

## INTRODUCTION

When California joined the Union in 1850, nothing about Los Angeles foreshadowed its emergence as one of America's foremost metropolises. It was simply a nondescript agricultural village with 1,610 people, no railroads, and few streets or other public improvements. It was isolated, geographically and economically, from the large population centers of the United States and western Europe. And it lacked the natural harbor and surface resources that attracted commerce and generated industry elsewhere in the country. During the next eighty years, nonetheless, Los Angeles underwent perhaps the most extraordinary expansion in American urban history. It grew into a city of 1.2 million and a metropolitan district of 2.3 million persons, by far the largest settlement on the Pacific coast. It built a vast network of railways and highways, tapped northern Sierra sources for its water supply, and subdivided the vast southern California countryside. It also developed into a flourishing commercial entrepôt, an impressive industrial producer, and the economic center of the great Southwest. Indeed, by overcoming its natural handicaps, Los Angeles in 1930 stood fourth in population, second in territory, and ninth in manufacturing among American metropolises.

Los Angeles' character was no less extraordinary. It differed markedly in its landscape, transportation, community, politics, and planning from the great American metropolis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In Los Angeles, residences were more widely dispersed, and businesses more extensively decentralized. Electric railways approached bankruptcy faster, and private automobiles handled a greater share of urban transportation. Middle-class native-white Americans were a larger majority, and working-class European immigrants a smaller minority. Reformers dismantled the political

machine more rapidly—only to falter before conservatism, radicalism, and indifference. And city and regional planning were adopted earlier, implemented more thoroughly, and yet undermined more insidiously. More than any other American metropolis—and with remarkably few misgivings—Los Angeles succumbed to the disintegrative, though not altogether undesirable, forces of suburbanization and progressivism. And as a result it emerged by 1930 as the fragmented metropolis par excellence, the archetype, for better or worse, of the contemporary American metropolis.

Thus the history of Los Angeles revolves around two separate but related themes. The first is the emergence of a populous, urbanized, and industrialized settlement—a process which involved the transformation of the Mexican village into an American town, the establishment of a tradition of urban expansion, the triumph of Los Angeles in its rivalry with San Diego, the relentless movement of people to southern California, the provision of transport facilities, domestic water, and subdivided real estate, and the expansion of commercial and industrial enterprise. The second theme is the rejection of the metropolis in favor of its suburbs—a decision which was reflected in the dispersal and decentralization of the landscape, the failure of the electric railway industry, the quest for community by the white majority and the colored minorities, the progressive reform of local politics (including the battle for municipal ownership of public utilities), and the implementation and frustration of city and regional planning. To trace these themes—to define thereby the urbanization of greater Los Angeles—is the purpose of this book.

The quintessence of Los Angeles is the tension between these themes, the ambivalent attitude toward urbanization. Indeed, nothing is more central to Los Angeles' history than the efforts of its residents to join the spirit of the good community with the substance of the great metropolis. This problem was by no means unique to Los Angeles before 1930, though nowhere else was it quite so pressing and poignant. Nor, from the perspective of 1967, was the resolution unusual, though nowhere else did it antedate the Great Depression. Since the Second World War, in fact, most American metropolises have duplicated, to a remarkable degree, the patterns of Los Angeles' landscape, transportation, community, politics, and planning. Hence Los Angeles' efforts to reconcile its conception of the good community with its ambitions as a great metropolis are illuminating not only for what they reveal about Los Angeles' past but also for what they imply about the alternatives available to America's cities in the future.

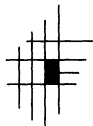
## PART ONE

### LOS ANGELES, 1850–1930

As I wandered about Los Angeles, looking for the basic meaning of the place, the fundamental source of its wealth and its economic identity, I found myself quite at sea. The Chamber of Commerce people told me about the concentration of fruit, the shipping, the Western branch factories put up by concerns in the East. But none of these things seemed the cause of a city. They seemed rather the effect, rising from an inexplicable accumulation of people—just as the immense dealings in second-hand automobiles and the great turnover of real estate were an effect. It struck me as an odd thing that here, alone of all the cities in America, there was no plausible answer to the question, “Why did a town spring up here and why has it grown so big?” (Morris Markey, 1932)



*Our inheritance is turned to strangers—our houses to aliens. We have drunken our water for money—our wood is sold unto us. Our necks are under persecution—we labor and have no rest. (Juan Bandini, 1855)*



## 1 FROM PUEBLO TO TOWN

Los Angeles, far from being a new settlement, was almost seventy years old when California joined the Union. It was founded in the late eighteenth century when Spain decided to defend its empire and propagate Catholicism by colonizing California. Since the crown lacked the resources and since its subjects showed little interest, the church assumed this responsibility. Its priests, accompanied by government troops and vowing to enhance the glory of God and King, marched north from western Mexico along the Pacific Ocean into coastal California. There they encountered thousands of primitive but peaceful Indians who were intrigued by the mysteries of Christianity and impressed by the devotion of its messengers. The clerics gained the natives' confidence, converted many to Catholicism, and then persuaded or compelled them to leave their tribal villages for sacred communities known as missions.<sup>1</sup> Resistance was ineffective against ecclesiastical determination and military power, and between the 1780's and 1830's the Spaniards resettled the California Indians on missions extending from San Diego north to Point Reyes.

To the aborigines, conversion meant confinement and civilization equaled subjugation. While in theory the missions prepared the natives for eventual independence, in fact the priests retained complete control. As missionaries they instructed the Indians in the gospel, as overseers they supervised their work, and as judges they punished their infractions. They exactly regimented life and labor on the missions in accord with their church's absolute authority, their estates' material advancement, and their wards' spiritual improvement. For the aborigines, slavery in this world was a prerequisite for salvation in the next. And despite the sincerity of the Spaniards, Christian civilization was disastrous for the Indians. Uprooted from cultures

which had accommodated tribal abilities to environmental conditions, they suffered grievously from the clerics' inflexibility and the soldiers' brutality. Thus not only did the aboriginal population decline from 130,000 to 90,000 between 1770 and 1832,<sup>2</sup> but, in addition, few Indians survived without irreparable physical and psychological damage that rendered them unfit for independent life.

The missions thrived nonetheless. Endowed with a mild climate and abundant land, California made only modest demands on its sparse and backward population. And the priests possessed adequate knowledge of productive techniques and ample power to force steady work from the Indians. Under clerical supervision, the aborigines planted and harvested cereals and vegetables, pastured and tended cattle and sheep, and then slaughtered and sheared them for meat and wool. They also cut the branches and dug the adobe for their simple huts and the priests' elaborate chapels, and, when finished with their labors, prayed, studied, and slept according to schedules set by the missionaries.<sup>3</sup> Although this training was intended to teach the natives to govern themselves and manage the estates, the priests were unwilling to relinquish their authority and property. Conceived of as a temporary means of facilitating colonization, the missions became firmly fixed as California's dominant economic and social institutions in the early nineteenth century.

For the defense of the missions, Spain founded presidios at San Diego, San Francisco, and other sheltered places along the Pacific coast. The presidios were supplied by ship from Mexico, and, to relieve the royal exchequer of this burden, the imperial authorities decided to establish pueblos (agricultural villages) in California. According to Governor Felipe de Neve, the pueblos were supposed to provide the presidios with foodstuffs, wine, and horses, furnish their garrisons with soldiers, and, beyond this, stimulate agriculture, stock raising, and related industries.<sup>4</sup> As few *gente de razon* (people of reason, or Europeans as opposed to Indians) resided in the province, however, the government was obliged to recruit *pobladores* (colonists) from among the Mexican people. But they displayed so little enthusiasm for the dangerous trip and precarious enterprise that the Governor, following precedents codified in Spain's Laws of the Indies, offered inducements to stimulate interest.

De Neve promised the pobladores a subsidy of money, stock, and tools, a building lot close to the plaza for residence, several tracts of outlying farmland for sustenance, adequate grazing land, and a share in the common water, pasturage, firewood, and lumber. He also ex-

empted them from tithes or any other taxes on their produce for five years. The colonists, in return, were obliged to complete their homes, cultivate their fields, increase their cattle, and construct a dam and other public works. They were also bound to sell their surplus at a fair price to the presidios, and to reimburse the royal treasury for its initial assistance from the profits.<sup>5</sup> Since the pueblos were supplemental agricultural units, the authorities instructed that they be located at sites close to the presidios and suited for farming, which, in an arid country, meant near available water. Guided by the institution's rationale and the province's environment, the imperial government then designated several places as pueblos.

Among these was *el pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles* (the village of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels) which was founded by Governor de Neve in 1781. Following his instructions to select a site in southern California's coastal plain, the pobladores first located Los Angeles near enough to the Porciuncula River to tap its waters yet high enough above it for protection against winter floods. They then took possession of the land and laid out the pueblo, setting aside a parcel two hundred by three hundred feet for the plaza and fixing its corners at the cardinal points of the compass. They also divided the surrounding territory into *solares* (building lots twenty by thirty varas) and *suertes* (sowing fields two hundred by three hundred varas) and reserved the remaining property for common use and newcomers. Finally, they held a lottery and distributed one solare, two irrigable suertes, and two dry ones to each poblador.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the settlers exploited the village's fertile soil, ample water, and warm weather so effectively that Los Angeles prospered beyond expectations, attracted more colonists, and, with about one thousand inhabitants, ranked first in size among California's settlements in the 1830's.<sup>7</sup>

The missions fared less well. In the 1830's, a decade after Mexico declared its independence of Spain, the republic, in response to claims that the priests were monopolizing the land and exploiting the natives, transferred the missions from the church to the state.<sup>8</sup> The Mexican authorities then reversed the Spanish policy of granting little property to individuals and even encouraged people to apply for parcels. Although they insisted that the petitioners be Mexican citizens, head their own households, and possess sufficient stock,<sup>9</sup> these requirements were moderately phrased and liberally interpreted. As a result applicants acquired more than seven hundred concessions for estates ranging from less than a hundred to more than a million acres during the following decade.<sup>10</sup> And by 1846 private proprietors (known as

rancheros) owned nearly all of southern California's arable and pasture land and directed the region's economy and society.

Although the rancheros were less restricted than the missionaries in pursuing their material advantages, they too were severely circumscribed by the province's geography and resources. Thousands of miles of mountains, deserts, and plains separated California from the markets of the eastern United States and the central Mexican plateau, and thousands of miles of ocean isolated it from the ports of the Hawaiian Islands and the Orient. The earth's surface contained no precious metals, and the settlers lacked the capital to support a quest for mineral wealth. The abundant land and limited water discouraged intensive cultivation, and a mild climate and sparse population permitted an indolence impossible in colder and more crowded countries. Nor did the Californians endeavor to overcome these handicaps. Trained as soldiers of Spain and Mexico, they regarded work with distaste and business with contempt, equated improvement with adherence to their ancestors' arts, science, and religion, and measured progress by participation in lengthy visits, ceremonial display, and vigorous exercise. As they accommodated their inclinations to the region's character, the Californians appeared to some visitors as "the least promising colonists of a new country" and to others as "a happy people, possessing the means of physical pleasure to the full."<sup>11</sup>

The Californians based their economy and society on vast estates known as ranchos. The ranchos were divided into three parts: sprawling haciendas on which the rancheros and their families resided; nearby gardens, vineyards, and fields; and, by far the largest chunk, surrounding pasture for the cattle. The cattle, which were originally established in southern California by the priests and later appropriated from the secularized missions by the rancheros, were the rancho's primary source of wealth. They provided meat, clothing, candles, and ropes, among other essentials. For the rancheros, indeed, stock raising was more than a means of livelihood well suited to the region's environment; it was also a way of life consistent with their own inclinations. Given the mild weather and limited but adequate rainfall, the herds could forage the hills unsupervised; and thus freed from more mundane matters, the rancheros could live—or so they thought—in the style of Spanish grandees.<sup>12</sup>

The Indians, not the Californians, made up the labor force. Although many did not survive the mission experience and others returned to their villages after secularization, a substantial number who were incapable of caring for themselves stayed in the vicinity of the



ranchos. The Californians promptly recruited them, offering, in return for labor and service, plain but ample fare, simple but adequate shelter, and unenlightened but patriarchic guidance. For these benefits the Indians watched the herds and slaughtered the cattle, prepared the meat and cured the hides. They planted the gardens, vineyards, and fields and then cultivated the potatoes, peppers, beans, and peas, tended the grapes, and harvested the corn, wheat, maize, and barley. They dug the adobe and erected the buildings, sawed the lumber, and constructed the furniture.<sup>13</sup> With their women, who cooked the food, sewed the garments, cleaned the haciendas, and served the Californians, the natives were as indispensable as the cattle to the rancho economy.

The rancheros geared production to the immediate requirements of their households, and the ranchos achieved a substantial degree of self-sufficiency. Moreover, the herds multiplied so rapidly that the excess hides and tallow were exchanged for goods unavailable in California. American and British merchantmen that plied between the United States, Europe, China, and the Pacific Islands conducted this commerce. Their owners filled them with liquor, tea, and coffee; linen, velveteen, and silk; cutlery, crockery, and tinware; and boots, shoes, and jewelry. Their supercargoes then bartered for the hides and tallow which were later sold to shoe and soap manufacturers in Massachusetts.<sup>14</sup> Since the trade was restricted by California's isolation and the market's limitations, however, the ranchos continued to provide all the necessities of life down through the 1840's.

The Californians and the Indians were not only owners and workers; they were also masters and servants. The rancheros, however, did not exploit the natives as intensively as, say, the southern planters did the Negro slaves; nor did they handle them as harshly. After all, the ranchos produced enough for all, and everyone there well knew his place. It was partly because no uncertainties about responsibilities and privileges unsettled the ranchos that one ranchero could claim that "We treat our servants rather as friends than as servants."<sup>15</sup> By virtue of this arrangement, the Californians and the Indians shared the same haciendas but not the same adobes, and they ate at the same tables but in assigned seats. Moreover, the natives worshipped and relaxed within the ranchos, and the rancheros prayed in private chapels and socialized on their estates. By thus meeting the emotional as well as the material imperatives of their households, the ranchos attained a social self-sufficiency as nearly complete as their economic autonomy.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles not only retained its position as California's largest settlement, but also increased its population to approximately 1,200 in 1840. The native Californians, a substantial majority, were joined by some Mexicans, pobladores who migrated to the province, and a few Americans, sailors from the Northeast who deserted their ships and pioneers from the Midwest who crossed the continent. But notwithstanding its growth, the pueblo underwent no fundamental changes in its agricultural economy or village society. Few people engaged in crafts, trade, professions, or manufacturing; most natives and newcomers alike cultivated the land or labored for farmers.<sup>16</sup> As they planted additional acreage and established new households, Los Angeles prospered and expanded; it thus developed through the accumulation, not the alteration, of its productive units.

Los Angeles' origins were still visible in its structure in the 1840's because of the pervasive influence of the ranchos in southern California. Their self-sufficiency inhibited opportunities for artisans, merchants, professionals, and manufacturers, and precluded urban growth in the pueblo. "I went to town only occasionally," one prominent ranchero recalled, "and then it was on some urgent business, and I returned without loss of time."<sup>17</sup> Even the American and British supercargoes bargained with the Californians on their estates, stored the hides and tallow in coastal warehouses, and outfitted their ships as shops. They did no business in the pueblo.<sup>18</sup> Thus by 1846 only a basic disruption in the region's economy and society could have altered the pattern of labor and life in Los Angeles, and from the perspective of the Californians nothing in their culture appeared capable of propelling changes of such magnitude.

After all, they had experienced rebellion without change and turbulence without disruption throughout the early nineteenth century. They had witnessed successive factions revolt against authority in the cause of liberty, and settle for new officials in the name of fraternity. They had become convinced that their economy and society, so recently created out of the desert wilderness, was impervious to political upheaval. So, when the United States commenced to wage war on Mexico in 1846, the Californians showed little anxiety as they prepared to defend the province. And indeed, they offered scant resistance. The invaders soon imposed military rule in California, then suppressed a passionate but hopeless insurrection there, and later defeated the Mexican army at Chapultepec. Incapable of protecting its empire, the Mexican government ceded New Mexico and California to the United States for \$15 million.<sup>19</sup>