PLAZA HOUSE
(Garnier Block)
(El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument)
507-511 North Main Street
Los Angeles
Los Angeles
California

HABS CA-2799 CA-2799

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Name: PLAZA HOUSE / GARNIER BLOCK

(El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument)

HABS No. CA-2799

Location:

507–511 North Main Street, corner of North Main Street, City of Los Angeles, County of Los Angeles, California. The Plaza House faces east onto the center of the El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument area, toward the Pico House and Merced Theater located diagonally across the street. The south elevation of the building abuts the Vickrey-Brunswig Building directly to the south.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 11.385291 E: 3769295 N

Present Owner / Occupant:

County of Los Angeles

Present Use:

Vacant

Significance:

Designed by the architectural firm of Kysor & Morgan, the Plaza House / Garnier Block is significant for its historical and architectural contribution to the evolution of the El Pueblo de Los Angeles, the original City of Los Angeles. The building represents the rapid transformation of Los Angeles in the final quarter of the 19th century from an agricultural outpost during the Spanish and Mexican eras to a populous, commercialized city with increasing regional importance.² Constructed in 1883, as the surrounding area shed its rural character and became the city's first central business

Dumke, Glenn S. [1944] 1991. The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library.

Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hill, Laurance L. 1929. La Reina: Los Angeles in Three Centuries. Los Angeles, CA: Security Trust & Savings Bank.

Mullaly, Larry, and Bruce Petty. 2002. The Southern Pacific in Los Angeles, 1873–1996. San Marino, CA: Golden West Books and Los Angeles Railroad Heritage Foundation.

Nadeau, Remi. 1960. Los Angeles, from Mission to Modern City. New York: Longmans, Green and Co.

Newmark, Maurice H., and Marco R. Newmark, eds. [1916] 1970. Sixty Years in Southern California, 1853–1913, Containing the Reminiscences of Harris Newmark. 4th edition. Los Angeles, CA: Zeitlin & Ver Brugge.

O'Flaherty, Joseph S. 1972. An End and a Beginning: The South Coast and Los Angeles 1850–1887. Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press.

O'Flaherty, Joseph S. 1978. Those Powerful Years: The South Coast and Los Angeles, 1887–1917. Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press.

Poole, Jean Bruce. 2002. El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications.

¹ Los Angeles City Directories from 1888 through 1894 and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from 1888 (vol. 1, sheet 11b) indicate that the original address of the Plaza House was 407 North Main Street. By 1891, the numbering system on North Main Street at Sonora (now Republic) Street had shifted from 400 to 500.

² Many secondary sources explore the factors behind the economic, social, and political transformation of Los Angeles in the second half of the 19th century. See, for example,

district, the Plaza House reflects the continuous and evolving use of the 1825 site of the Spanish settlement of El Pueblo de Los Angeles, characterized as "the living composite story of Los Angeles from Indian times prior to 1781 through Spanish, Mexican and American periods." The Plaza House is a contributor to the Los Angeles Plaza Historic District, a district listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION⁴

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1883

- **2. Architect:** Ezra F. Kysor in partnership with Octavius Morgan of the firm Kysor & Morgan, Los Angeles, California
- 3. Original and subsequent owners: Philippe and Marianee C.G. Garnier (1883–1913), Peter Garnier (1913–1931), Farmers and Merchants National Bank (1931–1940), Garnier Holding Company (1940 to 1948), County of Los Angeles (1948–present).
- 4. Original and subsequent occupants: Los Angeles City Directories indicate a variety of uses for the building over the years. Originally, the building was constructed by Philippe Garnier to serve as a hotel and retail shop building. According to directory information, in 1887, the building housed a store at 407 North Main, a saloon at 409, and a restaurant at 411. A livery stable can be seen in an 1888 photograph, and sleeping rooms were present upstairs. In 1894, G. Del Amo had his medical offices at 411 North Main; he was also the Spanish Consul. Doctor Lucio Zabala had an office in the building in 1891. Other businesses to have occupied the building throughout the 1890s include a bakery at 511 North Main, a physician at 511 ½, a grocery store at 507–509, and a gallery at 513. In 1914, there was a clothing and dry goods store at 509, and in 1931, it was occupied by the Farmers and Merchants National Bank. The Esperanza bakery and restaurant were tenants from 1930 until the late 1950s. The building was purchased in 1948 by the County of Los Angeles and housed the County Sheriff's offices throughout the 1950s.
- 5. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown
- **6. Original plans and construction:** No original drawings for the Plaza House / Garnier Block were uncovered by research.

³ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Register of Historic Places. 1972. "Nomination Form, Los Angeles Plaza Historical Group, El Pueblo de Los Angeles (State Historic Park)."

⁴ Unless otherwise cited, this section draws from existing documentation and research provided in the TK cite the HSR.

7. Alterations and additions: Following the 1971 Sylmar earthquake, the County of Los Angeles (owner since 1949) removed many of the exterior architectural details, including the large bracketed cornice, dentils and paneled frieze, the parapet central triangular pediment with the works "Garnier Block" in relief at its base, the "Plaza House" relief below, the molding above the second floor windows, and paneled area below the continuous window sills. The 2007/2010, rehabilitation of the building was carried out according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Properties.

B. Historic Context:

Plaza House / Garnier Block

The Plaza House / Garnier Block was constructed in 1883 for Phillippe Garnier on land, which once was owned by Pío de Jesús Pico, the last Mexican Governor of Alta California. When Pico purchased the property in circa 1856, it contained a large in circa 1850 house that ran along Main Street and an adobe located at the rear of the property, originally belonging to Dona Venancia Sotelo. The property was auctioned by creditors at a public auction in 1879. At this time, Phillippe Garnier, a well-known Los Angeles developer, purchased the property for \$7,419.32.

Garnier had originated from the Hautes Alpes in France. He and his five brothers had owned and operated the Rancho Encino, raising sheep for the wool trade. By 1871, they were among the most prominent wool traders in the Los Angeles area. Garnier served on the board of directors for the Farmer's and Merchants Bank in the 1890s. He was also known for constructing the Garnier Block on Los Angeles Street in 1891 for Chinese occupancy.

In 1882, Garnier demolished the adobe, as well as additional small outbuildings on the property, to make room for a new building. He hired the prominent Los Angeles architectural firm of Kysor & Morgan to design a building, costing \$18,000. The building was constructed in the Italianate style, with a rectangular shape measuring $60' \times 80'$. The first story of the building contained retail store space, and the second floor was to be used for lodging.

The building was consistently in use for commercial purposes from 1883 until the 1950s. The various businesses that occupied the first floor spaces over the years included a saloon, a restaurant, medical offices, a bakery, a grocery store, and a gallery The Plaza House was called the

⁵ National Register Form amendment. Revised final. 1981.

⁶ Weeks, Kay D., and Anne E. Grimmer. 1995. *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

⁷ National Register Form amendment. Revised final. 1981.

⁸ Peterson, Dan. 1985. *Historic Structure Report, Antique Block, El Pueblo International Plaza, El Pueblo de Los Angeles*. Unpublished report. On file, Sapphos Environmental, Inc., pp. 25–31.

⁹ M.B. Hoover, H.E. Rensch, and E.G. Rensch. 1916. Historic Spots in California. CA, p. 156.

¹⁰ Los Angeles Times. 15 June 1890. "City Briefs," p. 8.

¹¹ Los Angeles Times. 1 January 1885. "Reports from the Los Angeles Architects," p. 0-5.

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"Tourist Block" in 1892 and the "Ohio House" from 1892–1894. By 1921, it was known as the Garnier Block Hotel. The building was held by the Garnier family until 1931, when it became the property of the Farmer's and Merchant's National Bank due to the financial hardships of the Depression. In 1941, the building was sold to the Garnier Holding Company; in 1948, it was sold to the County of Los Angeles. Throughout the 1950s, the building housed the County Sheriff's offices. The building was abandoned in the late 20th century and underwent a rehabilitation and restoration effort by the County of Los Angeles from 2007 to 2010.

Architects: Ezra Frank Kysor and Octavius Morgan, Kysor & Morgan, Los Angeles, California

Ezra Frank Kysor was one of the earliest and most prolific architects in Los Angeles in the final quarter of the 19th century. Born in 1835 in Cattaraugus, New York, Kysor moved to the West Coast in circa 1860, settling first in Sacramento, California, then moving to Los Angeles in circa 1868. 12,13,14,15 Although the 1861/62 Sacramento city directory lists Kysor as an architect with a practice on 56 Fourth Street, little is known about his professional training and arrival in Los Angeles. Secondary sources often describe Kysor as Los Angeles's first architect; however, he reportedly joined an architect with an established practice in the Temple Block (constructed in 1857 between Spring/Main and First/Temple)16 upon his arrival in Los Angeles in circa 1868. 17 In addition, Kysor worked in conjunction with architect John H. Hennessy, with whom he designed the McDonald Block at 23–27 North Main Street in circa 1876. 18,19,20

Three of his most important early commissions came shortly after his arrival in Los Angeles: the Pico House (1870), the Merced Theater (1870), and St. Vibiana's Cathedral (1871–1876), all of which are extant and Historic-Cultural Monuments in the City of Los Angeles. The Pico House and

¹² American Architect and Building News. 14 August 1907. "Personals (E.F. Kysor obituary)," 92:33.

¹³ Bidleman, H.J. *Sacramento Directory*, 1861–62, entry for Ezra Frank Kysor, p. 71. Available at the Sacramento Public Library, Sacramento Room.

¹⁴ A number of secondary sources, including Withey's *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*, place Kysor's arrival in Southern California in the year 1865. The entry in the 1861 Sacramento city directory suggests an earlier arrival.

¹⁵ Withey, Henry F., and Elsie Rathburn Withey. 1956. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). (Los Angeles, CA: New Age Publishing Co.), p. 356.

¹⁶ Miller, Kathleen L. April 1994. "The Temple Block: A Core Sample of Los Angeles History." *Journal of the West*, pp. 62–74.

¹⁷ Withey, Henry F., and Elsie Rathburn Withey. 1956. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*. Los Angeles, CA: New Age Publishing, p. 356.

¹⁸ Thompson & West. [1880] Accessed 20 February 2008. *History of Los Angeles*. "Kysor & Hennessy, Architects, McDonald Block, Main Street, Los Angeles, Cal." Lithograph. Digital Archive, University of Southern California. Available at: http://digarc.usc.edu. Document ID # CHS-M1059.

¹⁹ Kysor's partner, John Francis Hennessy, was born in Ireland in 1853. After graduating from Oxford in 1868, he completed an architectural apprenticeship with the firm of William Perkin & Son in Leeds in 1875. Hennessy was the recipient of the Royal Institute of British Architects Ashpitel prize. He attended the architectural school at the Royal Academy of the Arts in London, studying with Gothic Revival architect William Burges. Hennessy arrived in Los Angeles in the mid-1870s and remained for two years, working as the junior partner in the firm of Kysor & Hennessy. In 1880, he immigrated to Australia, where he became a leading architect in Sydney.

²⁰ See Howard, Ron. 1983. "Hennessy, John Francis." In *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 9, Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press, pp. 263–264.

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Merced Theater are contributors to the El Pueblo de Los Angeles, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Commissioned by Pío Pico, the last governor of Mexican California, in an attempt to revive the deteriorated Plaza area, the Pico House and Merced Theater were the most elegant buildings of their type in Los Angeles for a decade.²¹ St. Vibiana, which was the largest church in Los Angeles at the time, with a capacity for 3,000 parishioners, was constructed to replace the Lady of Our Angels Catholic Cathedral in the Plaza area.²² The basis of the design for St. Vibiana, designed by Kysor in conjunction with W.J. Mathews, was a Spanish church in Barcelona, Puerto de San Miguel, to which Kysor added a belfry.^{23,24}

In circa 1874,²⁵ Kysor was joined by Octavius Morgan, an architect originally from Canterbury, England. Morgan studied architecture in England prior to moving to the United States in 1871, where he settled first in Denver, Colorado. In circa 1872, he moved to Southern California and was hired as a draftsman two years later in Kysor's office. In 1876, Morgan became a partner in the firm, which became Kysor & Morgan. Throughout the duration of their partnership, until Kysor retired in circa 1888, Kysor & Morgan became one of the city's most sought after architectural firms, designing in the Victorian and historic revivalist styles popular in the late 19th century. In 1889, the firm was described as "the oldest and most prominent firm of architects in the city," responsible for "a majority of the principal business blocks and public buildings erected in and about Los Angeles within the past fifteen years."²⁶

Los Angeles Times display advertisements from the early 1880s indicate that Kysor & Morgan's firm was located in the McDonald Block at 23–27 North Main Street.²⁷ The early 1880s brought commissions for the first university building in Southern California, Widney Hall (1880, extant), at the University of Southern California, and the Nadeau Hotel (1882), the city's first four-story building,²⁸ constructed for a total cost of \$175,000 and described by the Los Angeles Times as the

²¹ Poole, Jean Bruce, and Tevvy Ball. 2002. *El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles*. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Conservation Institute and J. Paul Getty Museum, pp. 30–35.

²² McGrew, Patrick, and Robert Julian. 1994. Landmarks of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: Times Mirror Company, p. 36.

²³ An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, California. 1889. Chicago, IL: Lewis Publishing, p. 291.

²⁴ See also Cultural Heritage Board, Municipal Art Department, City of Los Angeles. 6 August 1962. "St. Vibiana's Cathedral." In Fact Sheets on Historic-Cultural Monuments, p. 10.

²⁵ There is disagreement in the primary and secondary sources on the question of when Morgan arrived in Los Angeles and joined Kysor's firm. According to Withey's *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects* (p. 426), Morgan arrived in Los Angeles in 1873; no date is given for the establishment of Kysor & Morgan. The *Los Angeles Times* obituary for Octavius Morgan from 30 March 1922 offers a date of 1874 for Morgan's arrival in Los Angeles and no date for the establishment of the firm (*Los Angeles Times*, 30 March 1922, "Prominent Architect Succumbs: Octavius Morgan Passes Suddenly in Home after Theater Party," p. II-11), Document ID # 328-644-942). The date of 1872 for Morgan's arrival in Los Angeles, 1874, for his entry into Kysor's firm as a draftsman, and 1876 for establishment of the partnership of Kysor & Morgan is drawn from the 1889 *An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, California*, 1889, Chicago, IL: Lewis Publishing Company, pp. 566–567.

²⁶ An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, California. 1889. Chicago, IL: Lewis Publishing, pp. 566–567.

²⁷ Sanborn Insurance Map. 1888. p. 18B.

²⁸ Kirker, Harold. 1960. *California's Architectural Frontier: Style and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith, p. 96.

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"finest in the city and . . . a credit to the architects."²⁹ In a reflection of the building boom beginning to transform Los Angeles in the 1880s, Kysor & Morgan designed and constructed commissions totaling \$1,616,500 in 1883 and 1884, including the Plaza House / Garnier Block (1883) and the Grand Opera House (1884), constructed for \$80,000, with a capacity for 4,000, described as "the pride of the city."³⁰ In 1883 and 1884, Kysor & Morgan commissions included 32 business blocks, five churches, and 46 residences.³¹ This pace continued throughout the peak of the building boom, from 1886 to 1888, with commissions totaling \$1,687,000 between 1886 and 1887 and stretching north to Visalia, in California's central valley, and throughout Southern California.³² These buildings included, among others, the Los Angeles Infirmary, the Sister's Hospital, St. Vincent's College, Naud's Warehouse, the Los Angeles National Bank Building, San Gabriel Winery, Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, First Baptist Church, Fort Street Methodist Episcopal Church, Los Angeles Abstract Building, among dozens of prominent residential commissions.

In circa 1887, Kysor retired from the firm he founded. He remained active in real estate development, cofounding the Los Angeles and Vernon Street Railway in 1887 and offering for sale parcels of an 80-acre subdivision in Vernon called "Central Park," named for its location between developing cities such as Long Beach to the south and the center of Los Angeles 3 miles north. In circa 1887, Octavius Morgan formed a partnership with John A. Walls, a junior member of Kysor & Morgan who had worked in the Boston firm of Henry Hobson Richardson for three years prior to moving to Southern California. The firm became known as Kysor, Morgan, and Walls, and as of 1887, occupied three rooms in 26 South Spring Street. For his part, Morgan became a central figure in the early professionalization of the field of architecture in Los Angeles. He was a founding member and first president of the California Board of Architects, established in 1901, a founder, charter member, and one-time president of the Southern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and one-time president of the Engineers and Architects

²⁹ Los Angeles Times. 1 January 1885. "Reports from the Los Angeles Architects," p. 5. Available on ProQuest Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 319-264-302.

³⁰ Los Angeles Times. 1 January 1885. "Reports from the Los Angeles Architects," p. 5. Available on ProQuest Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 319-264-302.

³¹ Los Angeles Times. 1 January 1885. "Reports from the Los Angeles Architects," p. 5. Available on ProQuest Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 319-264-302.

³² An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County, California. 1889. Chicago, IL: Lewis Publishing, pp. 566-567.

³³ See for example *Los Angeles Times*. 3 July 1887. "The Vernon District: A Suburb of Los Angeles Which Is Looking Up," p. 8. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—*Los Angeles Times*, 1881–1986. Document ID # 318-547-752.

³⁴ Los Angeles Times, 21 July 1887, "Business Topics, Booming Vernon," p. 8. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 318-561-182; Los Angeles Times, 27 July 1887, "Booming Vernon," p. 11. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 318-566-992.

³⁵ Dan Peterson & Associates, Inc., Santa Rosa, CA. 1 June 1985. *Historic Structure Report, Antique Block, El Pueblo International Plaza, El Pueblo de Los Angeles, p.* 60.

³⁶ See, for example, *Los Angeles Times*. 2 January 1887. "Architects, Kysor, Morgan, & Walls." Display Advertisement, p. 6. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—*Los Angeles Times*, 1881–1986. Document ID # 318-418-642.

³⁷ California Architects. Winter 2001. "Octavius Morgan: The Board's First President" and "California Architects Board Celebrates 100 Years of Service." Sacramento, CA, pp. 1, 11.

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Association.³⁸ In 1900, he was admitted to the American Institute of Architects; in 1909, he advanced to fellowship and later served on the National Board of Directors.³⁹ His son, Octavius Morgan, Jr., joined the firm as a partner in 1910.

Through successor firms, Kysor's pioneering office has remained the longest ongoing architectural practice in Los Angeles. Successor firms are Kysor & Morgan (circa 1876–1887); Kysor, Morgan, and Walls (circa 1887–1910); Morgan, Walls, and Morgan (1910–1920); Morgan, Walls, and Clements (1920–1937); Stiles Clements (1937–1955); Stiles and Richard Clements (1955–1965); and Robert Clements and Associates (1965–present).

Plaza District: History and Development

Spanish Era

The area of Los Angeles now known as the Plaza district was selected in 1825 as the third of three sites 40,41 chosen by the Spanish for the new *pueblo*, or town, of Los Angeles, originally named *El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles*. 42 The site of the original settlement was selected in 1781 when the Spanish governor of California, Felipe de Neve, led a procession of soldiers, laypeople, and priests from nearby Mission San Gabriel and founded the pueblo near the Porciúncula River (Los Angeles River). The settlement, whose objective was to supplement the agricultural goods produced at the Mission San Gabriel, 43 was designed according to the Laws of the Indies, the town-planning guidelines codified by the Spanish in the mid-16th century for all colonial towns. All three iterations of the original settlement, whose relocations were a consequence of seasonal flooding of the river, reflected this plan, with houses and buildings facing a central square oriented to the cardinal points. The pueblo lands were divided and distributed among the 44 original settlers, or *pobladores*, each of whom was given two *suertes*, or fields, of irrigable land, two fields of dry land, and a house lot, facing the central square. 44

³⁸ Los Angeles Times. 30 March 1922. "Prominent Architect Succumbs: Octavius Morgan Passes Suddenly in Home after Theater Party," p. II-11. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 328-644-942.

³⁹ Withey, Henry F., and Elsie Rathburn Withey. 1956. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*. Los Angeles, CA: New Age Publishing Co., p. 426.

⁴⁰ The first site selected in 1781 by Governor Felipe de Neve on which to found the city suffered from severe flooding in 1792; after the second site was also flooded in 1815, the Plaza was relocated farther from the river, to the northwest.

⁴¹ Poole, Jean Bruce. 2002. El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications.

⁴² Ríos-Bustamante, Antonio, and Pedro Castillo. 1986. *An Illustrated History of Mexican Los Angeles, 1781–1985*. Monograph No. 12, p. 36. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Los Angeles, Chicano Studies Research Center Publications.

⁴³ Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Ríos-Bustamante, Antonio, and Pedro Castillo. 1986. *An Illustrated History of Mexican Los Angeles, 1781–1985*. Monograph No. 12. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Los Angeles, Chicano Studies Research Center Publications, p. 30.

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During Spanish rule, from 1781 to 1821, two dozen land grants were made, primarily as compensation to soldiers upon their retirement.⁴⁵ By 1818, the population of the pueblo had grown to nearly 600 people, and the town's character was rural and driven by small farming enterprises.

Mexican Era

Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, and the subsequent secularization of the mission system and distribution of its holdings dramatically shifted the character of land ownership in Los Angeles (and California). Mission secularization in 1833 and the beginning of a highly profitable trade in cattle hide and tallow exports opened the way for larger, commercially driven farms. During the Mexican rule of California, from 1821 to 1848, land owned by the Spanish crown and clergy was distributed in more than 800 land grants, passing mostly to Mexican settlers born in California, the "Californios." While this shift marked the beginning of the rancho system that would "dominate California life for nearly half a century," the rural character of the pueblo of Los Angeles and its surroundings remained intact. Ranchos were largely self-sufficient enterprises (partly out of necessity, given California's geographic isolation), producing goods to maintain their households and operations. (1849)

Many ranchers maintained second homes in the Plaza area, which in 1825 was relocated a third time to its present location. Construction on the Plaza Church, The Church of Our Lady, the Queen of the Angels, was completed in 1822. The Plaza continued to serve as a gathering place for trading and buying goods, as well as social activities, fiestas, and mass in the Plaza Church. By the 1830s, the population of the settlement had grown from the original 44 to approximately 1,000, making Los Angeles the most populous of the original three pueblo settlements, ⁵⁰ as well as the center of economic and political life, in Alta California.

American Era

With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the U.S.-Mexican War formally ended. California was annexed to the United States and subsequently gained statehood in 1850. This political shift set in motion a variety of factors that began to erode the rancho system. The initiation of property taxes proved onerous for many Southern California ranchers, given the size of their holdings.⁵¹ In addition, the 1851 creation of the U.S. Land Commission required that property owners prove the validity of their property titles, many of which had been granted relatively

⁴⁵ Hoover, et al. 2002. Historic Spots in California. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. xiii.

⁴⁶ Poole, Jean Bruce. 2002. El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Poole, Jean Bruce. 2002. El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Hill, Laurance L. 1929. La Reina: Los Angeles in Three Centuries. Los Angeles, CA: Security Trust & Savings Bank.

⁴⁹ See also Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 7.

⁵¹ Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 9.

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informally and without the benefit of formal survey. Because appeals were allowed (but were usually prolonged affairs), property ownership disputes were resolved via expensive litigation proceedings. Ranchers often paid legal debts with portions—or all—of their ranchos; during this period, 40 percent of rancho-held lands in the County of Los Angeles passed to the U.S. government. ^{52,53} The large-scale rancho system also suffered greatly from the 1860s droughts, which decimated the cattle industry upon which Southern Californian ranchers depended.

Following annexation, the first survey of Los Angeles was carried out when Lieutenant Edward O.C. Ord produced the city's first map, according to the same grid plan (albeit using the pueblo's original orientation to the cardinal points) that had become the standard for American cities by this time. With the 1849 advent of the Gold Rush in Northern California, as well as the growing influx of European-Americans to Southern California as a result of westward expansion, Los Angeles's population expanded rapidly in the American period. From 1850 to 1860, the population grew from approximately 1,600 to 4,300. The Plaza area continued to serve as the center of social and religious life in Los Angeles. Harris Newmark, a German Jew who settled in Los Angeles in 1853 (and later published his reminiscences of early Los Angeles), described the Plaza area as the "nucleus" of town, around which were "clustered the homes of many of those who were uppermost in the social scale."

Nevertheless, Newmark described the Plaza as "not beautiful." In 1869/1870, former California governor Pío Pico commissioned the construction of the Pico House, a hotel across Main Street from the Vickrey-Brunswig Building, in an attempt to revive the Plaza neighborhood. In 1870, the Merced Theatre, the first building constructed in Los Angeles specifically for theater, was built next door to the Pico House. For a decade, the Pico House and Merced Theatre, both extant, were the most elegant institutions of their kind in Los Angeles. ⁵⁷ Other attempts in the 1870s at beautifying the Plaza included landscaping and reshaping the central square to a large circle, as well as the addition of a fountain, trees, and flowerbeds.

⁵² Nadeau, Remi. 1960. Los Angeles, from Mission to Modern City. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., pp. 46–49.

⁵³ See also Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 13–14.

⁵⁴ O'Flaherty, Joseph S. 1978. Those Powerful Years: The South Coast and Los Angeles, 1887–1917. Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Hill, Laurance L. 1929. *La Reina: Los Angeles in Thr*ee *Centuries*. Los Angeles, CA: Security Trust & Savings Bank, p. 44.

⁵⁶ Newmark, Maurice H., and Marco R. Newmark, eds. [1916] 1970. Sixty Years in Southern California, 1853–1913, Containing the Reminiscences of Harris Newmark. 4th edition. Los Angeles, CA: Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, p. 97.

⁵⁷ Poole, Jean Bruce. 2002. El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, pp. 30–31, 34.

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While the Plaza district remained a commercial and social center, it grew increasingly marginalized, with the city's elite settling in developing neighborhoods in the northern and eastern hills, or southern and western flats, and civic and commercial functions expanding southwest of the Plaza area (as reflected in R.B. Young & Son's City Hall building, constructed in 1885 on Second and Spring Streets). The Plaza gained a reputation as the location for deteriorating adobe residences, hotels, gambling houses, and brothels.⁵⁸

During the second half of the 19th century, the establishment of city services and infrastructure helped accelerate urbanization in Los Angeles. The first Los Angeles Gas Works was established in 1867 in the Plaza district, on the future site of the Brunswig Annex, at the corner of Hayes Alley (now Republic Street) and New High Street.⁵⁹ By 1882, electric street lighting had been installed in the Plaza. The city's first horse-drawn trolley car was established in 1874, with a line running down Main Street past the Plaza Church, Pico House, and Merced Theatre. The 1876 completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad, connecting Los Angeles with the East Coast via San Francisco, greatly accelerated population growth and tourism in Southern California. Real estate valuations jumped 50 percent in County of Los Angeles from 1875 to 1876.⁶⁰ Between 1870 and 1880, the population of Los Angeles doubled, from more than 5,700 to 11,300.⁶¹

The 1880s brought a dramatic real estate boom to Southern California, fueled by a speculative real estate market and increasingly accessible rail travel (including a rate war in 1886 between the two transcontinental railway lines serving the region). Nascent Southern Californian towns were promoted as havens for good health and economic opportunity. "California, the Cornucopia of the World," declared an 1883 advertisement designed by the California Immigration Commission. "Room for Millions of Immigrants, 43,795 acres of government lands untaken, railroad and private land for a million farmers, a climate for health and wealth without cyclones or blizzards." Between 1880 and 1890, the population of Los Angeles expanded fivefold, from approximately 11,000 to 50,000; this figure peaked in 1888 at approximately 80,000. 44,65 By 1888, County of Los Angeles's real estate valuations had grown nearly five times, climbing from \$20,665,204 in 1882

⁵⁸ Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 138.

⁵⁹ Los Angeles Daily Star. 20 July 1870. "Our Gas Works." Available at Los Angeles Public Library, California Index.

⁶⁰ Los Angeles Times. 1 January 1891. "1880–1890, The Advance of a Decade, Wonders that Ten Years Have Wrought in Los Angeles County," p. 1. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 324-484-332.

⁶¹ The population statistics presented in this passage are drawn from O'Flaherty, Joseph S. 1978. *Those Powerful Years: The South Coast and Los Angeles, 1887–1917*. Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, p. 49.

⁶² For an excellent study of the railroad and its influence in the early development of California from 1850 through 1910, see William Deverell. 1994. *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850–1910*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

⁶³ Poole, Jean Bruce. 2002. El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, p. 36.

⁶⁴ Los Angeles Times. 1 January 1891. "1880–1890, The Advance of a Decade, Wonders that Ten Years Have Wrought in Los Angeles County," p. 1. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 324-484-332.

⁶⁵ Population statistics are also drawn from O'Flaherty, Joseph S. 1978. *Those Powerful Years: The South Coast and Los Angeles*, 1887–1917. Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, p. 49.

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to \$102,944,600 in 1888.⁶⁶ Los Angeles Times reporter Frank G. Carpenter, exploring the American West by rail, wrote in 1887,

Land speculation is wild upon the Pacific Slope, and Southern California is building paper cities on an unlimited supply or climate, sand and fleas. There is hardly a good-sized town in this section which has not or is not assuming booming proportions. In many and most towns the real growth has aroused a fictitious growth, and farm lands have been sold as city lots at prices at which it will take the towns years to grow up to. The great real growth, however, remains a fixed fact.⁶⁷

Following the collapse of the real estate market in 1888, economic stagnancy lasted in Los Angeles through the mid-1890s. Despite the economic downturn, the industrial and commercial transformation of Los Angeles—and residential subdivision and commercial development outside the traditional core—was well entrenched.

Indeed, by the turn of the century, Los Angeles's population had doubled over the course of a decade, expanding from 50,000 in 1890 to 102,000 in 1900. Electric Street Railway throughout the city, with a line along Main Street, increased access to the Plaza. But the importance of the Plaza district as Los Angeles's commercial center had long since been eclipsed by the area southwest of the Plaza, centered roughly at Second and Spring Streets, which had become the focus of commercial and business activity in downtown Los Angeles. The character of the Plaza district became increasingly industrial. At the same time, Chinatown had spread south and east from the Plaza, becoming home to more than 3,000 residents of Chinese descent and establishing the community's strong economic and cultural presence in the area. Similarly, the area north of the Plaza became identifiably Mexican in character, with a developing community of Californios and newly arrived immigrants from Mexico occupying the neighborhood. Called Sonoratown, the neighborhood became the focal point for the Mexican-American community in Los Angeles in the early 20th century.

By 1920, the Plaza district had fallen into disrepair. Meanwhile, the business district centered at Second and Spring Streets was in the process of becoming a victim of its own success. The central business district's status as the financial and retail center of Los Angeles, combined with the ascendancy of the automobile, created severe traffic congestion downtown. As of 1920, approximately 75 percent of Los Angeles's commercial and professional activity was carried out in the business district.⁷⁰ A traffic survey in the early 1920s found that a total of 1.2 million

⁶⁶ Los Angeles Times. 1 January 1891. "1880–1890, The Advance of a Decade, Wonders That Ten Years Have Wrought in Los Angeles County," p. 1. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 324-484-332.

⁶⁷ Los Angeles Times. 11 August 1887. "The Booming West, Its Wonderful Resources and Fast-Growing Cities," p. 9. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 318-579-612.

⁶⁸ Richard Longstreth, 1997, City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920–1950. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Poole, Jean Bruce. 2002. El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, p. 38.

⁷⁰ Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 148.

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commuters (a figure exceeding the city's total population at the time) traveled each day to the greater downtown area, which by that time was bounded by Temple, Los Angeles, Pico, and Figueroa Streets.⁷¹ By 1920, traffic problems had become so severe that the Los Angeles City Council adopted measures restricting on-street parking in an attempt to reduce congestion and promote the use of street cars. Predictions that parking restrictions in the central business district would trigger an eventual marginalization of downtown Los Angeles and decentralization of its commercial core proved correct.⁷² As these functions dispersed to developing areas, such as Hollywood and Wilshire Boulevard's "Miracle Mile," the primacy of downtown, and the neighboring district of the Plaza, started to falter.

In 1928, a scheme by Christine Sterling, an emigrant to Los Angeles, sought to preserve the few remnants of the Plaza's historic past and revive the area as a Latin American center and a Mexican marketplace. Spurred by the city's condemnation of the Avila Adobe, the lone survivor of the original settlement, Sterling contacted descendants of the original residents of the area, lobbied the city council and civic leaders such as *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harry Chandler, and raised enough capital to incorporate the Plaza de Los Angeles, Inc. The group sought "to preserve the Plaza as a monument to the founding of Los Angeles." The Mexican marketplace and Avila Adobe opened on Olvera Street in 1930.

While Olvera Street became a nationally known tourist destination in Los Angeles, its success did not translate into revitalization for the Plaza district as a whole. Continuing traffic congestion in the neighboring central business district and commercial and residential development in outlying areas led to further marginalization of downtown Los Angeles and its neighbor, the Plaza. By the late 1930s, downtown was described by commentators of the day as "blighted" and in need of clearing and redevelopment. "Los Angeles has a bad case of the urban sickness that is attacking American cities," reported the Los Angeles Times in April 1939. Los Angeles's "urban sickness" was described in the article as the "strangling of the downtown area by a blighted area of low-grade mixed business and residential property that surrounds it," causing, so the argument went, "people who have business downtown, who work there or go to stores there, to live far out beyond the blighted areas."74 The 1945 establishment of the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) opened efforts to use eminent domain to claim and clear "blighted" areas and sell them to private developers. Although the extended downtown area garnered frequent mention in newspapers of the day as blighted and in need of redevelopment (neighboring Bunker Hill represented the first project in which the CRA utilized eminent domain for demolition of a city neighborhood), the CRA did not focus early redevelopment efforts on either downtown or the Plaza district. The Plaza district's 1953 designation as a state historic park, known as El Pueblo de Los Angeles, signaled a

⁷¹ Fogelson, Robert M. 1967. The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 148.

⁷² See Richard Longstreth. 1997. Chapter I, "The Perils of a Parkless Town," and Chapter II, "The Problem Solved." In City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920–1950. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 2–35.

⁷³ Robinson, W.W. [1959] 1981. Los Angeles from the Days of the Pueblo: A Brief History and a Guide to the Plaza Area. San Francisco, CA: California Historical Society.

⁷⁴ Los Angeles Times. 22 April 1939. "City's Zoning Plan Scored," p. A9. Available on ProQuest, Historical Newspapers—Los Angeles Times, 1881–1986. Document ID # 400-242-851.

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change in how the Plaza district was portrayed. Rather than being considered a blighted urban area, it was characterized as the birthplace of Los Angeles; with historic designation, redevelopment plans began focusing on the rehabilitation of the standing structures.

In 1972, El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Park was nominated to and listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a district. In a boundary expansion approved by the National Register in 1981, the Plaza House, Vickrey-Brunswig Building, and Brunswig Annex were added as contributors to the Plaza district. Since that time, preservation efforts at the Plaza district have included rehabilitation of the Avila Adobe, the Firehouse, Sepulveda House, Pico House, and Garnier Block.

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION75

A. General Statement:

- 1. Architectural character: The Plaza House / Garnier Block is designed in the Italianate architectural style with some Renaissance Revival period influences. Characteristics of this style include tall proportions of windows and interior spaces; cornices with overscaled brackets that extend into central pediments; hood molds above windows; round, segmental arch and stilted flat-arch profiles for doors and windows; and smaller-scale architectural detail elements around doors and windows.
- 2. Condition of fabric: The current condition of the Plaza House / Garnier Block is good. The building was rehabilitated between 2007 and 2010. In 1971, the County of Los Angeles (owner) removed all the original ornamentation from the second-floor window label molding and above; all this was replaced during the rehabilitation. The first floor entry, staircase, and second floor do retain almost all the original historic fabric.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building is rectangular in plan and stands two stories with a full basement. The building is approximately 61' in length and 80' deep.

- 2. Foundations: It is unknown what materials make up the foundation of the Plaza House / Garnier Block. The adjacent Vickrey-Brunswig Building rests on granite block marble foundation; it is possible that the Plaza House / Garnier Block foundation is composed of similar materials.
- **3. Walls:** The building is constructed of reinforced masonry walls with wood-framed floors and roof. The masonry has been cement plastered on the east. The west (rear)

⁷⁵ Architectural information about the Brunswig Annex pertaining to structural systems and materials were derived from Peterson, Dan. 1985. *Historic Structure Report, Antique Block, El Pueblo International Plaza, El Pueblo de Los Angeles*. Unpublished report. On file, Sapphos Environmental, Inc.

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and north elevation are exposed brick. The south elevation abuts the Vickrey-Brunswig building and is also exposed brick.

The east elevation of the Plaza House is the only elevation with evidence of any architectural attention. The exterior was restored to its original appearance from the 1920s.⁷⁶ The ornamentation was removed in the 1970s and was replaced along with the large bracketed cornice and the parapet pediment with the letters spelling "GARNIER BLOCK."

4. Structural system, framing: The Plaza House / Garnier Block is of load-bearing masonry construction reinforced with shotcrete and steel bracing, as well as with wood joists and rafters. The original flooring was removed during construction and will be replaced with hardwood tongue-and-groove flooring. The concrete flooring in the basement helps support the wood column grid support system, and that carries through to all three upper floors. Steel round support beams crisscross from floor to ceiling to support the building.

5. Openings:

- Doorways and doors: Existing exterior doors of the Plaza House / Garnier a. Block consist of original paneled and glazed wooden doors. All doors on the east (facade) are double asymmetrical doors topped by a multilight transom. Primary entry to the Plaza House / Garnier Block is via four sets of doors on the east elevation, each opening into a separate space on the first floor, except for the northernmost door, which leads into an enclosed stairway. The three rooms on the first floor have doorways that allow pedestrian traffic from room to room and will be used as a gallery space. Additional doorways are located on the west elevation (rear) of the building. These doors consist of three sets of large wooden doors set in a segmental arched opening with multilight transoms. A second floor segmental arched door opening is located on the second floor of the west elevation (rear). This doorway is also topped by a multilight transom. No doorways are present on the north and south elevations. A wing housing restrooms will be added to the northwestern section of the building and will connect to the northern section of the Vickrey-Brunswig Building.
- b. Window Openings and Windows: The first floor of the east elevation (facade) is divided into four bays consisting of large wood framed single-paned fixed windows topped by a large multilight fixed window. Three-light casement windows are located between the lower single-paned fixed window and the upper multilight fixed window. The east elevation second floor windows are tall and narrow proportioned. They are grouped in double and triple sets within segmental arched openings and consist of

⁷⁶ Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 2003. *Plaza De Cultura y Arte Draft Environmental Impact Report*. Prepared by: Sapphos Environmental, Inc., Pasadena, CA, pp. 4–15

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wood-framed one-over-one double-hung windows. The wooden mullions between the sash are detailed to give the appearance of slender cast iron columns. Additional window openings are located on the second floor of the north elevation (rear). The segmental arched openings consist of two-over-two double-hung windows. No windows are present on the north and south elevations.

6. Roof:

- **a. Shape, covering:** The roof is flat with a low brick parapet with coping.
- **b. Cornice:** A detailed cornice caps the parapet.
- **c. Chimneys:** A series of brick chimneys project from the parapet on the north and west (rear) elevations.
- **d. Skylights:** A central atrium is located on the second floor and extends the length of the north/south hallway.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The County of Los Angeles expects to complete the remodel of the interior of the Plaza House by May 2010. All floors were reinforced with crisscross round steel supports. Existing floor plans are attached.

a. Basement

- b. First floor: The first floor features three large rectangular spaces parallel to one another, separated by interior walls with openings that allow for flow of pedestrian traffic. The spaces stretch from the front to the rear of the building. A fourth space, which contains the stairway to the second floor, is located within the rectangular space along the north end of the building. The space is separated by a full height wall and has it own exterior entrance.
- **c. Second:** The second floor retains its original hotel plan layout of several individual rooms accessed from a main lobby (a hall type space) with large central skylight. Fireplaces are located within rooms located on the north and west elevations.
- 2. Stairways: The stairway leading to the second floor from the street is located at the north end of the main hall. The stairway is enclosed along the first floor and has wainscoting and round handrails on both walls. The balustrade along the second floor has round railings and a heptagonal post. The steps are of wood construction.

3. Flooring: In the basement, a concrete floor supports the wood column grid. The remaining floors will feature hardwood flooring.

D. Site:

The Plaza House / Garnier Block faces east toward North High Street and sits directly on the sidewalk with no setback. The area surrounding the building consists of a scored concrete sidewalk at the east side and a fenced in planted lot at the north and west sides.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings for the Plaza House were discovered. The earliest known drawings of the building were commissioned in 1948 by the County of Los Angeles as part of an extensive building improvement program. A set of architectural schematic drawings created by Chu + Gooding Architects, revised in July 2009, have been added to the supplemental information provided.

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E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

County of Los Angeles Archives, El Pueblo Archives

F. Supplemental Material:

2009 floor plans by Chu + Gooding Architects

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Plaza House was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to December 2009 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office. The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the 2004 certified Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Plaza de Cultura y Arte project. Schematic drawings of the Plaza House were provided by Chu + Gooding Architects by way of Paul Mendoza of Accent Builders. Mr. Eugene Ng, graphics designer, Sapphos Environmental, Inc., prepared the schematic drawings for printing and production in December 2009. Photographs were taken in November and December 2009 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, and by Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator, and by Ms. Laura Carias, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Cultural Resources Group manager, Sapphos

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Environmental, Inc., reviewed the final report and supporting documents and provided research, writing, and project oversight.





