

[COVID-19 Info](#)[About Us](#)[Getting Here](#)[Events](#)[Tours](#)[History](#)[Education](#)[Olvera Street](#)[Commission](#)[Translate](#)[Search](#)[Home](#) > [History of El Pueblo](#)

History of El Pueblo

National Register of Historic Places

The Los Angeles Plaza Historic District encompasses approximately 9.5 acres in downtown Los Angeles. The district includes 22 contributing and 8 non-contributing resources, which date from the early 19th century through the early 20th century. Centered on an open plaza, it is roughly bounded by Cesar Chavez Avenue (north), North Los Angeles Street and North Alameda Streets (east), Arcadia Street (south), and North Spring Street (west). The district represents a rare, intact, and diverse group of historic/cultural resources that exemplify the founding and early growth of the city. The resources include buildings and sites from the city's Spanish, Mexican, and early American periods - from adobe buildings and large Victorian commercial blocks, to Spanish Revival buildings of the early 20th century.

The district was first listed in the [National Register of Historic Places](#) on November 3, 1972. The nomination was subsequently amended in 1981 to include five additional contributing resources and to provide additional information on two buildings listed in the original nomination.

Roots of El Pueblo: The Beginning of Los Angeles



Roots of El Pueblo - The Beginning of Los Angeles

This 20-minute documentary - examines the multi-ethnic history of the people who came to El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles from its founding in 1781 to the present time.

Olvera Street Mexican Market Place



In November 1928, a young woman named Christine Sterling went for a walk at the historical plaza. Halfway down the street, she saw the Avila Adobe with a condemnation notice from the City health officials stating the building was slated for demolition. Knowing that the Avila Adobe was the oldest house in Los Angeles, she began to raise money to repair it. She

also had a dream to create a "Mexican marketplace" near the Avila Adobe where people could learn about Los Angeles' Spanish and Mexican heritage. Through her efforts many of the historic buildings around the plaza were saved. Her dream of creating a "Mexican marketplace" also came to fruition. She invited artisans and craftspeople and opened Olvera Street on Easter Sunday, 1930. To this day, [Olvera Street](http://calleolvera.com/) is a popular attraction for tourists and locals alike, attracting over 2 million people a year.

📍 125 Paseo de la Plaza, Los Angeles, 90012

🕒 Open daily

📞 (213) 485-6855

🔗 <http://calleolvera.com/>

Avila Adobe



The Avila Adobe was constructed in 1818 by a prominent ranchero, Francisco José Avila, a native of Sinaloa, who was alcalde, or mayor of Los Angeles in 1810. Following Francisco Avila's death in 1832, his second wife, Encarnación Avila continued to live in the house with her two daughters. The Los Angeles Census of 1844 lists Encarnación Avila, age 40, as a widow living in the house with one daughter. For a brief time, from January 10th through the 19th, 1847, the adobe was commandeered as a military headquarters by the invading North American army under Robert Stockton.

After Encarnación Avila died in 1855, the home passed to her two daughters, Luisa and Francisca and their husbands, Manuel Garfias and Theodore Rimpau. Francisca and Theodore Rimpau and their nine children continued to live in the adobe from 1855 to 1868 until they moved to Anaheim, California where Theodore served as the first mayor. From 1868 to the early 1920s, the adobe was rented and used as a restaurant, rooming house, or was frequently vacant. The condition of the building deteriorated and was finally condemned in 1926 by the City Health Department, which caught the attention of Christine Sterling, who began a public campaign to save the adobe.

Today, the Avila Adobe is open to the public as a museum and is furnished as it might have appeared in the late 1840s. It attracts over 300,000 visitors annually and is a wonderfully tranquil space in the heart of the big city.

📍 10 Olvera St, Los Angeles, 90012

🕒 Open Wednesday through Sunday 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

📞 (213) 628-1274



Plaza Firehouse

The Plaza Firehouse was the first building to be constructed by the City of Los Angeles for housing fire fighting equipment and personnel. The City Council hired architect William Boring to design a structure which was built by Dennis Hennessy. Boring's design



followed closely a fashion then-current in his native Illinois, with the horses stabled inside the station, as was the custom in colder climates. A unique turntable in the floor made it unnecessary to back the horses in or out. Construction began in May of 1884 and was completed by mid-August. Firehouse No. 1 opened for business in September that same year.

Before long, the City's ownership of the site was in dispute. Mrs. L.M Bigelow and Griffin Johnston claimed that the site belonged to them, and in early 1891, the Supreme Court decided in their favor. The lease with Mrs. Bigelow expired in 1897 and the City decided to build all future stations only on municipally-owned land, thus ending the Plaza Firehouse's life as a fire station. By then the Plaza area and Los Angeles Street had become the heart of the City's original Chinatown. Over the next sixty years, the Plaza Firehouse was partitioned and used variously as a saloon, cheap boarding house, cigar store, poolroom, and allegedly, a house of ill repute. In 1953, the State of California joined with the City and County of Los Angeles to create El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument, of which the Plaza Firehouse was to be a part. The State purchased the building in 1954 and began the process of restoring the structure and installing firefighting equipment and memorabilia.

The Plaza Firehouse was dedicated as California Historical Landmark No. 730. It was the first building in the Monument to be restored.

📍 501 N Los Angeles, Los Angeles, 90012

🕒 Open Wednesday through Sunday 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

📞 (213) 680-2525

🔗 <https://www.discoverlosangeles.com/things-to-do/the-old-plaza-firehouse>

Sepulveda House

Tuesday thru Sunday 10:00am to 3:00pm



Senora Francisca Gallardo was granted a house lot between Bath Street and Vine Street (later renamed Olvera Street) in 1847. In 1881 she gave the adobe she built there to her niece, Eloisa Martinez de Sepúlveda. When Bath Street was widened and made an extension of Main Street in 1886, Eloisa lost 1,600 feet of her mother's lot and part of the family adobe. As a replacement, the

following year she built a combination business and residential building with an unusual Eastlake design. It had a triangular gable and two large bay windows topped with iron cresting. The rough brick façade on Main Street was painted a reddish brown color and penciled with white paint to resemble the precise lines of mortar between the bricks.

The twenty two room building had two large stores fronting on Main Street, and for boarders, fourteen bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor. Senora Sepúlveda's private quarters in the rear were separated from the stores by a breezeway. In 1901 she gave the building to her favorite niece and goddaughter Eloisa Martinez de Gibbs who had married Edward Gibbs, a City councilman. Several of the Gibbs children were born in the Sepúlveda House. Senora Sepúlveda died in 1903 and the Gibbs family moved away in 1905, but owned the building until the State of California took it over in 1953.

In the 1930s, after the Mexican marketplace had opened on Olvera Street, Christine Sterling persuaded Forman Brown and his partners to open their "Yale Puppeteers" in the building. She also invited photographers Viroque Baker and Ernest Pratt to set up their studios on the second floor. In the 1940s during World War II, a USO canteen was located in the building, providing a refuge to the thousands of troops passing through Union Station.

📍 12 Olvera St, Los Angeles, CA 90012

🕒 Open Wednesday through Sunday 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

📞 (213) 485-6855

Pico House



The Pico House built by Pío Pico, last governor of California under Mexican rule, who lived almost the entire length of the nineteenth century, from 1801 to 1894. This was the first three story building and the first grand hotel in Los Angeles. Pico chose architect Ezra F. Kysor to design the "finest hotel in Los Angeles".

Construction began on September 18, 1869, and the hotel opened for business on June 9, 1870. To raise funds for the building and furnishing of the hotel, Pío and his brother Andrés sold most of their vast landholdings in the San Fernando Valley. The hotel was built in the Italianate style, with deep set round-arched windows and doors and the Main Street and Plaza facades were stuccoed to resemble

blue granite. The hotel had eighty two bedrooms and twenty one parlors as well as bathrooms and water closets for each sex on each floor.

📍 430 N Main St, Los Angeles, 90012

🕒 Open for special events, exhibitions, and filming

📞 (213) 628-1274

Italian Hall / Italian American Museum

Designed by architect Julius Kraus and built by the Pozzo Construction Company, the Italian Hall (1907-08), located on the corner of North Main Street and Cesar Chavez Avenue served as an important cultural and social center for the Italians of Los Angeles and is one of seven buildings at El Pueblo that were associated with the Italian community. For more than two decades, it was the site of meetings, banquets and dances as well as the headquarters for groups such as the Garibaldina Society (1888) and Il Circolo Operaio Italiano (Italian Worker's Club). Pete Pontrelli's orchestra played there weekly. The building also served as a starting point for weekend food races and location for festivities such as the vendemmia, or Italian wine harvest celebration. The Hall also hosted internationally-known figures such as Emma Goldman and Ricardo Flores Magón.

The Italian presence at El Pueblo begins in 1823, when Giovanni Leandri opened a store and built an adobe where the Plaza Firehouse now stands. In the 19th century, significant numbers of Italians lived at El Pueblo and owned or operated one-third of businesses in the Plaza area.

Enjoy a beautiful restored building with exciting and informative exhibits.

📍 644 North Main Street, LA CA 90012

🕒 Open Tuesday through Sunday 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

📞 (213) 485-8432

🔗 <http://www.iamla.org/>

Merced Theatre

The Merced Theatre was built in 1870 and is one of the oldest structures erected in Los Angeles for the presentation of dramatic performances. It served as the center of theatrical activity in the city from 1871 to 1876.

The theatre was built by William Abbot, the son of Swiss immigrants who settled in Los Angeles in 1854. In 1858, he married the woman for whom he would name the theatre, Maria Merced Garcia, the daughter of José Antonio Garcia and María Guadalupe Uribe, who were long-time residents of the Los Angeles pueblo. The theatre was designed by Ezra F. Kysor, the architect of the Pico House.

📍 301 W Main St, Los Angeles, 90012

🕒 Interior Closed

📞 (213) 485-6855



Plaza Catholic Church

The Plaza church was dedicated in December 1822, as *La Iglesia de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles*. It is the only building at El Pueblo that is still used for its original purpose. Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church—known by locals as La Placita Church—is the oldest church in the city and today serves as an active parish of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

📍 535 N Main St, Los Angeles, 90012

🕒 Open Daily

🔗 <http://laplacita.org/>

Garnier Building / Chinese American Museum

The Garnier Building was built in 1890, by Philippe Garnier, a French settler who arrived in Los Angeles in 1859 at the age of eighteen. Philippe Garnier and his brothers, Eugene, Abel, and Camille, owned the 4,400 acre Rancho Los Encinos in the San Fernando Valley where they raised sheep. Despite losing a considerable sum of money in the wool market crash in 1872, the Garniers were financially well off and remained influential in local commerce. Philippe Garnier served as a bank director on the Board of the Farmers and Merchants Bank from 1879 to 1891 and is believed to have constructed several other buildings in Los Angeles.

The Garnier Building was designed primarily for Chinese commercial tenants. The rent for the entire building was \$200 a month for the first three years. The Garnier Building is the oldest building in Los Angeles exclusively and continuously inhabited by Chinese immigrants from the time of its construction in 1890 until the State took it over in 1953. It was the headquarters of major Chinese American organizations and housed businesses, churches, and schools. It was an important structure in the original Los Angeles Chinatown.

The building houses the Chinese American Museum showcasing permanent and temporary exhibits.

📍 425 N. Los Angeles Street, Los Angeles, 90012

🕒 Open Friday through Sunday 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

📞 (213) 485-8567

🔗 <http://camla.org/>

Pelanconi House

The Pelanconi Warehouse was built in 1910 by Lorenzo Pelanconi and his mother, Isabel Tononi for the storage of their wine. Behind it, opening on Olvera Street is a small two-story square building known as the Pelanconi House. It was built by an Italian vintner, Giuseppe Covaccichi between 1855-57 and is the oldest house made of fired brick still

standing in Los Angeles. Covaccichi and his partner, Giuseppi Gazzo also owned a winery that lay diagonally across Olvera Street.

Between 1858 and 1871 the Pelanconi House changed hands four times. Antonio Pelanconi, who came from the Lombardy region of Italy, purchased the house and winery in 1871. In 1866, he married Isabel Ramirez, daughter of Juan Ramirez who owned much of what is now Olvera Street. In 1877, Antonio turned over the winery operation to his partner, Giacomo Tononi, and died two years later. His widow married Tononi in 1881.

Senora Consuelo Castillo de Bonzo took over the Pelanconi House for her restaurant, [La Golondrina Cafe](#) in 1930. She removed the rear wall of both the warehouse and the Pelanconi House in order to make one large room for the restaurant. It is the oldest restaurant on Olvera Street.

📍 W-17 Olvera St, Los Angeles, 90012
🕒 Open Monday through Sunday (Currently Closed)
📞 (213) 628-4349
🔗 <https://www.casalagolondrinacafe.com/>

Hammel Building

The Hammel Building on North Main Street was constructed in 1909. Originally built as four light industrial shops with a partial basement storage area along Olvera Street, the building now fronts on Olvera Street and houses two ground level shops and two basement shops. Marie Hammel, who built the Italian Hall next door in 1907-8, hired architects Husdon and Munsell to construct the building at a cost of \$4,000. In 1913, the Hammel Building passed to Mrs. Hammel's daughter, Marie Hammel McLaughlin, who enlarged the building on the Olvera Street side.

As Olvera Street was transformed into a Mexican Market place in 1930, it was necessary to provide public access to the building from Olvera Street and staircases had to be constructed to the ground floor of the Hammel Building. Small basements were excavated during the 1940s to provide additional shops for Olvera Street merchants.

Although the Main Street facade has not changed significantly, the Olvera Street facade has been altered and repaired over the years.

Simpson/Jones Building

Open daily

Doria Deighton Jones built what is now known as the Simpson/Jones Building in 1894. The site which had formerly contained a large adobe which she, her husband John Jones and their children occupied. The adobe was torn down when Bath Street was widened in 1886 to become an extension of Main Street. The Simpson/Jones

Building was constructed to house William Gregory Engines, also known as Moline Engines. Later tenants were the Diamond Shirt Company and the Soochow Restaurant. When Doria died in 1908, her property was divided among her three children and her daughter, Constance Jones Simpson inherited the three buildings close to the Plaza on Main Street. Mrs. Simpson opposed Christine Sterling's idea of closing vehicle traffic on Olvera Street and fought the matter all the way to the California Supreme Court. In 1960, the Simpson/Jones Building was altered to create the appearance of a Mexican banco.

The building now houses two restaurants: [Chiguacle - Sabor Ancetral de Mexico](#) and [La Luz del Dia](#).

América Tropical

In 1932, David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), one of the great Mexican artists of the twentieth century, was commissioned to paint an idealized tropical scene on a second story exterior wall on Olvera Street, in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. Siqueiros instead created *America Tropical*, a monumental mural depicting an overgrown jungle with a crucified Indian peasant surmounted by an American eagle, at which revolutionary soldiers aim their rifles. This

imagery was immediately controversial; within the decade the entire mural was whitewashed. For the next twenty years, it remained under layers of white paint, neglected and all but forgotten.

In 1988, the Getty Conservation Institute began a collaboration with the City of Los Angeles to conserve *America Tropical*. This led to a study of the environment around the mural and the design of a protective shelter and viewing platform for the public. Eighty years after its creation, *America Tropical* was re-unveiled to the world and is once again accessible to the public. Today, visitors to El Pueblo can learn more about the history and controversy surrounding *America Tropical* at the America Tropical Interpretive Center, located on the World Famous Olvera Street.

📍 125 Paseo de la Plaza, Los Angeles, 90012

🕒 Open Wednesday through Sunday, 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

📞 (213) 485-6855

🔗 http://www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/field_projects/siqueiros/