settlers hastened the Americanization of Los Angeles. Then the town changed rapidly both in appearance and ways; the old Spanish days were shoved into the background. When building activities started with wood and brick as innovations, the old adobes were demolished to make way for new, modern structures. Business houses, schools and hotels replaced the fine residences about the plaza. The town was so busy expanding with new improvements that the old plaza was often neglected in the later years. The town council was constantly urged by good citizens to make improvements in the square.

In 1857, the city council granted Judge W. G. Dryden the right to construct a municipal water tank in the center

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26. Layne, Annals, 48-49.

of the plaza. An attempt was made to beautify the place. Trees and flowers were planted, paths made, and the whole enclosed by a fence. The improvements were not kept up, however; the flowers scraggled, the trees went untrimmed, and the fence became dilapidated. The water system, tank and franchise passed through various hands until, in 1870, it became the Los Angeles City Water Company.

In 1880, after much hounding by public-spirited individuals, and comment in the local papers, the city council voted 5,000 dollars for improvements in the plaza. Evergreen trees were planted in a circular row and trimmed in a conical shape. The old reservoir was removed, to be replaced later by a fountain. Since that time the plaza has been constantly improved and kept up.[27]

In 1868, the franchise for the water system had been granted to Dr. Griffin, Solomon Lazard and Prudence Beaudry, with the provision that the city of Los Angeles was to build a fountain on the location of the first reservoir and furnish water free for a thirty-year period. The water was to be kept running as a tribute to Felipe de Neve. The fountain was constructed in 1872, and dedicated to Neve, as the founder of the city.

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27. A. S. C. Forbes, "Los Angeles Plaza," in Archives of the State Park Commission, 2.

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