

One Black Life Did Matter --  
Later On in Los Angeles

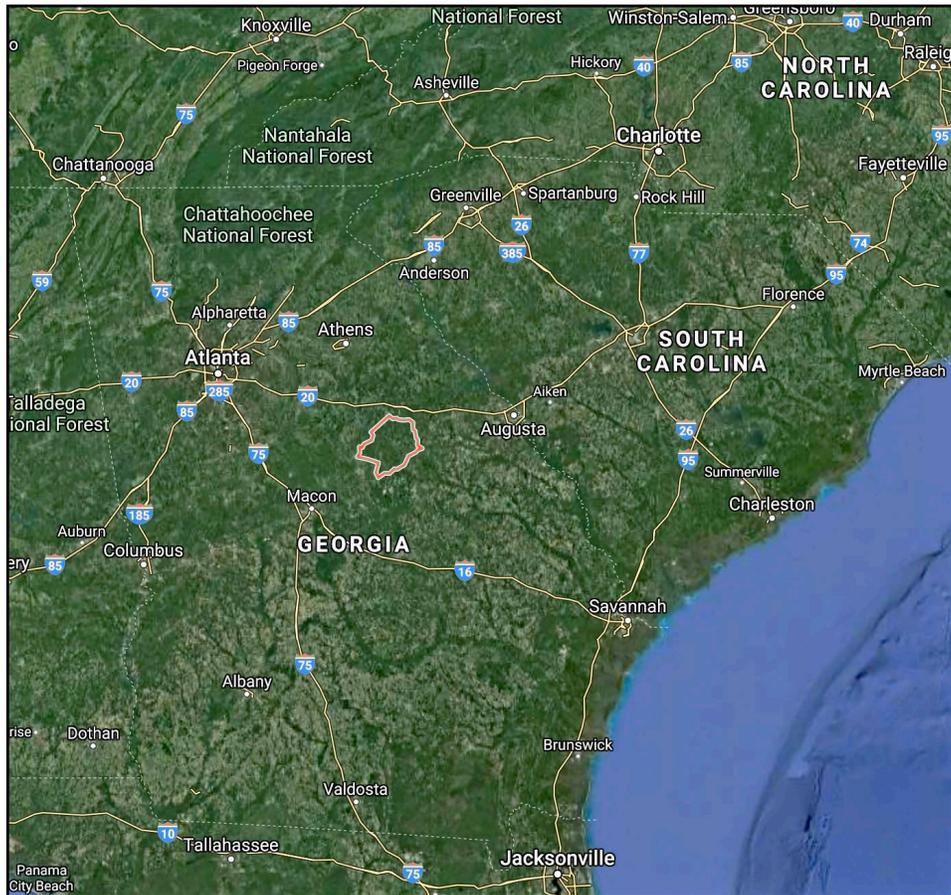
Biographical Summary of Bridget Biddy Mason  
by Robert S. Sherins, MD  
August 2020



On August 15, 1818, a little black girl was born of slaves on a plantation in Hancock County, Northern Georgia.<sup>1</sup> For historical enthusiasts, the date coincided with the Catholic holiday of “Maria Himmelfahrt” Mary’s ascent (of Christian faith) into heaven. Our protagonist was early-on sold several times to different plantation owners. However, the economic basis of her sale remains unknown. This writer is both puzzled and ashamed of the history of that sale based upon the knowledge that the slave owner certainly was aware that he orphaned the girl depriving her of her rightful and nurturing loving family. Very likely the sale of the slave girl occurred when she was old enough to work as a farmhand, manage livestock, perform household duties, and was sexually mature. She was first sold to John Smithson, owner of a South Carolina plantation, where she worked at household matters and assisted midwives. By age 18, she had been relocated to Logtown, Mississippi.

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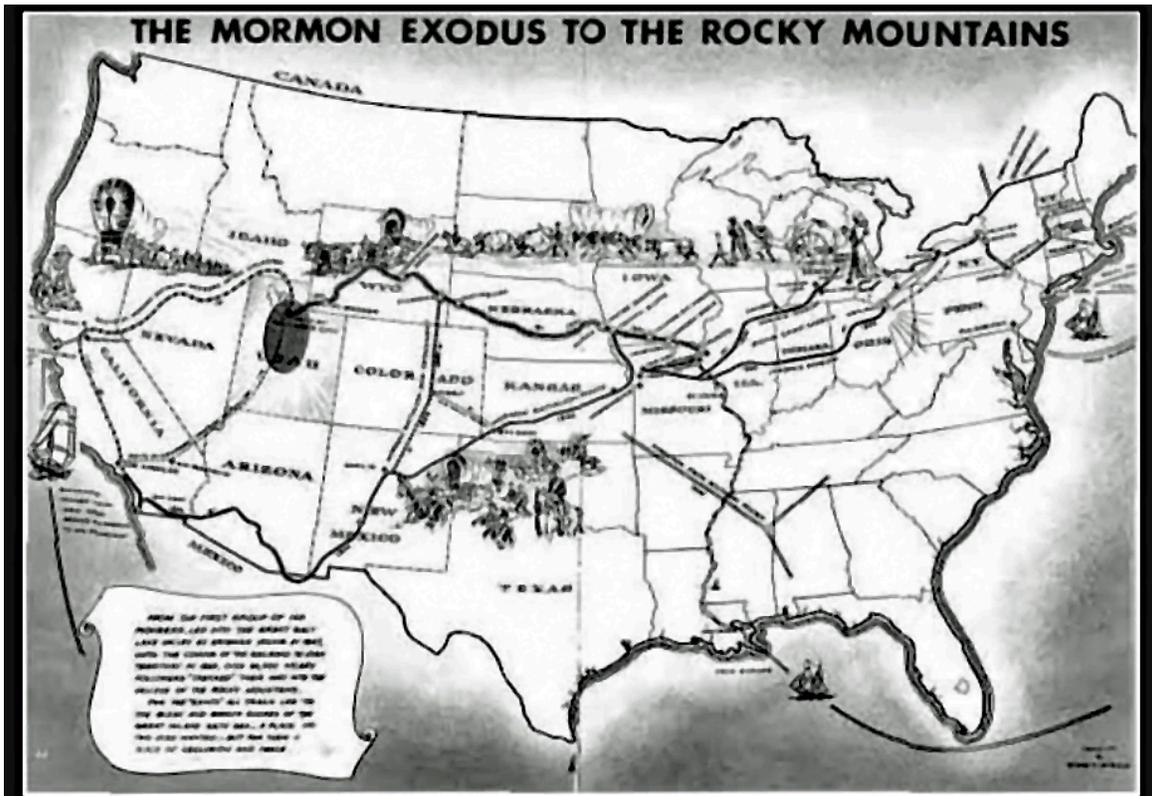
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2013/05/biddy-mason.html>



Aerial Map Hancock County, Georgia

John Smithson resold our protagonist to his cousins Robert and Rebecca Smith as a wedding present. Imagine, she was sold as a gift, an object, without even the pretense of humanity. She was young and illiterate, but brilliant and capable of learning tasks well and being responsible. Smith fathered her 3 children, the first of whom was Ellen, then Ann and Harriet.

The Smiths decided to move to Utah, which by then had been established as the Mormon territory. The family and staff (90 people) were moved; our protagonist walked the entire distance behind the wagons, dragging her daughters with her. Her tasks included maintaining the wagons, goods, livestock and bodily requirements, as well as tending the livestock. When needed, she served as midwife during the 2,000 mile trek. This writer can't imagine such disgraceful and punitive tasks placed upon our protagonist. Their determination and strength were evident; they survived reaching Utah where they were converted as Mormons. The Mormons were divided as to the issues of slavery versus a free-State. The turmoil must have been horrific. Slaves in Utah were permitted, which included African and Native Americans; the abuses were overlooked.



Map Mormon Trail to Rockies



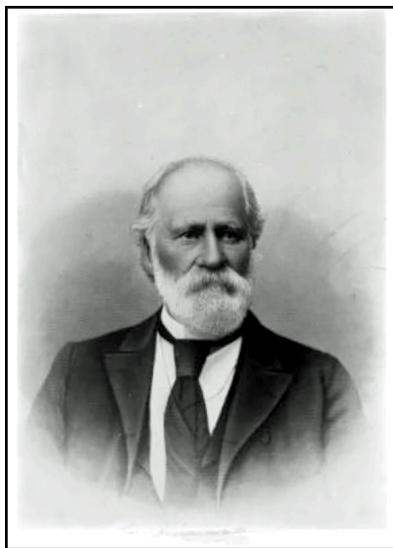
Wagoners on Mormon Trail, Circa 1847

When Mormon leader Brigham Young decided to send members to San Bernardino, California, Smith planned to join the migration. He refused to free his slaves, however. Smith planned to take his slaves to California, where as a free-State, he would be required to free or sell them. Our protagonists walked to California from Utah. Her 3<sup>rd</sup> daughter, Harriet, was delivered in a temporary encampment in the Santa Monica mountains of west Los Angeles.

California was in the process of creating legislation as a slave-free State. Smith decided to leave California to resettle his family and slaves in Texas. The moment was opportune for some of his slaves to escape, including our protagonist and her children. The oldest daughter, Ellen had married Robert Owen; he convinced fellow slaves to remain in California and file suit for their freedom from slavery. Free finally in San Bernardino, where **on January 21, 1856, Los Angeles County District Judge, Benjamin Hayes**, declared the slave's freedom in California.

As a slave, our protagonist had never been given a surname. She had been simply known as Biddy, had no legal last name as a slave. In researching this topic I discovered that her first name was Bridget Biddy, which is incorrect. Her given name is only Biddy. After emancipation, she chose to be known as Biddy Mason because Mason was the middle name of Amasa Lyman, Mormon Apostle and mayor of San Bernardino. She had spent many years in the company of the Amasa Lyman household.

After her emancipation, Biddy moved to Los Angeles, where she met Dr. John S. Griffin. There are few details about their meeting; however, Biddy soon began to work with Dr. Griffin.



John S. Griffin, MD, Los Angeles, California - 1816 - 1898

First President of the Los Angeles County Medical Association

From Robert S. Sherins, MD:

John Griffin, MD was among the first physicians of Los Angeles and California, having graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1837. He came from an old Virginia pioneering family.<sup>2</sup> After practicing in Louisville, Kentucky, until 1840, he entered the United States Army serving until he was stationed in San Diego, California, He was wounded in 1847 fighting against the Mexican army. The population of Los Angeles at the time was only about 3,000 people. When General Fremont arrived with troops in LA, Griffin was assigned to head the army general hospital in San Diego.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Griffin-9453>

## Introduction

Biddy Mason was one of the founding leaders of the black community in the city of Los Angeles, and remains a symbol for the black community and its business as well as philanthropic activities. (See Plate 1). Although exceptional in and of herself, we also see Biddy Mason's life as a vehicle for tracing the development of the black community in Los Angeles for the years between the mid-1850's and the mid-1890's. When she arrived in Los Angeles as a slave there were 12 blacks living there<sup>1</sup>. When she died, as a successful businesswoman and philanthropist, the community of blacks had expanded to 1,258<sup>2</sup>. Biddy Mason left an enormous legacy as a woman who "made good" in the real estate market, and who "did good" by helping others less fortunate, particularly those "of her own color". She did this work as an individual, but it is also evident that as a founder and on-going benefactor of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church (the first black church in Los Angeles), this work was done as part of community works with the church as the center of that community.

In order to trace Biddy Mason's development in Los Angeles, particularly as part of the emerging black community, we will discuss how Mason grew from a slave to a wealthy philanthropist along with the once Spanish pueblo.

## **Section Two: How She Got to Los Angeles**

While most sources generally confirm that Biddy Mason was born August 15, 1818 in Hancock county Georgia there are varied account of her early years, the condition of her enslavement, and the events surrounding her journey to California<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps the most colorful account, Charlotta Bass' *FOURTY YEARS: MEMOIRS FROM THE PAGES OF A NEWSPAPER* claims that she made a successful escape from slavery while still very young and, making friends with Indians in Missouri met and married an Indian chief, subsequently bearing three daughters. Of her journey to California, it is told that she was discovered by Mormons who planned to capture Mason and sell her back into slavery in Texas. Upon learning of this scheme, Mason sought out the leader of a caravan heading west and was taken on to herd sheep.

More conservative accounts argue that Mason was born on the plantation of Robert Smith who maintained several slaves including Mason and her three daughters, and brought them on the trek to California, which began "in the 1840's". In the early years before the journey Mason spent much of her time caring for Smith's wife who was chronically ill.

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Dolores Hayden's course titled Los Angeles Place Making, at the UCLA Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, February 1984.

The search for a better climate suited to his wife's constitution and later, the lure of gold, motivated Smith to sell his plantation and make successive moves west. A convert to the Mormon faith, in the 1840's Smith joined up with a huge wagon train heading to Salt Lake City. In this account, Mason also herded sheep behind the wagon train – some 300 sheep belonging to Robert Smith. Because of her ability in this arduous task Mason was reported to be “a woman of masculine strength”. In addition to this Mason had to care for her three young daughters – Ellen, Harriet and Ann – the first born when Mason was twenty-one and the last when she was thirty. (It is not clear whether her children were infants or helpmates on the journey west, but it is most likely that they were both). While the trek eventually ended in California, Smith is reported to have spent four years in Mississippi and another four years in Utah before arriving in California in 1851.

There are two accounts of the events leading to Mason's freedom. The first is that Smith first settled in San Bernardino County in 1851. Curiously enough, San Bernardino was one of several small communities in California populated largely by blacks, which had grown out of the migration of free slaves to the area. Others included Abila, Allensworth, Bowles, Victoriaville, Tulare, and Fresno. As Smith grew wary of the outcome of the Civil War and its implication for slavery he planned to move to Texas, which was still a slave state. In this first account, the Mungen account, Mrs. Rowan, a prominent member of the black community of San Bernardino, alerted the Sheriff of Los Angeles County, Frank Dewitt. Dewitt served a habeas corpus on the Smith party while there were stopped in Santa Monica Canyon for supplies and rations. Robert Owens is said to have assisted the Sheriff in these arrests. In a second account, Smith and his camp were discovered by a young black boy <sic> who notified his father who then notified the sheriff. Dewitt, accompanied by this man and several other blacks “swooped down on the camp where the slaves were held and rescued them”.

Court proceedings followed on January 19, 1856, presided over by Judge Benjamin Hays. At this trial, Smith testified that while he intended to move to Texas, he did not intend to return Mason and the others to slavery, arguing “they had already known that they were not slaves but rather they had consented upon their own will to go to travel to the slave state of Texas”. This contrasts sharply with Mason's own testimony, later published in the Los Angeles Star in which she stated “I have always done what I have been told to do. I feared this trip to Texas since I first heard of it. Mr. Smith told me that I would be just as free in Texas as here”. Just how free she imagined that was is not entirely clear. The freedom papers documenting the case noted that of the slaves “none of said persons could read or write and are entirely ignorant of the laws of California”. However, following this trial, Mason requested a copy of the legal document granting her freedom. (see Plate 2).

The prospect of settling in Los Angeles was no doubt one of conflict for Mason. Although California was admitted as a free state in 1850, Southern California loyalties to the anti-slavery position were not certain, and there was intense debate around that and other economic and political issues leading to the possible division of California into two states.

Secondly, there were bounty hunters that roamed through the state returning slaves to their former owners, an illegal yet prevalent activity. In fact, some accounts argue that slavery was practiced in California until 1870. In addition, Los Angeles was not exactly the sleepy pueblo town portrayed in many booster-ilk travelers' accounts. One traveler, even while recounting the virtues of Los Angeles in the seventies, recalled that "the drifting of the failures and malcontents down from the northern gold fields during the fifties gave Los Angeles its darkest hour. Only the hour lasted twenty years". Lynchings were as common as hangings, and it was only news when there wasn't a killing to be reported that week. Obviously, Los Angeles was not an idyllic place for a single mother to be bringing up a family.

In 1850, there were only twelve blacks living in Los Angeles. In other areas of Southern California there were already pockets of black communities, most notably the black community of former slaves in San Bernardino. By choosing to live in Los Angeles, she would be dependent upon the goodwill of its white citizens, such as Dr. Griffin, who offered her a position as a nurse-midwife. She was also taken in by the prominent negro resident of Los Angeles, Robert Owens, a livery stableman who had moved to Los Angeles with his family in 1852<sup>20</sup>. (See Plate 3 which shows Mason, seated on the left on the porch of the Owen's residence). Los Angeles in 1850 was peopled predominantly by Californians, though "gringos" were quickly gaining political and economic control. In fact, when Biddy Mason's owner Robert Smith camped in the Santa Monica Canyon outside of Los Angeles in 1856, Los Angeles was little more than a Mexican town. (See Plate 4). Most of the houses were adobe, comparatively few were of wood and none were of brick. (See Plate 5). The streets were crooked and unpaved. (See Plates 6 & 7). Although under American domination since 1846, and part of the United States territory in 1849, its population grew little during the next two decades, because most of the emigration was to the north to participate in the gold rush of '49. During those two decades, the first telegraph line arrived in 1860, the first railroad was built in 1869 and then in 1876 Los Angeles became linked to a transcontinental railway line.

Because Los Angeles had, previous to the American Conquest, been held in common as a Spanish pueblo, the city in 1849 had an enormous amount of land to sell, but no money in its coffers. In order to proceed in these real estate sales however, Los Angeles needed a city map showing a survey of the parcels in the area. Up until this time, mapping in Los Angeles was an imprecise art at best. An army lieutenant by the name of O.C. Ord was hired by the city for the surveying job. The map when finished, was

considered a pretty map, but it lacked such detail as street width, block and lot dimensions, and gave only marginal explanation. (See Plate 8). The wooden stakes set out to mark the subdivisions were said to be of more use to tie a burro than to serve as a surveyor's tool. In a report to the city council in 1870, the map was declared to be "utterly as useless to the survey as so much waste paper". Nevertheless, Ord's survey did serve as the base for Los Angeles early land sales which resulted in Los Angeles first land boom in 1849. After its first sales of land, Los Angeles had \$2,500 in its treasury. The Ord's survey continued to be the reference for land sales until it was recopied in 1872 by Lothan Seebold the county surveyor.

### **Section Three: The Early Black Community in Los Angeles**

The status of the black community at the time of Bidly's arrival in Los Angeles was a complicated one. We find according to the 1850 Census of Los Angeles several blacks who lived in the homes of white people. Whether or not they were indentured is difficult to ascertain, but only one black in 1850 is listed in a separate residence. This was Peter Biggs, who ran a barber shop on Main Street near Bella Union Hotel.

In 1850, the total black population in California was 962. The majority lived in counties near the gold mines where they worked at night to earn enough to buy their freedom. In Los Angeles the twelve blacks constituted only a small portion of the population – 0.7%. By 1860, the number of blacks grew slightly to 66 (1.5%) and by 1870 to 93 (1.6%). By 1890, at the time of Bidly Mason's death the black community had grown to 1,258.

There was evident racial residential segregation of Indians, Mexicans (called "Sonorans"), Californians and Chinese, but until the 1800's there is no early evident racial segregation of blacks. Possibly the hostility against the larger non-white populations, particularly the Chinese may have shunted away racial hostility from the small black population for a while. However, there were limited work opportunities for blacks. An account given by William Ballard, one of the few "old timers" of black Los Angeles whose oral history was recorded in the 1930's noted "in 1848, at the age of seventeen, my father came to Los Angeles. I was born in 1862... The negroes who came here in those days were very poor. Some did odd jobs and many farmed. They lived everywhere, as there was no special districts then". The type of work found by Bidly Mason and her friends the Owens reflected the opportunities of the time.

The negro male engaged in farming, transporting people and goods, shoeing horses. A few operated business establishments on a small scale such as barber shop, groceries, stores, and restaurants. The negro women either assisted on the farm or found employment in the homes of the ever increasing number of white who could afford domestic servants or an untrained nurse or midwife.

The principal industry in Los Angeles was the production of wine and brandy. Some authors argue that the main industry was the consumption of alcohol. In 1872, there

were sixty-two drinking saloons in the city. Other industry include the manufacture of olive oil and mustard, and shipbuilding, with the new industry including two flour mills, several saw mills, planing mills, woolen spinning mills, an ice-plant, shoemakers, tailors, an iron foundry, stove-manufacturing, tile manufacturing and the manufacture of artificial stone. The Europeans controlled the bulk of commerce especially the Irish and the Germans. The native Californians were largely in ranching, shepherding, and the raising of vineyards and orange trees. (See Plate 9 showing various types of activities in and around Los Angeles).

#### **Section Four: Biddy Mason's Development as a Freewoman**

***Of the early black settlers in Los Angeles, Robert Owens was a prominent figure, whose grandson was enlisted in the Los Angeles Times of 1909 as the wealthiest Negro in Los Angeles. Upon her arrival to Los Angeles, Biddy Mason first stayed with the Owens family, and two years later her daughter married the son of Robert, Charles Owen. Robert Owens came to Los Angeles in 1852, from Texas, with his wife Winnie Owens, and two daughters and one son: Sarah Jane, Martha and Charles respectively. Owens first made money by government contracts and general trade and later bought lots on San Pedro Street, where he opened a livery stable.***

***In addition to the livery business, Robert amassed much property in and around the Los Angeles area. (See Plate 10. Owen's houses are the two white structures in the distance on the extreme right.) His first purchase in 1854 was a fairly large tract of land from Obed Macy which was situated across the sanya and purchased for \$1,750.00. Subsequent purchases included a tract along the western bank of the Los Angeles River measuring 360 yards by 160 yards which he sold on July 6 1859 to John Behn for \$450.00, land in El Monte which he bought from J.H. Carr on Oct. 10, 1859 for \$300.00, and a block facing Crop Street which ran from Main Street to Los Angeles Street, purchased from the Methodist Episcopalian Church for \$300.00 on April 9, 1864. Owens continued to purchase property throughout his lifetime and acquired several other properties in the city, including the block bounded by Olive, Charity, Sixth and Seventh Streets, which he acquired in 1868 for \$500.00 from Ozro Childs<sup>44</sup>. (See Plate 11 for extent of property development in 1888). Robert also bequeathed property to his son Charles two years after the marriage of Charles to Ellen Mason. This was a lot adjacent to Dr. Griffin's land which he sold for the sum of \$1.00 on June 4, 1860. The following day he sold the adjacent lot to W. Smart (perhaps a son-in-law) for the same amount.***

***While Robert Owens was one of the first Blacks in Los Angeles to establish an independent residence and acquire property, accounts suggest that it was primarily Robert (who was the grandson of both Owens and Biddy Mason) who profited from real estate investments. Robert C. Owens began work in his youth as a manual laborer, working in the early 1870's for J.S. Slauson as a ranch hand and later pedaling charcoal***

***and driving a city sprinkler at San Pedro Harbor. At the death of his father he and his brother, Henry, took charge of his livery stable, then located on Main near First, and at the death of Bidly Mason they moved this livery to Spring between Third and Fourth ... “ the property on Main having become too valuable to hold a livery stable<sup>47</sup>. (See Plate 12 showing the location of the stable in the rear of the Spring street property.) In 1890 Robert bought a lot and cottage for \$7,200, which he sold in 1905 for \$75,000.***

***In addition to having the good fortune to stay with the Owens family in her early days, Mason managed to get work with Doctor John S. Griffin as a confinement nurse and midwife for \$2.50 per day<sup>49</sup>. Griffin had both offices and residence located on Main Street and was listed as a physician and surgeon in the City Directories of the period. Perhaps her leanings towards this profession developed in her early years with the Smiths when she spent much time caring for Robert Smith’s ailing wife. It is also known that “the older and more intelligent female slaves were delegated to attend the women in the quarters in childbirth”. Mason’s reputation as a midwife grew and one account notes that “she was in demand as a midwife and as such brought into the world many of the children of the early pioneer families”. Some twenty-seven years after she began work with Dr. Griffin, it appears that Mason set up practice on her own. In the City Directory of 1883-1884 Mason is listed independently as a sick nurse residing at 108 Fort Street.***

Dr. Griffin appears to have been a prominent figure in the city himself, as well as a shrewd investor in real estate and other areas. In 1868, Griffin, along with Beaudry Lazure, engineered a thirty year contract to sell water to the city, paying \$400.00 a month for this right. When this contract expired, they sold the rights back to the city for \$200 million. Griffin also owned land in East Los Angeles which was said to have been “opened for development” by himself and Mr. Downey, the ex-governor. (See Plate 13 for the location of the tracts).

***In addition to her work as a nurse, Mason became renowned for her astute property purchases in the City of Los Angeles. In some accounts, Mason is depicted as having a “mania” for acquisition of property which she passed on to her daughters. In another Griffin is described as “the shrewd real estate investor” who “<influenced> Bidly to invest her \$250.00 in her first two downtown lots” but there is no record of this. Nor does Mason appear to be the real estate shark that some accounts portray her as. Rather it appears that she acquired property as a security for herself and her family and as a means of establishing, at last, a permanent settlement.***

***In 1866, when Mason was forty-eight years old, she made her first purchase from Mr. Buffon for the sum of \$250.00. This was ten years after her establishment in Los Angeles as a free person. This lot is set out in the Ords Survey as being lots three and eight on block number seven – lying between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> and Spring and Fort in approximately the middle of the block<sup>57</sup>. (See Plate 8: Ord’s Survey and Plate 9). In***

***1868, when she was fifty she purchased a site even further out of town the north half of lots two and seven of block twenty, and lots three and eight of the same block which was bounded by Olive and Charity Streets, from Charles Owens and Martha Hall for \$375<sup>58</sup>. (See Plates 8 & 9).***

***Mason's intentions for the property on South Spring were clear. After purchasing it, she told her children that "this was to remain their homestead, and it mattered not what their circumstances, they were always to retain this homestead". This property she improved with a two story building faced in brick on the first floor and wood on the second and housing storerooms on the lower floor and living rooms on the upper, which she occupied. (See Plate 14. Mason's properties appear in the lower right as they were in 1900). The storerooms later became quite valuable rental property when business moved south of First Street<sup>60</sup>. Records in the City Directories indicate that this was her primary residence, where she was listed for the period from 1878 to 1890. Other places of residence included 108 Fort Street, where she resided in 1883 and "First Street below Main" which was her home in 1872.***

Not until 1867-1868 did Los Angeles begin to grow rapidly and show progress in erecting large, more expensive housing. "Fine buildings and substantial brick shops, hotels, schools, banks, factories, sprang up at this time as if by magic". Despite these early "booms", in the 1870's Los Angeles was still a little town of some 10,000 persons. The city itself changed a little in the twenty some years between its transformation from a pueblo to its beginning industrial and real estate development in the mid-seventies. Up until 1872, there wasn't any need for a city directory, because "every resident of the embryo city of these days knew where every other person within its municipal bounds lived. Why go to a book to find what he already knew?". In addition, some streets were unnamed, all the houses unnumbered, and many of the inhabitants could not read, making a city directory rather useless. For the purposes of the directory, numbers were assigned for Main Streets, Spring Street, Eternity Street, and Bull Streets. However, the numbers on Main went only to Fourth, and on Sprint went from Main to Third street. The streets themselves were unpaved, dusty in summer and muddy rivers during the rains.

Business was confined to Aliso, Los Angeles Main and Spring Streets, and not much of it extended south of First Street. Main Street was the most animated of the three principal streets and had the finest buildings. On it stood City Hall, the Commercial Bank and the Catholic Cathedral, built in 1877 at a cost of \$80,000. Nearby were grocery stores with canned goods and fresh fruit vegetables<sup>67</sup>. Further down on Main Street the houses were poorer, most of them small wooden structures with tiny and often pleasant gardens.

Spring Street, the second principal street of Los Angeles, opened right into Main Street near Temple Block. Running west, the street zigzagged between houses, and groves of olives, walnuts and oranges.

The third and longest street was San Pedro, which began near the Calle De Los Negros with its dilapidated old house. It was dirtier and dustier than the others, and though broad at its beginning, gradually became narrower and at the lower end passed primarily through gardens. Between it and Main Street were some splendid orange groves<sup>70</sup>. The only residential district was on San Pedro and the west side of Main Street. The wealthier residents on Main Street owned through the block and faced their stables on Spring Street.

The housing in Los Angeles of the 1870's was constructed of wood, seldom of tile. The Americans owned most of the houses and the land in the city. (That of the Californian was built of unbaked brick, clay and adobe.) The wooden houses were built usually of redwood, with white pine flooring, on shallow foundations. Small houses out in the country were frequently built directly on bare ground. From the outside these houses had a fairly good appearance. Those of the more prosperous families were ornamented with verandas covered with masses of flowers. Usually the paint was gray or graying yellow in color.

Among the newer wooden houses many were built in duplicate and stood close together: several houses had simple vines trained over the porches. Frequently the verandas occupied one entire end of a house and covered a quarter of the lot: One account of Biddy Mason's homestead property on Spring Street describes it as "between Third and Fourth Streets, located from Spring Street to Broadway. There was a ditch of water on the place and a willow fence running along the plat of ground which was considered quite out of town at that date, but which today is the most valuable piece of property in all of beautiful Los Angeles". (See Plate 15. Mason's property is located on Spring which is the horizontal street in the distance). The "willow fence" referred to is no doubt a living tree fence which was at that time the prevalent type of "fence" indicating property lines in Los Angeles<sup>75</sup>. Accounts of the flora and fauna of the time speak of hills rich with the hue of flowers. In March, red, in April, blue, and in May the pure gold of California poppies. Though not an area rich with native trees, Mason might have encountered the California roble, the aliso, the sycamore, poplars, cottonwoods, and the California horsechestnut. In her garden, the fields surrounding her property and perhaps while walking through what was then known as Central Park, she probably often saw the ubiquitous ground squirrel as well as owls, gopher, the jumping rat, as well as varieties of hare and rabbit:

***Because Mason's property was considered "out of town", she may not have fronted on the private stables of the wealthy residents of Main Street. However, some of the businesses in her area included the stable for the Nadeau Hotel, the first public school***

*of Los Angeles (which was integrated) at Second and Spring, a blacksmith shop, the terminal for the stage coach, a windmill, some small shops, and chicken coops. There was a feed and fuel yard at Third and Spring and the "Round House" was a community resort where many city celebrations were held.*

*Mason later sold the north half of the Spring Street property to K. H Jones and Charles M. Wright on January 2, 1875 for \$1,500, and lot eight on the property bounded by Olive and Charity for \$2,800 on April 7, 1884<sup>78</sup>. But the remainder of the Spring Street property she intended to be kept as a permanent homestead. One years before her death in 1891, Mason left part of this land to her grandsons Robert and Henry Owens "in consideration of the sum of love and affection and ten dolalrs"<sup>79</sup> (See Plate 16, photo of deed). The remainder she left to Robert Owens and his mother Ellen, with a life interest to her sister Harriet which was to revert to Robert and his mother upon her death. Throughout her adventures in real estate, Mason was still unable to write, and signed transactions with an x which albeit developed considerable flourish until age weakened her handwriting (See Plates 16, 17 & 18). In spite of this handicap, Mason always asked for copies of the deeds of sale, which demonstrates a certain astuteness on her part. At the time of her death Mason is said to have owned property at Third and Spring, Second and Broadway, Eighth and Hill and "many other valuable properties in downtown Los Angeles both on the east and west sides". However, records do not substantiate this claim.*

After the death of Biddy Mason on January 16, 1891, Robert and Henry moved their livery from Main Street to Spring Street and later in 1905, Robert announced plans for a six story structure to be built on this site, and to include a Biddy Mason Memorial Institute on the second floor, which would be given over to assisting black youth in finding employment. This organization was to be run through the help of the Tuskegee Institute, to which Robert had recently made a substantial donation. Today none of these structures remain. Spring Street holds a parking lot which will soon house a state building. (See Plates 19 & 20). The center properties on Olive street house a parking lot and small nondescript structure of recent construction. The remainder of the block is crowded with high-rise structures. (See Plate 21 showing the corner of Olive block from Pershing Square).

*Biddy Mason, in addition to being known for her prudent dealings in real estate was most known and lover for her philanthropic work, particularly in "her own community". Her work that is best documented is that connected with the first A.M.E. Church. This was organized in her home on Spring between Third and Fourth Streets in 1872 when she was 54 years old. Although it is said that Biddy Mason helped not only negroes, but also white people and white churches, her activities in her "own" community are the best documented.*

***In her 60's she aided the poor and unfortunate in the slum area and during the flood of the early 1880's she opened an account at a small grocery store on 4<sup>th</sup> and Spring to be used by any family made homeless by the rains of the 1880's. One source states that she opened a day nursery for orphans, poor, and deserted children.***

***Mason is also remembered for her frequent visits to the city prison where she most widely became known as "Grandma Mason". Many people came to her for aid, and in her later ailing years, her grandsons had to stand outside to turn people away who lined up at her door for assistance.***

***The A.M.E. Church is of particular importance in marking Biddy Mason's philanthropy, both because of her continued association with the church and the black community's continued association of Biddy Mason with the work of the first black church organized in Los Angeles.***

***The first A.M.E. after being organized in her home was located in four additional sites before being on Azusa street in the area of what is presently Little Tokyo. By purchasing a lot at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Grand for \$700 the congregation became the mother church for all subsequent black churches and the first Negro church in the group to buy land and build a church (See Plate 22). The Azusa street building was later used as a warehouse, when it was replaced by a stately church at 8<sup>th</sup> and Towne, the church of the wealthiest negro residents of Los Angeles. This building was a beautiful Gothic edifice, modeled after an English Cathedral designed by Sir Christopher Wren. An additional wing used as a youth center was designed in 1947 by Los Angeles architect Paul R. Williams. Later work of the church included organizing the Sojourner Truth Club for the purposes of establishing a working girls home.***

### **Section Five: Biddy Mason's Descendants and Legacy**

At the time of Biddy Mason's death, she had two daughters, two grandsons and several grandchildren. Her second eldest daughter died a young death on August 1, 1857. Ellen Mason Owen (married to Charles Owen who died in 1882) later married George Huddleston. Harriet Mason who married Mr. Washington, died June 9, 1914. Ellen's sons were Robert C. Owens and Henry L. Owens. In 1893 her grandson Robert C. Owens, later to be known as a successful black capitalist, married Anna Dugger. They were the parents of Gladys and Varnella Owens. Gladys married "Red" Spikes a band leader of the 1920's, and they had a son Robert Owens Spikes III. Currently the great granddaughter of Biddy Mason, Gladys Owens-Smith and her daughter and granddaughter live in Los Angeles.

The first effort to preserve Biddy Mason's History was a proposal for a six story building on the site of her first property which was to house on the second floor a community center to train black youths and help them find employment. The Tuskegee Institute,

which was later subsumed under the Urban League was to undertake the operation, but unfortunately, it remained a proposal.

More recently, in 1971, there was an attempt to create a Bidy Mason Museum and community center, when the church at 8<sup>th</sup> and Towne was named a historical monument on January 1971. Unfortunately, the building burned down on July 4 1971. A few years later Miriam Matthews and other community members succeeded in time or the bicentennial in having a plaque placed in the sidewalk commemorating the A.M.E. Church and Bidy Mason's work. However, the efforts to make a "Bidy Mason" park at the site failed. Another bicentennial effort included a special booklet published by Donna Mungen, "The Life and Times of Bidy Mason", which was part of a Black History commemorative project and the Bidy Mason festival.

There have been additional efforts to create a cultural center to honor Bidy Mason. One was a restoration project of the home of Mrs. Jessie L. Terry at 1152 E. Adams Blvd., making it into a museum and community center. This effort, as well as the one for the preservation of the church at 8<sup>th</sup> and Towne were sponsored by the Federation of Black History and Art.

Miriam Matthews has been an historian of Los Angeles History since 1941, and is an expert on Bidy Mason and black cultural history from 1871-1940. She has been largely responsible for the efforts made to preserve Bidy Mason's history. Most recently she assembled from her extensive collection materials for an exhibition at the Museum of Science and Technology.

Miriam Matthews was California's first Black librarian with professional training. She has degrees from I.C. Berkeley and the University of Chicago. In 1929 she was the first to stimulate interest in Los Angeles celebration of Negro History Week, and since the early 1940's she has been researching the history of blacks and building a personal collection of photos, books, documents and arts.

#### Section Six: Future Proposals to Commemorate Bidy Mason

There are several possible ways to commemorate Bidy Mason, linking proposals both to the sites that were part of her daily life in early Los Angeles and to the community that still remains. Because of the number of sites associated with Bidy and her life story (including those of Dr. Griffin and Robert Owens, as well as her own) a walking tour was initially considered. (see Plates 8 and 34). However, upon visiting the sites this approach was abandoned in favor of concentration on one or two locales because of the destitute nature of area surrounding the sites which are quite near skid row or in desolate industrial areas. On the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and Towne (discussed above) we envisioned a mural depicting perhaps the early history of the church from its beginnings in Mason's home to its status in the community at present. (Plates 22, 23, and 24 show the original A.M.E. Church, the site as it is today and the commemorative plaque now in place). The

block on Olive and 6<sup>th</sup> is now crowded with high rise structures (see Plate 21, showing the northeast corner as seen from Pershing Square). However, its proximity to Pershing Square offers other possibilities. The contemporary square is a bleak shadow of the lush central park that it once was, and the two statues that highlights the square (that of Beethoven and Pershing) have little to do with the history of Los Angeles, much less the square itself. (See Plates 25 to 28). At this site we would propose a statue of Biddy Mason reminiscent of her actual use of the square (which we assume because of the proximity of her site to the square). This might feature Mason seated on bench surrounded by children or perhaps even seated in the bandstand recreated to remind us of the façade of Robert Owens house where she is shown in a photograph surrounded by other members of the family and friends (see Plates 32 and 33). On her original properties, in the lobby of the future state building, we propose a mural depicting her life and works. Finally, we would support the proposal of the black community to establish a center in her name of Adams Street. (See Plates 29 to 31, showing the neighborhood and the site for the center). The structure under consideration is located in a thriving black community and would certainly revive not only visually but actively the philanthropic works for which Mason is so well remembered.

***Biddy earned \$2.50 per day, a good rate of pay for African Americans at that time. She did not charge fees to indigent patients; she had amazing empathy for the poor. Within 10-years, Biddy saved \$250 and purchase property in downtown Los Angeles at Spring, Fort, Third and Fourth Streets. She was one of the first women in LA to own property. She bought a house that she lived in until her death in 1891.***

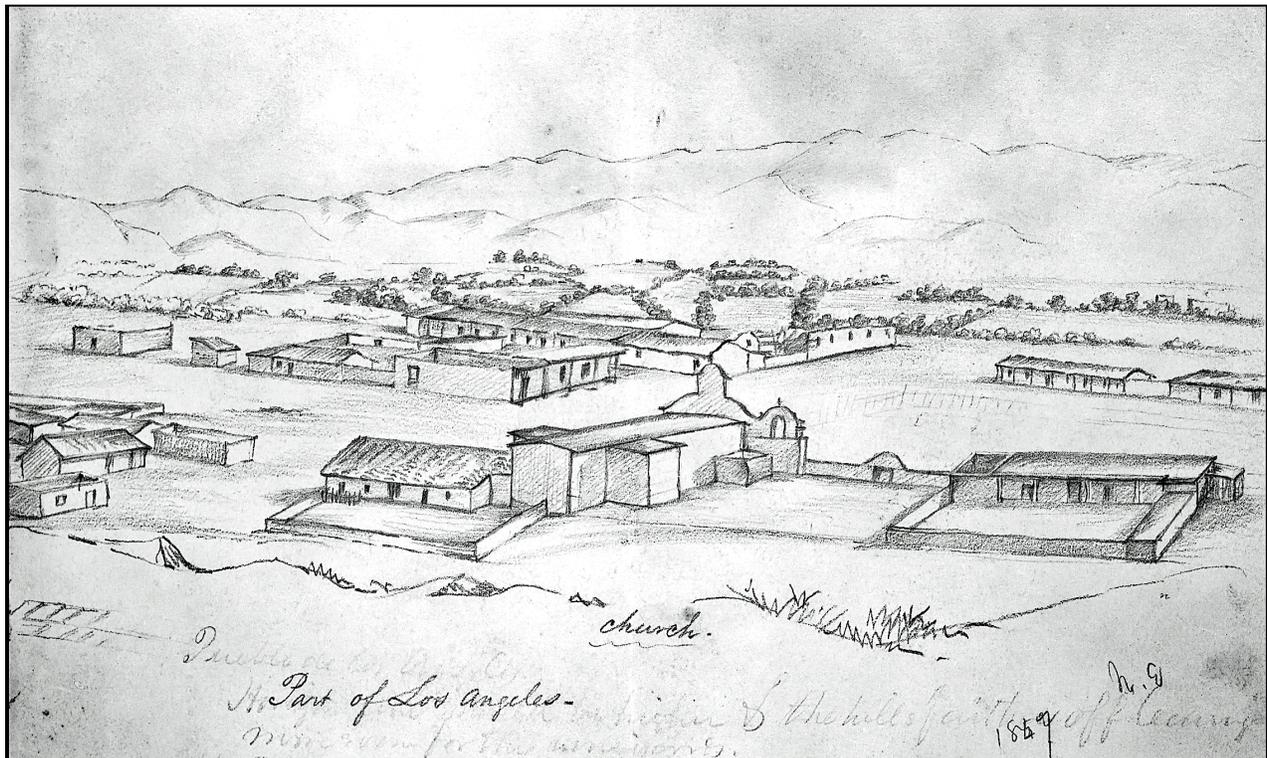
Fearing that he would lose his enslaved persons, Smith decided to move to Texas, a slave state. They were prevented from leaving by the Owens family. One of Robert Owens' sons was romantically involved with Mason's 17 year old daughter. Owens told the L.A. County Sheriff that slaves were being illegally held. The sheriff gathered a posse and apprehended Smith's wagon train in Cajon Pass, California.

***After spending five years enslaved in California, Mason challenged Smith for her freedom. On January 21, 1856, L.A. District Judge Benjamin Hayes approved Mason's petition. The ruling freed Mason and thirteen members of her extended family. She took the surname Mason from the middle name of Amason Lyman, who was the mayor of San Bernardino and a Mormon Apostle. Mason moved her family to L.A. where her daughter married had the son of Robert and Minnie Owens. She continued working as a midwife and nurse, saving her money and using it to purchase land in what is now the heart of downtown L.A. There she organized First A.M.E. Church, the oldest African American Church in the city. Mason used her wealth, estimated to be about \$3 million, to become a philanthropist to the entire L.A. community. She donated to numerous charities, fed and sheltered the poor, and visited prisoners.***

**Mason was instrumental in founding a traveler's aid center and an elementary school for black children.**

**Bridget "Biddy" Mason died in L.A. on January 15, 1891. She was buried in an unmarked grave in Evergreen Cemetery, Boyle Heights, Los Angeles. On March 27, 1988, the mayor of L.A. and members of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church of Los Angeles she founded held a ceremony, during which her grave was marked with a tombstone.**

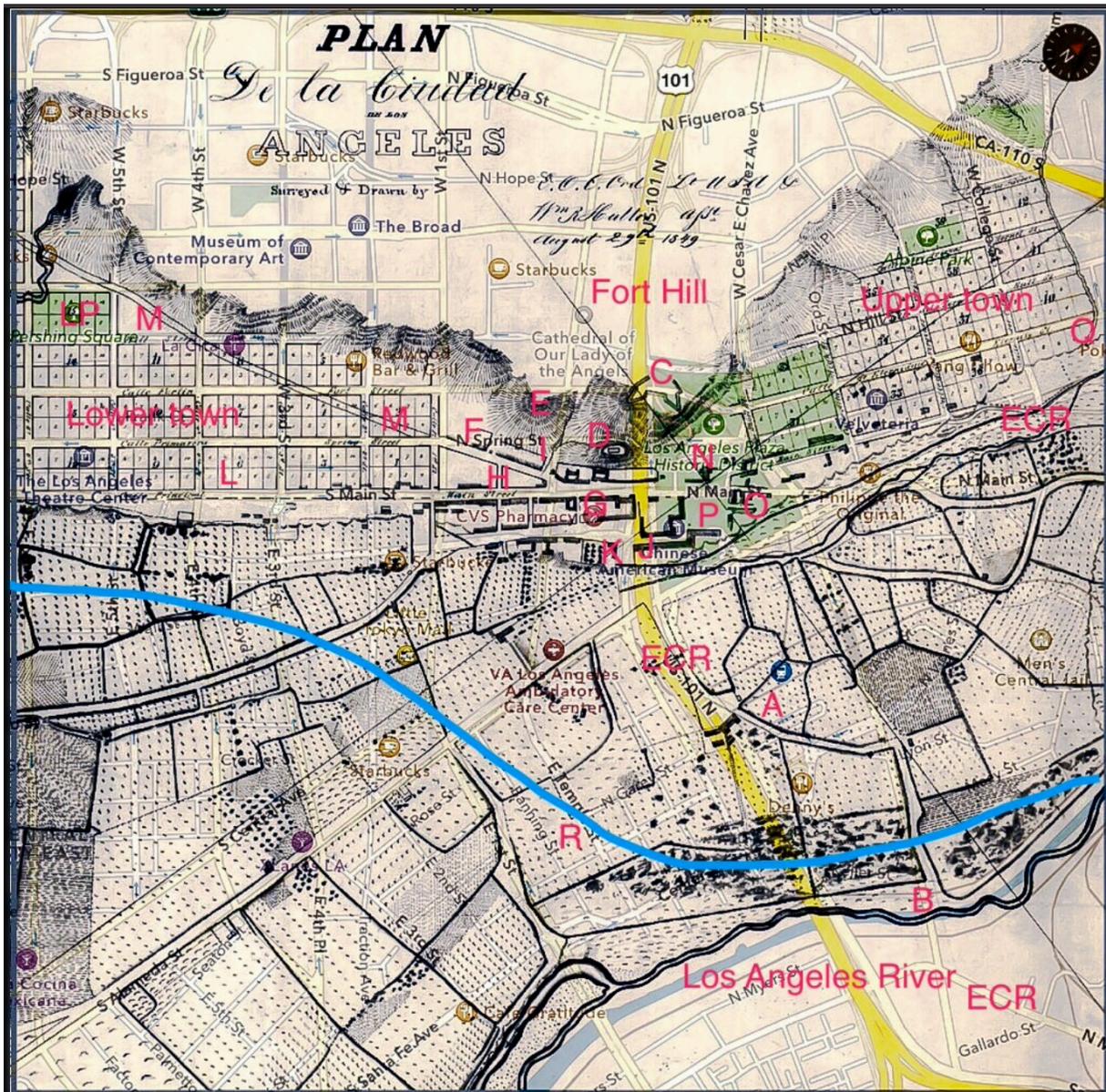
**Bridget "Biddy" Mason is associated with the Historic Resources Associated with African Americans in Los Angeles Multi-Property Submission (MPS). It was approved and listed on the National Register of Historic Places on March 17, 2009.**



Map Drawing Los Angeles Circa 1847



Central Church Plaza, Los Angeles, Circa 1869



Map of Los Angeles, Circa 1890



Map Los Angeles Circa 1890



Aerial Map Los Angeles (Balloon) Circa 1920

**DEED.**

William M. Buffum

and  
James T. Burns.

TO  
Biddy Mason

Dated November 28<sup>th</sup> 1866

Filed for Record at request of

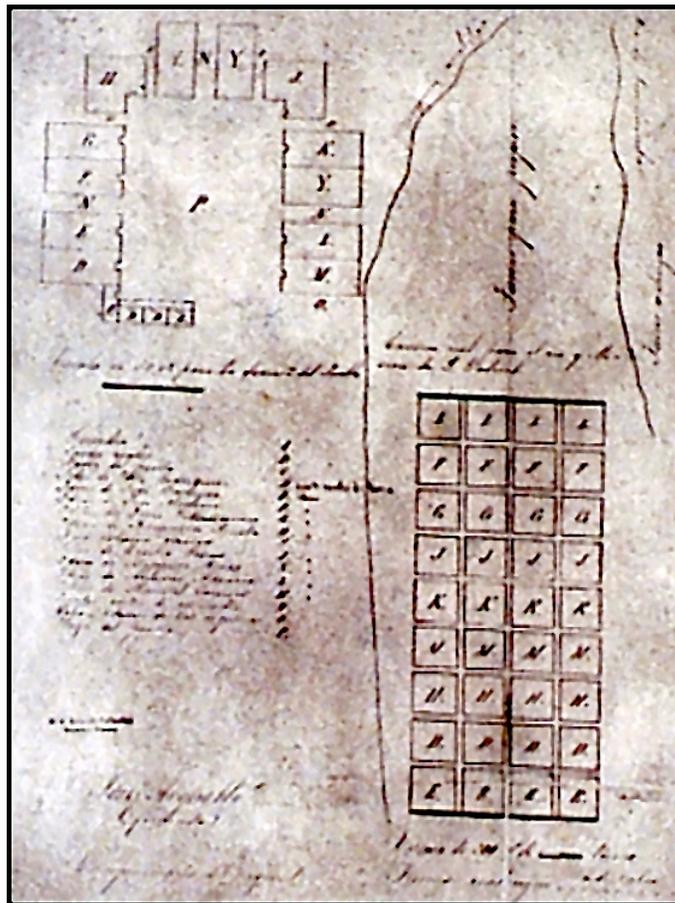
J. P. Mason

Bank of Cal. D. 1867

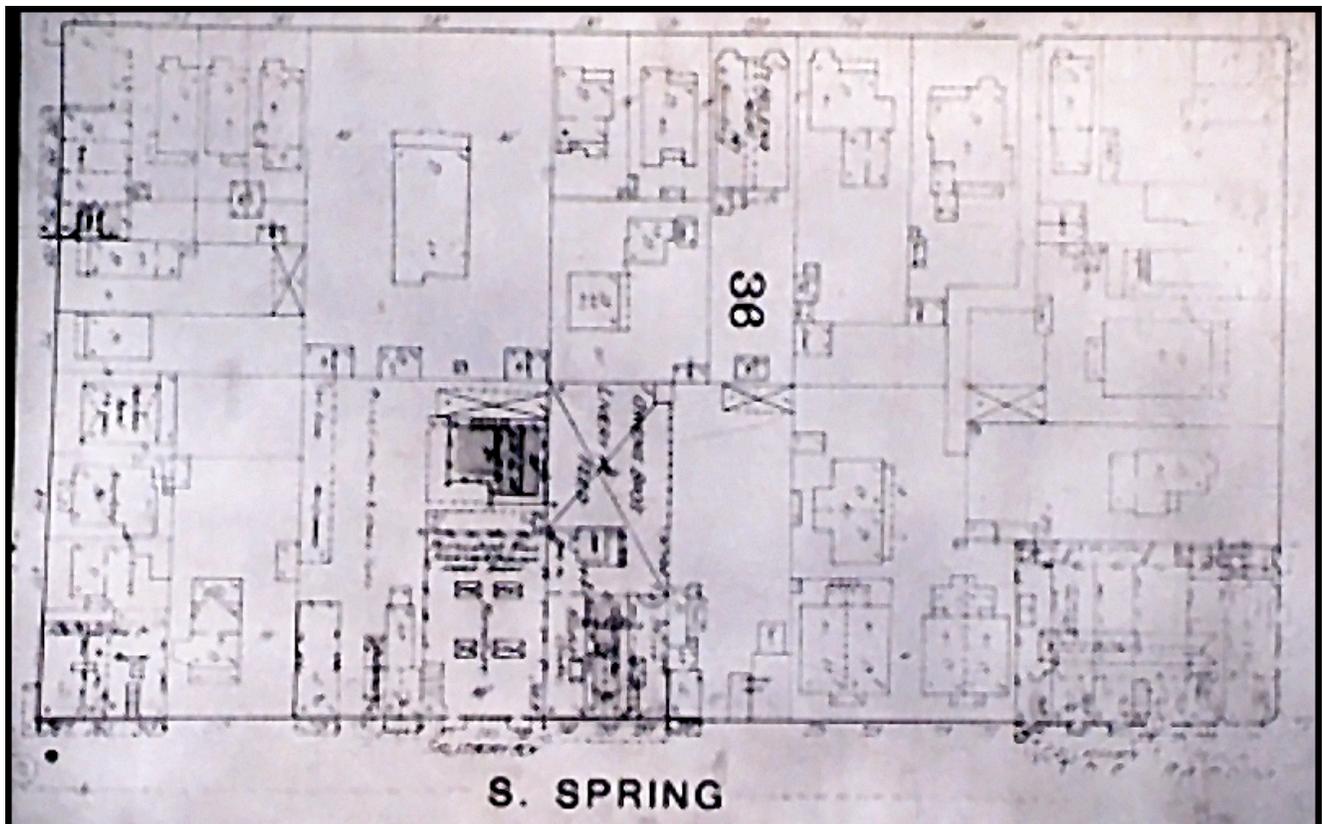
at 2.00 min. per 3 P. M.

J. P. Mason  
By S. H. Mason Deputy

Biddy Mason's Place, "A Passage of Time", Circa 1866  
Deed Broadway & 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Los Angeles



Map Broadway at 3<sup>rd</sup> St., Los Angeles, Circa 1890



Map Spring Street, Los Angeles, Circa 1890



Biddy Mason Monument, Spring Street, Los Angeles



A shot of Bidy Mason Park in Los Angeles on Spring Street.

JIM WINSTEAD/FLCKR/CC BY 2.0

## Mormonism and slavery

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### From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

“The [Latter Day Saint movement](#) has had varying and conflicting teachings on [slavery](#). Early converts were initially from the [Northern United States](#) and [opposed slavery](#),<sup>[1]</sup> believing they were supported by Mormon scripture. After the church base moved to the [slave state](#) of [Missouri](#) and gained [Southern](#) converts, church leaders began to own slaves. New scriptures were [revealed](#) teaching against interfering with the slaves of others. A few slave owners joined the church, and took their slaves with them to [Nauvoo, Illinois](#), although [Illinois](#) was a [free state](#).

After Joseph Smith's death, the church split. The largest contingent followed [Brigham Young](#), who supported slavery, allowing enslaved men and women to be brought to the territory but prohibiting the enslavement of their descendants and requiring their consent before any move and became [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#) (LDS Church). A smaller contingent followed [Joseph Smith III](#), who opposed slavery, and became the [Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints](#) (RLDS). Young led his followers to Utah, where he led the efforts to legalize [slavery in the Utah Territory](#). Brigham Young taught that slavery was ordained of God and taught that the [Republican Party's](#) efforts to abolish slavery went against the decrees of God and would eventually fail. He also encouraged members to participate in the Indian slave trade.

Teachings on slavery Mormon scripture simultaneously denounces both slavery and abolitionism in general, teaching that it was not right for men to be in bondage to each other, but that one should not interfere with the slaves of others. While in Missouri, Joseph Smith defended slavery, arguing that the Old Testament taught that blacks were cursed with servitude, a belief that was common in America at the time. While promoting the legality of slavery, the church consistently taught against the abuse of slaves and advocated for laws that provided protection. Critics said the church's definition of abuse of slaves was vague and difficult to enforce.

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**Curse of Cain and Ham** *Further information:* [Curse of Cain](#) and [Curse of Ham](#)



[Joseph Smith](#) justified slavery using the [Curse of Ham](#).

Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young referred to the [Curse of Ham](#) to justify slavery. According to the [Bible](#), after [Cain killed Abel](#), God cursed him and put a mark on him, ([Genesis 4:8-15](#)) although the Bible does not state the nature of the mark. In another biblical account, [Ham](#) discovered his father [Noah](#) drunk and naked in his tent. Because of this, Noah cursed Ham's son, [Canaan](#) to be "servants of servants". ([Genesis 9:20-27](#)) While nothing explicitly supports enslaving black Africans, one interpretation that was popular in the United States during the Atlantic slave trade was that the mark of Cain was black skin, and it was passed on through Canaan's descendants, who they believed were black Africans. They argued that because Canaan was cursed to be servants of servants, then they were justified in enslaving Canaan's descendants. By the 1800s, this interpretation was widely accepted in America, including among Mormons. An assistant president of the church, W. W. Phelps, wrote in a letter that Ham's wife was a descendant of Cain, and that the [Canaanites](#) were black Africans and covered by both curses.

In June 1830, [Joseph Smith began translating the Bible](#). Parts of it were canonized as the [Book of Moses](#) and accepted as official LDS scripture in 1880. It states that "the seed of Cain were black" ([Moses 7:22](#)). The Book of Moses also discusses a group of people called the Canaanites, who were also black ([Moses 7:8](#)). These Canaanites lived before the flood, and hence before the Biblical Canaan. Later, in 1835, Smith produced a work called the [Book of](#)

[Abraham](#). It relates the story of Pharaoh, a descendant of Ham, who was also a Canaanite by birth. Pharaoh could not have the priesthood because he was "of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood, "([Abraham 1:27](#)) and that all Egyptians descended from him ([Abraham 1:22](#)). The Book of Abraham also says the curse came from Noah ([Abraham 1:26](#)). This book was also later canonized as Mormon scripture.

In 1836, Smith taught that the Curse of Ham came from God, and that it demanded the legalization of slavery. He warned those who tried to interfere with slavery that God could do his own work. While Smith never reversed his opinion on the Curse of Ham, he did start expressing more anti-slavery positions. In 1844, Smith wrote his views as a candidate for president of the United States. The anti-slavery plank of his platform called for a gradual end to slavery by the year 1850. His plan called for the government to buy the freedom of slaves using money from the sale of public lands.

After the succession crisis, Brigham Young consistently argued slavery was a "divine institution," even after the [Emancipation Proclamation](#) was issued during the Civil War by President Abraham Lincoln. In the year following the Emancipation Proclamation, Young gave several discourses on slavery and characterized himself as neither an abolitionist nor a pro-slavery man. He based his position on the scriptural curses. He also used these curses to justify banning blacks from the priesthood and from holding public office. After Young, leaders did not use the curse of Cain to justify slavery, but this doctrine continued to be taught by President [John Taylor](#) and [Bruce R. McConkie](#). The LDS Church today does not support slavery and disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse.

Most modern scholars believe "Canaanites" to refer to people of [Semitic](#) origin, not black African. Most Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions also reject the teaching that Canaanites were black Africans.

## **Legality of slavery**



Young taught the [Emancipation Proclamation](#) went against the decrees of God and predicted it would eventually fail.

While Mormon scripture taught against slavery, it also taught the importance of upholding the law. Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young stated that the Mormons were not abolitionists.

In the [Book of Mormon](#), slavery was against the law. ([Mosiah 2:13](#) & [Alma 27:9](#)) The [Doctrine and Covenants](#) teaches that "it is not right that any man should be in bondage to another" (D&C [Section 101:79](#)), but it is unclear whether it applied to black servitude, since it was never used either for or against black slavery in early discourses on slavery. <sup>[28]:13</sup> The official position which was more often cited was the belief that one shouldn't interfere with slaves against the will of their masters, since it would cause unrest. (D&C [Section 134:12](#)) This explanation avoided taking a direct stance on slavery, and instead focused on following current laws. In general, Mormon teachings encouraged obeying, honoring and sustaining the laws of the land. ([Articles of Faith 1:12](#))

In 1836, Smith wrote a piece in the [Messenger and Advocate](#) which supported slavery and affirmed that it was God's will. He said that the Northerners had no right to tell the Southerners whether they could have slaves. He said that if slavery were evil, southern "men of piety" would have objected. He expressed concern that freed slaves would overrun the United States and violate chastity and virtue. He pointed to biblical stories of slavery, arguing that the prophets who owned slaves were inspired of God, and knew more than abolitionists. He said that blacks were under the curse of Ham to be servants, and warned those who sought to free blacks were going against the dictates of God. [Warren Parrish](#) and [Oliver Cowdery](#) made similar arguments. During this time the Mormons were based in the slave state of Missouri.

After the move to the free state of Illinois, Smith began expressing more abolitionist ideals. He argued that blacks should be given employment opportunities equal to whites. He believed that given equal chances as whites, blacks would become like whites. In his personal journal, he wrote that the slaves owned by [Mormons](#) should be brought "into a free country and set ... free— Educate them and give them equal rights." During Smith's 1844 campaign for president of the United States, he had advocated for the immediate abolition of slavery through compensation from money earned by the sale of public lands.

My cogitations, like Daniel's have for a long time troubled me, when I viewed the condition of men throughout the world, and more especially in this boasted realm, where the Declaration of Independence 'holds these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;' but at the same time some two or three millions of people are held as slaves for life, because the spirit in them is covered with a darker skin than ours.

— *History of the Church, Vol. 6, Ch. 8, p.197 - p.198* Smith was killed in 1844, the year of his presidential bid, resulting in a schism among his followers. After the schism, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (later known as the [Community of Christ](#)), one of the resulting sects, embraced abolitionist ideals. Its leader following the schism, [Joseph Smith III](#), was a "devotee" of [Abraham Lincoln](#) and supported the Republicans' charge to end slavery.

Under Brigham Young, the LDS Church continued to teach that slavery was ordained of God. After he helped [institute slavery in the Utah Territory](#), Young taught "inasmuch as we believe in the ordinances of God, in the Priesthood and order and decrees of God, we must believe in slavery". He argued that blacks needed to serve masters because they were not capable of ruling themselves, When blacks were treated right, Young contended that they were much better off as slaves than if they were free. Because of these benefits, Young argued that slavery brought the "true liberty" which God had designed. He taught that because slavery was decreed of God, man was not able to remove it. He criticized the Northerners for their attempts to free the

slaves contrary to the will of God and accused them of worshipping blacks. He opposed the [American Civil War](#), calling it useless and saying that the "for the cause of human improvement is not in the least advanced by the dreadful war which now convulses our unhappy country." After President Lincoln signed the [Emancipation Proclamation](#), Young prophesied that the attempts to free the slave would eventually fail.

**Relationship between master and slave** Slave owners complained that the Mormons were interfering with slaves, but the LDS Church denied such claims. In 1835, the Church issued an official statement that, because the [United States](#) government allowed slavery, the Church would not "interfere with bond-servants, neither preach the gospel to, nor baptize them contrary to the will and wish of their masters, nor meddle with or influence them in the least to cause them to be dissatisfied with their situations in this life, thereby jeopardizing the lives of men." This was later adopted as scripture. (D&C [Section 134:12](#)) This policy was changed in 1836, when Smith wrote that slaves should not be taught the gospel at all until after their masters were converted.

Church leaders taught that slaves should not be mistreated. In March 1842, Smith began studying some abolitionist literature, and stated, "it makes my blood boil within me to reflect upon the injustice, cruelty, and oppression of the rulers of the people. When will these things cease to be, and the Constitution and the laws again bear rule?"

Under Brigham Young, the Church also opposed mistreatment of slaves. Young urged moderation, not to treat Africans as beasts of the field, nor to elevate them to equality with the whites, which was against God's will. He criticized the Southerners for their abuse of slaves, and taught that mistreating slaves should be against the law: "If the Government of the United States, in Congress assembled, had the right to pass an anti-polygamy bill, they had also the right to pass a law that slaves should not be abused as they have been; they had also a right to make a law that negroes should be used like human beings, and not worse than dumb brutes. For their abuse of that race, the whites will be cursed, unless they repent." Later, as Utah sovereignty became a larger political issue, Young changed his stance on the

role of the federal government in preventing abuse, arguing against federal meddling in a State's sovereignty by stating "even if we treated our slaves in an oppressive manner, it is none of their business and they ought not to meddle with it."<sup>[39]</sup>

**In early Mormonism** *See also:* [\*\*Black people and early Mormonism\*\*](#)

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Initially, Church leaders avoided the topic of slavery. Most of the early converts of the church came from the northern United States and tended to be anti-slavery. These attitudes came into conflict with Southerners after they moved to Missouri.<sup>[4]</sup> In the summer of 1833 [W. W. Phelps](#) published an article in the church's newspaper, seeming to invite free black people into the state to become Mormons, and reflecting "in connection with the wonderful events of this age, much is doing towards abolishing slavery, and colonizing the blacks, in Africa." Outrage followed Phelps' comments, and he was forced to reverse his position. He said he was "misunderstood" and that free blacks would not be admitted into the Church. His reversal did not end the controversy. Missouri citizens accused Mormons of trying to interfere with their slaves. The Church denied such claims and began to teach against interfering with slaves and more pro-slavery rhetoric. Some slaves owners joined the church during this period. However, this did not end the controversy, and the church was forcibly expelled from Missouri.

By 1836, the church already had some slave owners and slaves as members. The rules established by the church for governing assemblies in the Kirtland Temple included attendees who were "bond or free, black or white." When abolitionists tried to solicit support from the Mormons, they had little success. Even though Illinois prohibited slavery, members who owned slaves took them along on the migration to Nauvoo. Nauvoo was reported to have 22 black members, including free and slave, between 1839–1843. The state of Illinois did not pass laws to free existing slaves in the region for some time.

One slave-owning family in Nauvoo was the Flake family. They owned a slave named [Green Flake](#). While building the [Nauvoo Temple](#), families were asked to donate one day in ten to work on the temple. The Flake family used Green's slave labor to fulfill their tithing requirement.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - *See also:* [History of slavery in Utah](#) After Smith's death in 1844, the church went through a [succession](#)

[crisis](#), and split into multiple groups. The main body of the church, which would become the LDS Church, followed [Brigham Young](#) who was significantly more pro-slavery than Smith. Young led the Mormons to Utah and formed a theocratic government, under which slavery was legalized and the Indian slave trade was supported. Young promoted slavery, teaching that blacks had been cursed to be "servants of servants" and that Indians needed slavery as part of a process of overcoming a curse placed on their [Lamanite](#) ancestors.

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**Slavery during westward migration** When church leaders asked for men from the members of Mississippi to help with the westward emigration, they sent four slaves with [John Brown](#) who was given the task to "take charge of them." Two of the slaves died, but Green Flake later joined the company, making it a total of three slaves arriving in Utah. More slaves arrived as property of members in later companies. By 1850, 100 blacks had arrived, the majority of whom were slaves. Some slaves escaped during the trek west, including one large contingent that escaped the Redd family during the night in Kansas, but six of the slaves were not able to escape and continued with the family to Utah Territory.<sup>[52]</sup> When William Dennis stopped in [Tabor, Iowa](#), members of the [Underground Railroad](#) helped five of his slaves escape, and despite a manhunt, they were able to reach freedom in Canada.

**Ambiguous Period (1847–1852)** Mormons arrived in Utah in the middle of the [Mexican–American War](#); they ignored the Mexican ban on slavery. Instead, they recognized slavery as custom and consistent with the Mormon view on blacks.<sup>[54]</sup>

After the [Compromise of 1850](#), Congress granted the Utah Territory the right to decide whether it would allow slavery based on [popular sovereignty](#). Many prominent members of the church were slave owners, including [Abraham O. Smoot](#) and [Charles C. Rich](#).



Apostle Charles C. Rich, a prominent Mormon slave owner. The territory did not pass any laws defining the legality of slavery, and the LDS Church tried to remain neutral. In 1851, apostle [Orson Hyde](#) said that because many church members were coming from the South with slaves, that the church's position on the matter needed to be defined. He went on to say that there was no law in Utah prohibiting or authorizing slavery and that the decisions on the topic were to remain between slaves and their masters. He also clarified that individuals' choices on the matter were not in any way a reflection of the church as a whole or its doctrine.

Once in Utah, Mormons continued to buy and sell slaves as property. Church members used their slaves to perform labor required for tithing, and sometimes donated them to the church as property. Both Young and [Heber C. Kimball](#) used the slave labor that had been donated in tithing before granting freedom to the people.”

## In San Bernardino (1851–1856)



[Biddy Mason](#) was one of 14 blacks who sued for freedom after being illegally held captive in San Bernardino See also: [History of San Bernardino, California § Mormon San Bernardino](#)

In 1851, a company of 437 Mormons under direction of [Amasa M. Lyman](#) and [Charles C. Rich](#) of the [Quorum of the Twelve](#) Apostles settled at what is now [San Bernardino, California](#). This first company took 26 slaves, and more slaves were brought over as San Bernardino continued to grow. Since California was a free state, the slaves should have been freed when they entered. However, slavery was openly tolerated in San Bernardino. Many slaves wanted to be free,<sup>[61]</sup> but were still under the control of their masters and ignorant of the laws and their rights. Judge [Benjamin Hayes](#) freed 14 slaves who had belonged to Robert Smith. Other slaves were freed by their masters.

**Indian slave trade** See also: [Slavery among the indigenous peoples of the Americas](#) As historian Max Perry Mueller has written, the Mormons participated extensively in the Indian slave trade as part of their efforts to convert and control Utah's Native American population.<sup>[63]</sup> Mormons also were confronted in Utah with the practice of the Indian slave trade among regional tribes; it was very prevalent in the area. Tribes often took captives from enemies in raids or warfare, and used them as slaves or sold them. As the Mormons began expanding into Indian territory, they often had conflicts with the local residents. After expanding into [Utah Valley](#), Young issued the

extermination order against the [Timpanogos](#), resulting in the [Battle at Fort Utah](#). The Mormons took many Timpanogos women and children into slavery. Some were able to escape, but many died in slavery. After expanding into Parowan, Mormons attacked a group of Indians, killing around 25 men and taking the women and children as slaves.



A statue of Chief [Walkara](#), a Mormon slave trader. At the encouragement of Mormon leaders, their pioneers started participating in the Indian slave trade. Chief [Walkara](#), one of the main slave traders in the region, was baptized in the church. In 1851, Apostle [George A. Smith](#) gave [Chief Peteetneet](#) and Walkara talking papers that certified "it is my desire that they should be treated as friends, and as they wish to Trade horses, Buckskins and Piede children, we hope them success and prosperity and good bargains."

As in other regions in the Southwest, the Mormons justified enslaving Indians in order to teach them Christianity and achieve their salvation. Mormon theology teaches that Indians are descendants in part from the [Lamanites](#), an ancient group of people described in the Book of Mormon that had fallen into apostasy and had been cursed. When Young visited the members in Parowan, he encouraged them to "buy up the Lamanite children as fast as they could". He argued that by doing so, they could educate them and teach them the Gospel, and in a few generations the Lamanites would become "white and delightsome", as prophesied in Nephi.

The Mormons strongly opposed the New Mexican slave trade. Young sought to put an end to the Mexican slave trade. Many of Walkara's band were upset by the interruption with the Mexican slave trade. In one graphic incident, Ute Indian Chief Arrapine, a brother of Walkara, insisted that because the Mormons had stopped the Mexicans from buying certain children, the Mormons were obligated to purchase them. In his book, [Forty](#)

[Years Among the Indians](#), [Daniel Jones](#) wrote, "[s]everal of us were present when he took one of these children by the heels and dashed its brains out on the hard ground, after which he threw the body towards us, telling us we had no hearts, or we would have bought it and saved its life."

### **Legal period (1852–1862)**



Brigham Young promoted slavery as a consequence of the [Curse of Ham](#).

One of the Mexican slave traders, Don Pedro Leon Lujan, was charged with trading with the Indians without a license, including Indian slaves. His property was seized and his slaves distributed to Mormon families in Manti. He sued the government, charging that he received unequal treatment because he wasn't Mormon. The courts sided against him, but noted that Indian slavery had never been officially legalized in Utah.

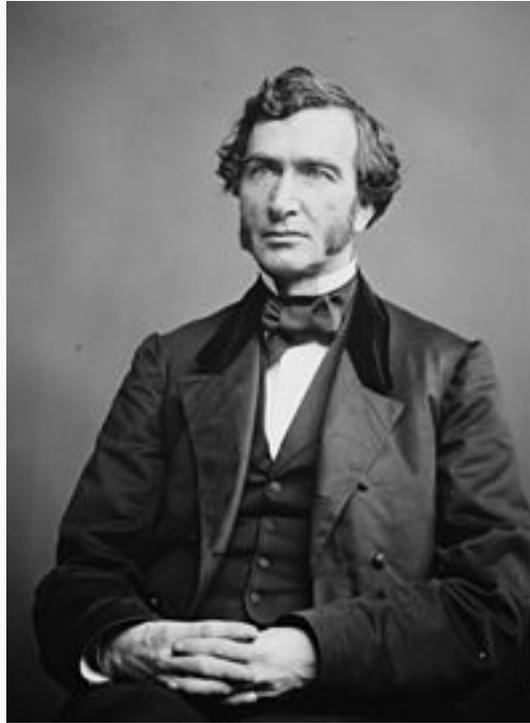
On January 5, 1852, Young, who was also [Territorial Governor of Utah](#), addressed the joint session of the [Utah Territorial Legislature](#). He discussed the ongoing trial of Don Pedro Leon Lujan and the importance of explicitly indicating the true policy for slavery in Utah. He explained that although he didn't think people should be treated as property, he felt because Indians were so low and degraded, that transferring them to "the more favored portions of the human race", would be a benefit and relief. He said this was superior to drudgery of Mexican slavery, because the Mexicans were "scarcely superior" to the Indians. He argued that it is proper for persons thus purchased to owe a debt to the man or woman who saved them, and that it

was "necessary that some law should provide for the suitable regulations under which all such indebtedness should be defrayed". He argued that this type of service was necessary and honorable to improve the condition of Indians.

He also supported African slavery and said that "Inasmuch as we believe in the Bible, inasmuch as we believe in the ordinances of God, in the Priesthood and order and decrees of God, we must believe in slavery." He argued that the blacks had the [Curse of Ham](#) placed on them which made them servants of servants and that he was not authorized to remove it. He also argued that blacks needed to serve masters because they are not capable of ruling themselves, and that when treated right, blacks were much better off as slaves than if they were free. However, he urged moderation, not to treat Africans as beasts of the field, nor to elevate them to equality with the whites, which he believed was against the will of God. He said that this was the principle of true liberty according to the designs of God. On January 27, [Orson Pratt](#) objected to Young's remarks, saying it was not man's duty to enforce Cain's curse, and that slavery had not been authorized by God. Young responded that the Lord had revealed these instructions to him. After this, the Utah legislature passed an [Act in Relation to Service](#), which officially legalized slavery in Utah Territory, and a month later passed an [Act for the relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners](#), which specifically dealt with Indian slavery.

The acts had a few special provisions unique to slavery in Utah, reflecting Mormon beliefs. Masters were required by law to correct and punish their slaves, which particularly worried Republicans in Congress. Black slaves brought into the Territory had to come "of their own free will and choice"; and they could not be sold or taken from the Territory against their will. Indian slaves just had to be in possession of a white person, which Republicans in Congress complained was too broad. Indian slavery was limited to twenty years, while black slavery was limited to not be longer "than will satisfy the debt due his [master]." Several unique provisions were included which terminated the owner's contract in the event that the master neglected to feed, clothe, shelter, or otherwise abused the slave, or attempted to take them from the Territory against their will. Black slaves, but not Indian slaves, were freed if the master had sexual intercourse with them.

Some schooling was also required for slaves, with blacks requiring less schooling than Indians. Despite the unique provisions in Utah, many black slaves received the same treatment as in the South. According to former slave Alexander Bankhead, the slaves were "far from being happy" and longed for their freedom.



[Justin Smith Morrill](#) attacked the Mormon belief in slavery

Mormons continued taking Indian children from their families long after the slave traders left and even began to actively solicit children from Paiute parents. They also began selling Indian slaves to each other. By 1853, each of the hundred households in Parowan had one or more Paiute children. Indian slaves were used for both domestic and manual labor. In 1857,

Representative [Justin Smith Morrill](#) estimated that there were 400 Indian slaves in Utah. Richard Kitchen has identified at least 400 Indian slaves taken into Mormon homes, but estimates even more went unrecorded because of the high mortality rate of Indian slaves. Many of them tried to escape.

Brigham Young opposed slaves who wanted to escape their masters. This was enforced by Utah laws. When Dan, a slave, tried to escape his master, William Camp, the courts upheld that Dan was Camp's property and could not escape. Dan was later sold to Thomas Williams for \$800 and then to William Hooper.

The Mormon position of slavery was often criticized and condemned by anti-slavery groups. In 1856, the key plank of the [Republican Party's platform](#) was "to prohibit in the territories those twin relics of barbarism, polygamy and slavery". While considering appropriations for Utah Territory, Representative [Justin Smith Morrill](#) criticized the LDS Church for its laws on slavery. He said that under the Mormon patriarchy, slavery took a new shape. He criticized the use of the term servants instead of slaves and the requirement for Mormon masters to "correct and punish" their "servants". He expressed concern that Mormons might be trying to increase the number of slaves in the state.<sup>[14]</sup> [Horace Greeley](#) also criticized the Mormon position on slavery and general apathy towards the welfare of black people.

**Emancipation (1862–present)** When the [American Civil War](#) broke out, there is some indication that some Mormon slave owners returned to southern states because they were worried that they would lose their slaves. On June 19, 1862 Congress prohibited slavery in all US territories, and on January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The slaves of the Mormons were incredibly joyful when the news reached that they were free, and many left Utah for other states, particularly California.

After the slaves were freed, Young gave several discourses on slavery. He characterized himself as neither an abolitionist nor a pro-slavery man.<sup>[6]</sup> He criticized both the South for their abuse of slaves and the North for their alleged worshipping of blacks. He opposed the [American Civil War](#), calling it useless and that the "cause of human improvement is not in the least advanced" by trying to free the slaves. He predicted the Emancipation Proclamation would fail.

**Evaluations by historians** Leaders of the church have had varying opinions on slavery, and many Mormon historians have discussed the issue.

Harris and Bringhurst noted that early Mormons wanted to stay neutral or aloof of slavery as a political issue, probably because of the strong Mormon presence in Missouri, which was then a slave state. In 1833, Joseph Smith stated that "it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another," but most historians agree that this statement referred to debt and other types of economic bondage. In 1835, Joseph Smith wrote that missionaries should not baptize slaves against the will of their masters. According to Harris and Bringhurst, Joseph Smith made these statements to

distance the church from abolitionism, and not to align with pro-slavery positions, but it came across as supporting slavery. Church headquarters were in Ohio, where abolitionism and anti-abolitionism were polarized many citizens. After members of the church were expelled from Missouri to Illinois, Smith changed to an antislavery position, which he held until his death in 1844. More new converts were from free states and a handful of black people joined the church, which may have contributed to Smith's change in position.

John G. Turner writes that Brigham Young's stance on slavery was contradictory. In 1851 he opposed abolitionism, seeing it as politically radical, yet he did not want to "lay a foundation" for slavery. In an 1852 speech, Young was against slavery, but also against equal rights for blacks. Two weeks after the speech, Young pushed to have slavery formally recognized in the Utah territory, stating that he was for slavery, and said that a belief in slavery naturally followed from believing in God's priesthood and decrees. Young mimicked proslavery apologetics when he argued that slaves were better off than European workers and that slavery was mutually beneficial to slave and master. Young feared that abolishing slavery would result in blacks ruling over whites. At the end of 1852, Young commented that he was glad the black population was small. Young was generous with the black servants and slaves in his life, but that did not change their lack of rights. According to Turner, Young's position on slavery is unsurprising given the racial context of the time, as discrimination was common in white American Protestant groups. Turner does note that Young's theological justification for racial discrimination set a discriminatory precedent that his successors believed they ought to perpetuate.

According to W. Paul Reeve, Brigham Young was the driving force behind the 1852 legislation to solidify slavery in the Utah territory, and that the common fear of "interracial mixing" motivated Young. Reeve also states that Mormons were surprised by the Native American slave trade from the Utes. The slave traders would insist that the Mormons buy slaves, sometimes killing a child to motivate their purchase. The 1852 law tried to change slavery into indentured servitude, requiring Mormons with Native American children to register them with their local judge and provide some education for them; the law did not work well in practice. Reeve explains that while Joseph Smith

saw a potential for black equality, Young believed that blacks were inferior to whites by divine design.

## In the Community of Christ

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Joseph Smith III opposed slavery.

[Joseph Smith III](#), son of Joseph Smith, founded the [Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#) in 1860, now known as the [Community of Christ](#). Smith was a vocal advocate of abolishing the slave trade, and followed [Owen Lovejoy](#), an anti-slavery congressman from Illinois, and [Abraham Lincoln](#). He joined the Republican party and advocated for their antislavery politics. He rejected the fugitive slave law, and openly stated that he would assist slaves trying to escape. While he was a strong opponent of slavery, he still viewed whites as superior to blacks, and held that they must not "sacrifice the dignity, honor and prestige that may be rightfully attached to the ruling races."

**In the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint** The [Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints](#) (FLDS Church) broke from the LDS Church in the early 20th century. Although it emerged well after slavery was made illegal in the United States, there have been several accusations of slavery. On April 20, 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor assessed fines totaling \$1.96 million against a group of FLDS Church members, including Lyle Jeffs, a brother of the church's controversial leader, [Warren Jeffs](#), for alleged child slave labor violations during the church's 2012 pecan harvest at an orchard near Hurricane, Utah. The church

has been suspected of trafficking underage women across state lines, as well as across the [US–Canada](#) and [US–Mexico borders](#), for the purpose of sometimes involuntary [plural marriage](#) and sexual slavery. The FLDS is suspected by the [Royal Canadian Mounted Police](#) of having trafficked more than 30 under-age girls from Canada to the United States between the late 1990s and 2006 to be entered into polygamous marriages. RCMP spokesman Dan Moskaluk said of the FLDS's activities: "In essence, it's human trafficking in connection with illicit sexual activity." According to the [Vancouver Sun](#), it's unclear whether or not Canada's anti-human trafficking statute can be effectively applied against the FLDS's pre-2005 activities, because the statute may not be able to be applied retroactively. An earlier three-year-long investigation by local authorities in British Columbia into allegations of sexual abuse, human trafficking, and forced marriages by the FLDS resulted in no charges, but did result in legislative change.

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## History of Los Angeles

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### From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **History of [Los Angeles](#)** began when 11 settlers established a settlement that changed little in the three decades after 1848, when California became part of the [United States](#). Great changes came from the completion of the [Santa Fe railroad](#) line from [Chicago](#) to Los Angeles in 1885. “Overlanders” flooded in, mostly White [Protestants](#) from the Lower [Midwest](#) and [South](#).

Los Angeles had a strong economic base in farming, oil, tourism, real estate and movies. It grew rapidly with many suburban areas inside and outside the city limits. [Its motion picture industry](#) made the city world-famous, and [World War II](#) brought new industry, especially high-tech aircraft construction. Politically the city was moderately conservative, with a weak labor union sector.

Since the 1960s, growth has slowed—and traffic delays have become infamous. Los Angeles was a pioneer in freeway development as the public transit system deteriorated. New arrivals, especially from [Mexico](#) and [Asia](#), have transformed the demographic base since the 1960s. Old industries have declined, including farming, oil, military and aircraft, but tourism, entertainment and high-tech remain strong.

### Early history

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By 3000 B.C., the area was occupied by the [Hokan](#)-speaking people of the [Milling Stone Period](#) who fished, hunted sea mammals, and gathered wild seeds. They were later replaced by migrants — possibly fleeing drought in the [Great Basin](#) — who spoke a [Uto-Aztecan language](#) called [Tongva](#).

The [Tongva](#) people called the Los Angeles region **Yaa** in [Tongva](#).

By the time of the arrival of the Spanish in the 18th century A.D., there were 250,000 to 300,000 native people in California and 5,000 in the Los Angeles basin. Since contact with Europeans, the people in what became Los Angeles were known as Gabrielinos and Fernandinos, after the missions associated with them.

The land occupied and used by the Gabrielinos covered about 4,000 square miles. It included the enormous floodplain drained by the [Los Angeles](#) and [San Gabriel](#) rivers and the southern [Channel Islands](#), including the [Santa](#)

[Barbara](#), [San Clemente](#), [Santa Catalina](#), and [San Nicolas](#) Islands. They were part of a sophisticated group of trading partners that included the [Chumash](#) to the west, the [Cahuilla](#) and [Mojave](#) to the east, and the [Juaneños](#) and [Luiseños](#) to the south. Their trade extended to the [Colorado River](#) and included [slavery](#).

The lives of the Gabrielinos were governed by a set of religious and cultural practices that included belief in creative supernatural forces. They worshipped [Chinigchinix](#), a creator god, and [Chukit](#), a female virgin god. Their Great Morning Ceremony was based on a belief in the afterlife. In a purification ritual, they drank [tolquache](#), a [hallucinogenic](#) made from [jimson weed](#) and salt water. Their language was called Kizh or Kij, and they practiced cremation.

Generations before the arrival of the Europeans, the Gabrielinos had identified and lived in the best sites for human occupation. The survival and success of Los Angeles depended greatly on the presence of a nearby and prosperous Gabrielino village called Yaanga. Its residents provided the colonists with seafood, fish, bowls, pelts, and baskets. For pay, they dug ditches, hauled water, and provided domestic help. They often intermarried with the Mexican colonists.

### **Spanish era: 1769-1821**

*Main articles: [Pueblo de Los Angeles](#) and [Los Angeles Pobladores](#)*



The "[Old Plaza Church](#)" facing the Plaza, 1869. The brick reservoir in the middle of the [Plaza](#) was the original terminus of the [Zanja Madre](#).

In 1542 and 1602, the first Europeans to visit the region were Captain [Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo](#) and Captain [Sebastián Vizcaíno](#). It was another 166 years before another European visited the region.

**Plans for the pueblo** Although Los Angeles was a town that was founded by Mexican families from [Sonora](#), it was the Spanish governor of California who named the settlement.

In 1777, Governor [Felipe de Neve](#) toured [Alta California](#) and decided to establish [civic pueblos](#) for the support of the military [presidios](#). The new pueblos reduced the secular power of the [missions](#) by reducing the dependency of the military on them. At the same time, they promoted the development of industry and agriculture.

Governor de Neve identified [Santa Barbara](#), [San Jose](#), and Los Angeles as sites for his new pueblos. His plans for them closely followed a set of Spanish city-planning laws contained in the [Laws of the Indies](#) promulgated by [King Philip II](#) in 1573. Those laws were responsible for laying the foundations of the largest cities in the region at the time, including Los Angeles, [San Francisco](#), [Tucson](#), [San Antonio](#), [Sonoma](#), [Monterey](#), [Santa Fe](#), and [Laredo](#).

The Spanish system called for an open central plaza, surrounded by a fortified church, administrative buildings, and streets laid out in a grid, defining rectangles of limited size to be used for farming (*suertes*) and residences (*solares*).

It was in accordance with such precise planning—specified in the Law of the Indies—that Governor de Neve founded the pueblo of [San Jose de Guadalupe](#), California's first [municipality](#), on the great plain of [Santa Clara](#) on 29 November 1777.

**Pobladores** [Los Angeles Pobladores](#) The Pobladores ("townspeople") is the name given to the 44 original settlers, 22 adults and 22 children from Sonora, who founded the town. Of the 44, 20 of the settlers were of African American or Native American descent, making LA one of the few cities in the United States which such a diverse beginning. In December 1777, Viceroy [Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa](#) and Commandant General [Teodoro de Croix](#) gave approval for the founding of a civic municipality at Los Angeles and a new *presidio* at Santa Barbara.

Croix put the California lieutenant governor [Fernando Rivera y Moncada](#) in charge of recruiting colonists for the new settlements. He was originally instructed to recruit 55 soldiers, 22 settlers with families and 1,000 head of

livestock that included horses for the military. After an exhausting search that took him to [Mazatlán](#), Rosario, and Durango, Rivera y Moncada only recruited 12 settlers and 45 soldiers. Like the people of most towns in [New Spain](#) they were a mix of Indian and Spanish backgrounds. The [Quechan Revolt](#) killed 95 settlers and soldiers, including Rivera y Moncada.

In his *Reglamento*, the newly baptized Indians were no longer to reside in the mission but live in their traditional *rancherías* (villages). Governor de Neve's new plans for the Indians' role in his new town drew instant disapproval from the mission priests.

Zúñiga's party arrived at the mission on 18 July 1781. Because they had arrived with [smallpox](#), they immediately were quarantined a short distance away from the mission. Members of the other party arrived at different times by August. They made their way to Los Angeles and probably received their land before September.

**Founding** The official date for the founding of the city is September 4, 1781. The families had arrived from [New Spain](#) earlier in 1781, in two groups, and some of them had most likely been working on their assigned plots of land since the early summer.

The name first given to the settlement is debated. Historian Doyce B. Nunis has said that the Spanish named it "El Pueblo de la Reina de los Angeles" ("The Town of the Queen of the Angels"). For proof, he pointed to a map dated 1785, where that phrase was used. [Frank Weber](#), the diocesan archivist, replied, however, that the name given by the founders was "El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles de [Porciuncula](#)", or "the town of [Our Lady of the Angels](#) of Porciuncula." and that the map was in error.

**Early pueblo** The town grew as soldiers and other settlers came into town and stayed. In 1784 a chapel was built on the [Plaza](#). The *pobladores* were given title to their land two years later. By 1800, there were 29 buildings that surrounded the Plaza, flat-roofed, one-story adobe buildings with thatched roofs made of tule. By 1821, Los Angeles had grown into a self-sustaining farming community, the largest in Southern California.

Each settler received four rectangles of land, *suertes*, for farming, two irrigated plots and two dry ones. When the settlers arrived, the Los Angeles floodplain was heavily wooded with willows and oaks. The [Los Angeles River](#) flowed all year. Wildlife was plentiful, including deer and black bears, and even an occasional [grizzly bear](#). There were abundant wetlands and swamps. [Steelhead trout](#) and [salmon](#) swam the rivers.

The first settlers built a [water system consisting of ditches \(\*zanjas\*\)](#) leading from the river through the middle of town and into the farmlands. Indians were employed to haul fresh drinking water from a special pool farther upstream. The city was first known as a producer of fine wine grapes. The raising of cattle and the commerce in tallow and hides came later.

Because of the great economic potential for Los Angeles, the demand for Indian labor grew rapidly. Yaanga began attracting Indians from the Channel Islands and as far away as [San Diego](#) and [San Luis Obispo](#). The village began to look like a refugee camp. Unlike the missions, the *pobladores* paid Indians for their labor. In exchange for their work as farm workers, *vaqueros*, ditch diggers, water haulers, and domestic help; they were paid in clothing and other goods as well as cash and alcohol. The *pobladores* bartered with them for prized sea-otter and seal pelts, sieves, trays, baskets, mats, and other woven goods. This commerce greatly contributed to the economic success of the town and the attraction of other Indians to the city.

During the 1780s, [San Gabriel Mission](#) became the object of an Indian revolt. The mission had expropriated all the suitable farming land; the Indians found themselves abused and forced to work on lands that they once owned. A young Indian healer, [Toypurina](#), began touring the area, preaching against the injustices suffered by her people. She won over four *rancherías* and led them in an attack on the mission at San Gabriel. The soldiers were able to defend the mission, and arrested 17, including Toypurina.

In 1787, Governor [Pedro Fages](#) outlined his "Instructions for the Corporal Guard of the Pueblo of Los Angeles." The instructions included rules for employing Indians, not using corporal punishment, and protecting the Indian *rancherías*. As a result, Indians found themselves with more freedom to choose between the benefits of the missions and the pueblo-associated *rancherías*.

In 1795, Sergeant Pablo Cota led an expedition from the [Simi Valley](#) through the [Conejo-Calabasitas region](#) and into the [San Fernando Valley](#). His party visited the *rancho* of Francisco Reyes. They found the local Indians hard at work as *vaqueros* and caring for crops. Padre Vincente de Santa Maria was traveling with the party and made these observations:

All of pagandom (Indians) is fond of the pueblo of Los Angeles, of the rancho of Reyes, and of the ditches (water system). Here we see nothing but pagans, clad in shoes, with sombreros and blankets, and serving as muleteers to the settlers and rancheros, so that if it were not for the gentiles there were neither pueblos nor ranches. These pagan Indians care neither for the missions nor for the missionaries.

Not only economic ties but also marriage drew many Indians into the life of the pueblo. In 1784, only three years after the founding, the first recorded marriages in Los Angeles took place. The two sons of settler Basilio Rosas, Maximo and José Carlos, married two young Indian women, María Antonia and María Dolores.

The construction on the [Plaza of La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Los Ángeles](#) took place between 1818 and 1822, much of it with Indian labor. The new church completed Governor de Neve's planned transition of authority from mission to pueblo. The *angelinos* no longer had to make the bumpy 11-mile (18 km) ride to Sunday Mass at Mission San Gabriel.

In 1820, the route of [El Camino Viejo](#) was established from Los Angeles, over the mountains to the north and up the west side of the [San Joaquin Valley](#) to the east side of [San Francisco Bay](#).

**Mexican era: 1821-1848 Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821** was celebrated with great festivity throughout Alta California. No longer subjects of the king, people were now *ciudadanos*, citizens with rights under the law. In the plazas of Monterey, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and other settlements, people swore allegiance to the new government, the Spanish flag was lowered, and the flag of independent Mexico raised.

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Independence brought other advantages, including economic growth. There was a corresponding increase in population as more Indians were assimilated and others arrived from America, Europe, and other parts of Mexico. Before

1820, there were just 650 people in the pueblo. By 1841, the population nearly tripled to 1,680.

**Secularization of the missions** During the rest of the 1820s, the agriculture and cattle ranching expanded as did the trade in hides and tallow. The new church was completed, and the political life of the city developed. Los Angeles was separated from Santa Barbara administration. The system of ditches which provided water from the river was rebuilt. In 1827 [Jonathan Temple](#) and John Rice opened the first [general store](#) in the pueblo, soon followed by J. D. Leandry. Trade and commerce further increased with the [secularization of the California missions](#) by the [Mexican Congress](#) in 1833. Extensive mission lands suddenly became available to government officials, ranchers, and land speculators. The governor made more than 800 land grants during this period, including a [grant of over 33,000-acres](#) in 1839 to [Francisco Sepúlveda](#) which was later developed as the westside of Los Angeles.

Much of this progress, however, bypassed the Indians of the traditional villages who were not assimilated into the *mestizo* culture. Being regarded as minors who could not think for themselves, they were increasingly marginalized and relieved of their land titles, often by being drawn into debt or alcohol.

In 1834, [Governor Pico](#) was married to Maria Ignacio Alvarado in the Plaza church. It was attended by the entire population of the pueblo, 800 people, plus hundreds from elsewhere in Alta California. In 1835, the Mexican Congress declared Los Angeles a city, making it the official capital of Alta California. It was now the region's leading city.

The same period also saw the arrival of many foreigners from the United States and Europe. They played a pivotal role in the U.S. takeover. Early California settler [John Bidwell](#) included several historical figures in his recollection of people he knew in March, 1845.

"It then had probably two hundred and fifty people, of whom I recall Don [Abel Stearns](#), [John Temple](#), Captain Alexander Bell, [William Wolfskill](#), [Lemuel Carpenter](#), [David W. Alexander](#); also of Mexicans, [Pio Pico](#) (governor), Don [Juan Bandini](#), and others."

Upon arriving in Los Angeles in 1831, [Jean-Louis Vignes](#) bought 104 acres (0.42 km<sup>2</sup>) of land located between the original Pueblo and the banks of the [Los Angeles River](#). He planted a vineyard and prepared to make wine. He named his property *El Aliso* after the centuries-old tree found near the entrance. The grapes available at the time, of the [Mission variety](#), were brought to Alta California by the [Franciscan](#) Brothers at the end of the 18th century. They grew well and yielded large quantities of wine, but Jean-Louis Vignes was not satisfied with the results. Therefore, he decided to import better vines from Bordeaux: [Cabernet Sauvignon](#), [Cabernet Franc](#), and [Sauvignon blanc](#). In 1840, Jean-Louis Vignes made the first recorded shipment of California wine. The Los Angeles market was too small for his production, and he loaded a shipment on the *Monsoon*, bound for Northern California. By 1842, he made regular shipments to [Santa Barbara](#), [Monterey](#) and San Francisco. By 1849, *El Aliso*, was the most extensive vineyard in California. Vignes owned over 40,000 vines and produced 150,000 bottles, or 1,000 barrels, per year.

**May 1846** In May 1846, the [Mexican–American War](#) started. Because of Mexico's inability to defend its northern territories, California was exposed to invasion. On August 13, 1846, Commodore [Robert F. Stockton](#), accompanied by [John C. Frémont](#), seized the town; Governor Pico had fled to Mexico. From Stockton and Frémont until late 1849, all of [California had a military governor](#). After three weeks of occupation, Stockton left, leaving Lieutenant [Archibald H. Gillespie](#) in charge. Subsequent dissatisfaction with Gillespie and his troops led to an uprising. A force of 300 locals drove the Americans out, ending the first phase of the [Battle of Los Angeles](#). Further small skirmishes took place. Stockton regrouped in San Diego and marched north with six hundred troops while Frémont marched south from Monterey with 400 troops. After a few skirmishes outside the city, the two forces entered Los Angeles, this time without bloodshed. [Andrés Pico](#) was in charge; he signed the so-called [Treaty of Cahuenga](#) (it was not a treaty) on 13 January 1847, ending the California phase of the Mexican–American War. The [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#), signed on 2 February 1848, ended the war and ceded California to the U.S.

**Transitional era: 1848-1870** Drawing by [William Rich Hutton](#) depicting a section of Los Angeles, ca.1847–49

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According to historian Mary P. Ryan, "The U.S. army swept into California with the surveyor as well as the sword and quickly translated Spanish and Mexican practices into cartographic representations."<sup>[40]</sup> Under colonial law, land held by grantees was not disposable. It reverted to the government. It was determined that under U.S. property law, lands owned by the city were disposable. Also, the *diseños* (property sketches) held by residents did not secure title in an American court.

California's new military governor [Bennett C. Riley](#) ruled that land could not be sold that was not on a city map. In 1849, Lieutenant [Edward Ord](#) surveyed Los Angeles to confirm and extend the streets of the city. His survey put the city into the real-estate business, creating its first real-estate boom and filling its treasury. Street names were changed from Spanish to English. Further surveys and street plans replaced the original plan for the pueblo with a new civic center south of the Plaza and a new use of space.

The fragmentation of Los Angeles real estate on the Anglo-Mexican axis had begun. Under the Spanish system, the residences of the power-elite clustered around the Plaza in the center of town. In the new U.S. system, the power elite resided in the outskirts. The emerging minorities, including the Chinese, Italians, French, and Russians, joined with the Mexicans near the Plaza.

In 1848, the gold discovered in [Coloma](#) first brought thousands of miners from Sonora in northern Mexico on the way to the gold fields. So many of them settled in the area north of the Plaza that it came to be known as **Sonoratown**.

During the [Gold Rush](#) years in northern California, Los Angeles became known as the "Queen of the Cow Counties" for its role in supplying beef and other foodstuffs to hungry miners in the north. Among the cow counties, Los Angeles County had the largest herds in the state followed closely by Santa Barbara and Monterey Counties.

With the temporary absence of a legal system, the city quickly was submerged in lawlessness. Many of the New York regiment disbanded at the end of the war and charged with maintaining order were thugs and brawlers. They roamed the streets joined by gamblers, outlaws, and prostitutes driven out of San Francisco and mining towns of the north by Vigilance Committees

or [lynch mobs](#). Los Angeles came to be known as the "toughest and most lawless city west of Santa Fe."

Some of the residents resisted the new powers by resorting to banditry against the [gringos](#). In 1856, [Juan Flores](#) threatened Southern California with a full-scale revolt. He was hanged in Los Angeles in front of 3,000 spectators. [Tiburcio Vasquez](#), a legend in his own time among the Mexican-born population for his daring feats against the Anglos, was captured in present-day [Santa Clarita, California](#) on May 14, 1874. He was found guilty of two counts of murder by a [San Jose](#) jury in 1874, and was hanged there in 1875.

Los Angeles had several active "Vigilance Committees" during that era. Between 1850 and 1870, mobs carried out approximately 35 lynchings of Mexicans—more than four times the number that occurred in San Francisco. Los Angeles was described as "undoubtedly the toughest town of the entire nation." The homicide rate between 1847 and 1870 averaged 158 per 100,000 (13 murders per year), which was 10 to 20 times the annual murder rates for [New York City](#) during the same period.

The fear of Mexican violence and the racially motivated violence inflicted on them further marginalized the Mexicans, greatly reducing their economic and political opportunities.

[John Gately Downey](#), the seventh governor of California was sworn into office on January 14, 1860, thereby becoming the first governor from Southern California. Governor Downey was born and raised in Castlesampson, [County Roscommon, Ireland](#), and came to Los Angeles in 1850. He was responsible for keeping California in the Union during the Civil War.

**Plight of the Indians** In 1836, the Indian village of Yaanga was relocated near the future corner of Commercial and Alameda Streets. In 1845, it was relocated again to present-day [Boyle Heights](#). With the coming of the U.S. citizens, disease took a great toll among Indians. Self-employed Indians were not allowed to sleep over in the city. They faced increasing competition for jobs as more Mexicans moved into the area and took over the labor force. Those who loitered or were drunk or unemployed were arrested and

auctioned off as laborers to those who paid their fines. They were often paid for work with liquor, which only increased their problems. Los Angeles was incorporated as an U.S. city on April 4, 1850. Five months later, California was admitted into the Union. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo required the U.S. to grant citizenship to the Indians of former Mexican territories, it did not happen for another 80 years. The [Constitution of California](#) deprived Indians of any protection under the law, considering them as non-persons. As a result, it was impossible to bring an [Anglo](#) to trial for killing an Indian or forcing Indians off their properties. Anglos concluded that the "quickest and best way to get rid of (their) troublesome presence was to kill them off, (and) this procedure was adopted as a standard for many years." When New England author and Indian-rights activist [Helen Hunt Jackson](#) toured the Indian villages of Southern California in 1883, she was appalled by the racism of the Anglos living there. She wrote that they treated Indians worse than animals, hunted them for sport, robbed them of their farmlands, and brought them to the edge of extermination. While Indians were depicted by Whites as lazy and shiftless, she found most of them to be hard-working craftsmen and farmers. Jackson's tour inspired her to write her 1884 novel [Ramona](#), which she hoped would give a human face to the atrocities and indignities suffered by the Indians in California, and it did. The novel was enormously successful, inspiring four movies and a yearly pageant in [Hemet](#), California. Many of the Indian villages of Southern California survived because of her efforts, including [Morongo](#), [Cahuilla](#), [Soboba](#), [Temecula](#), [Pechanga](#), and [Warner Springs](#).

Remarkably, the Gabrielino Indians, now called [Tongva](#), also survived. In 2006, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that there were 2,000 of them still living in Southern California. Some were organizing to protect burial and cultural sites. Others were trying to win federal recognition as a tribe to operate a casino.<sup>[50]</sup> The city's first newspaper, [Star of Los Angeles](#), was a bilingual publication which began its run in 1851.

Industrial expansion and growth: 1870-1913 See also: [Central Business District, Los Angeles \(1880s-1890s\)](#)

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An 1887 aerial photo of Los Angeles, taken from a balloon

In the 1870s, Los Angeles was still little more than a village of 5,000. By 1900, there were over 100,000 occupants of the city. Several men actively promoted Los Angeles, working to develop it into a great city and to make themselves rich. Angelenos set out to remake their geography to challenge San Francisco with its port facilities, railway terminal, banks and factories. The [Farmers and Merchants Bank of Los Angeles](#) was the first incorporated bank in Los Angeles, founded in 1871 by John G. Downey and [Isaias W. Hellman](#). Wealthy Easterners who came as tourists recognized the growth opportunities and invested heavily in the region.<sup>[52]</sup> During the [1880s and 1890s, the central business district \(CBD\)](#) grew along Main and Spring streets towards Second Street and beyond.

Much of Los Angeles County was farmland, with an emphasis on cattle, dairy products, vegetables and citrus fruits. After 1945, most of the farmland was converted into housing tracts.

**Railroads** See also: [Arcade Depot](#) and [River Station \(Los Angeles\)](#)

The [Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad](#) was the first railroad in Los Angeles, photo ca.1880

The city's first railroad, the [Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad](#), was inaugurated in October 1869 by [John G. Downey](#) and [Phineas Banning](#). It ran 21 miles (34 km) between [San Pedro](#) and Los Angeles. The town continued to grow at a moderate pace. Railroads finally arrived to connect with the [Central Pacific](#) and San Francisco in 1876. The impact was small. Much

greater was the impact of the [Santa Fe system](#) (through its subsidiary [California Southern Railroad](#)) in 1885. The Santa Fe and [Southern Pacific](#) lines provided direct connections to the East, competed vigorously for business with much lower rates, and stimulated economic growth. Tourists poured in by the thousands every week, and many planned on returning or resettling.

The city still lacked a modern harbor. Phineas Banning excavated a channel out of the mud flats of [San Pedro Bay](#) leading to [Wilmington](#) in 1871. Banning had already laid track and shipped in locomotives to connect the port to the city. [Harrison Gray Otis](#), founder and owner of the [Los Angeles Times](#), and a number of business colleagues embarked on reshaping southern California by expanding that into a harbor at [San Pedro](#) using federal dollars.

This put them in conflict with [Collis P. Huntington](#), president of the [Southern Pacific Company](#) and one of California's "[Big Four](#)" investors in the Central Pacific and Southern Pacific. (The "Big Four" are sometimes numbered among the "[robber barons](#)" of the [Gilded Age](#)). In April 1872, John G. Downey went to San Francisco and was successful in representing Los Angeles in discussions with Collis Huntington concerning Los Angeles's efforts to bring the Southern Pacific Railroad through Los Angeles. The line reached Los Angeles in 1876 and Huntington directed it to a port at [Santa Monica](#), where the [Long Wharf](#) was built.



Train at the [Southern Pacific Railroad's Arcade Depot](#) station, 1891

In 1876 the [Newhall railroad tunnel](#) located 27 miles (43 km) north of Los Angeles between the town of [San Fernando](#) and [Lyons Station Stagecoach Stop](#) (now [Newhall](#)) was completed, providing the final link from San Francisco to Los Angeles for the railroad. The 6,940-foot-long railroad tunnel (2,115.3 m) took a year and a half to complete. More than 1,500 mostly Chinese laborers took part in the tunnel construction, which began at the south end of the mountain on March 22, 1875. Many of them had prior

experience working on Southern Pacific's located tunnels in the [Tehachapi Pass](#). Due to the sandstone composition of the mountain that was saturated with water and oil, frequent cave-ins occurred and the bore had to be constantly shored up by timbers during excavation. The initial location for the north end of the tunnel near Newhall was abandoned due to this. The north end of the tunnel excavation commenced in June 1875. Water was a constant problem during construction and pumps were utilized to keep the tunnel from flooding. Workers digging from both the north and south ends of the tunnel came face to face on July 14, 1876. The bores from each end were only a half inch out of line with dimensions of 22 feet (6.7 m) high, 16.5 feet (5.0 m) wide at the bottom and over 18 feet (5.5 m) at the shoulders. Track was laid in place soon after the tunnel dig was completed and the first train passed through on August 12, 1876. On September 4, [Charles Crocker](#) notified Southern Pacific that the track had been completed on the route between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The San Pedro forces eventually prevailed (though it required Banning and Downey to turn their railroad over to the Southern Pacific). Work on the San Pedro breakwater began in 1899 and was finished in 1910. Otis Chandler and his allies secured a change in state law in 1909 that allowed Los Angeles to absorb San Pedro and Wilmington, using a long, narrow corridor of land to connect them with the rest of the city. The debacle of the future Los Angeles harbor was termed the [Free Harbor Fight](#).

In 1898, [Henry Huntington](#) and a San Francisco syndicate led by [Isaias W. Hellman](#) purchased five trolley lines, consolidated them into the [Los Angeles Railway](#) (the 'yellow cars') and two years later founded the [Pacific Electric Railway](#) (the 'red cars'). Los Angeles Railway served the city and the Pacific Electric Railway served the rest of the county. At its peak, Pacific Electric was the largest electrically operated interurban railway in the world. Over 1,000 miles (1,600 km) of tracks connected Los Angeles with Hollywood, [Pasadena](#), San Pedro, [Venice Beach](#), [Santa Monica](#), [Pomona](#), [San Bernardino](#), [Long Beach](#), [Santa Ana](#), [Huntington Beach](#), and other points and was recognized as best public transportation system in the world.

**Oil discovery** Oil wells in 1904

Oil was discovered by [Edward L. Doheny](#) in 1892, near the present location of [Dodger Stadium](#). The [Los Angeles City Oil Field](#) was the first of many fields

in the basin to be exploited, and in 1900 and 1902, respectively, the [Beverly Hills Oil Field](#) and [Salt Lake Oil Field](#) were discovered a few miles west of the original find.<sup>[58]</sup> Los Angeles became a center of oil production in the early 20th century, and by 1923, the region was producing one-quarter of the world's total supply; it is still a significant producer, with the [Wilmington Oil Field](#) having the fourth-largest reserves of any field in California.<sup>[58]</sup>

## Populism



Looking north on Spring Street, 1900. The [Hollenbeck Hotel](#) is on the southwest corner of Spring and Second streets. The [Bryson-Bonebrake Block](#) is on the northwest corner. The [County Courthouse](#) is in the background.

At the same time that the *Los Angeles Times* was spurring enthusiasm for the expansion of Los Angeles, the newspaper was also trying to turn it into a [union-free](#) or [open shop town](#). Fruit growers and local merchants who had opposed the [Pullman strike](#) in 1894 subsequently formed the [Merchants and Manufacturers Association](#) (M & M) to support the *Times's* anti-union campaign.

The California labor movement, with its strength concentrated in San Francisco, largely had ignored Los Angeles for years. However, in 1907, the [American Federation of Labor](#) decided to challenge the open shop of "Otis Town."

In 1909, the city fathers placed a ban on free speech from public streets and private property except for the Plaza. Locals had claimed that it had been an

Open Forum forever. The area was of particular concern to Harrison Grey Otis and his son-in-law Harry Chandler.

This conflict came to a head with the [bombing](#) of the Times in 1910. Two months later, the [Llewellyn Iron Works](#) near the plaza was bombed. A meeting hastily was called of the [Chamber of Commerce](#) and Manufacturers Association. The *L.A. Times* wrote: "radical and practical matters (were) considered, and steps taken for the adaption of such as are adequate to cope with a situation tardily recognized as the gravest that Los Angeles has ever been called upon to face." The authorities indicted John and James McNamara, both associated with the Iron Workers Union, for the bombing; [Clarence Darrow](#), famed Chicago defense lawyer, represented them.

At the same time the McNamara brothers were awaiting trial, Los Angeles was preparing for a city election. Job Harriman, running on the [socialist](#) ticket, was challenging the establishment's candidate.

Harriman's campaign, however, was tied to the asserted innocence of the McNamaras. But the defense was in trouble: The prosecution not only had evidence of the McNamaras' complicity, but had trapped Darrow in a clumsy attempt to bribe one of the jurors. On December 1, 1911, four days before the final election, the McNamaras entered a plea of guilty in return for prison terms. Harriman lost badly.

On Christmas Day, 1913, police attempted to break up an IWW rally of 500 taking place in the Plaza. Encountering resistance, the police waded into the crowd attacking them with their clubs. One citizen was killed. In the aftermath, the authorities attempted to impose martial law in the wake of growing protests.

Seventy-three people were arrested in connection with the riots. The city council introduced new measures to control public speaking.

The *Times* scapegoated all foreign elements, even calling onlookers and taco vendors "cultural subversives."

The open shop campaign continued from strength to strength, although not without meeting opposition from workers. By 1923, the [Industrial Workers of the World](#) had made considerable progress in organizing the [longshoremen](#) in San Pedro and led approximately 3,000 men to walk off the job. With the

support of the *Los Angeles Times*, a special "Red Squad" was formed within the [Los Angeles Police Department](#) and arrested so many strikers that the city's jails were soon filled.

Some 1,200 dock workers were corralled in a special stockade in [Griffith Park](#). The *Times* wrote approvingly that "stockades and forced labor were a good remedy for IWW terrorism." Public meetings were outlawed in San Pedro, [Upton Sinclair](#) was arrested at Liberty Hill in San Pedro for reading the [United States Bill of Rights](#) on the private property of a strike supporter (the arresting officer told him "we'll have none of 'that Constitution stuff'") and blanket arrests were made at union gatherings. The strike ended after members of the [Ku Klux Klan](#) and the [American Legion](#) raided the IWW Hall and attacked the men, women and children meeting there. The strike was defeated.

Los Angeles developed another industry in the early 20th century when movie producers from the East Coast relocated there. These new employers were likewise afraid of unions and other social movements: During [Upton Sinclair](#)'s campaign for governor of California under the banner of his "End Poverty In California" (EPIC) movement, [Louis B. Mayer](#) turned [MGM's Culver City](#) studio into the unofficial headquarters of the organized campaign against EPIC. MGM produced fake [newsreel](#) interviews with whiskered actors with Russian accents voicing their enthusiasm for EPIC, along with footage focusing on [central casting](#) hobos huddled on the borders of California waiting to enter and live off the bounty of its taxpayers once Sinclair was elected. Sinclair, however, lost the election.

Los Angeles also acquired another industry in the years just before World War II: the [garment industry](#). At first devoted to regional merchandise such as sportswear, the industry eventually grew to be the second largest center of garment production in the United States.

**Progressives** The immigrants arriving in the city to find jobs sometimes brought the revolutionary zeal and idealism of their homelands. These included anarchists such as Russian [Emma Goldman](#) and [Ricardo Flores Magón](#) and his brother [Enrique](#) of the [Partido Liberal Mexicano](#). They later were joined by the socialist candidate for mayor [Job Harriman](#), Chinese revolutionaries, the novelist [Upton Sinclair](#), "Wobblies" (members of the [Industrial Workers of the World](#), the IWW), and Socialist and Communist

labor organizers such as the Japanese-American [Karl Yoneda](#) and the Russian-born New Yorker Meyer Baylin. The socialists were the first to set up a soapbox in the Plaza, which served as the location of union rallies and protests and riots as the police attempted to break up meetings. Unions began to make progress in organizing these workers as the [New Deal](#) arrived in the 1930s. An influential strike was the [Los Angeles Garment Workers Strike of 1933](#), one of the first strikes in which Mexican immigrant workers played a prominent role for union recognition. The unions made even greater gains in the war years, as Los Angeles grew further.

Today, the ethnic makeup of the city and the dominance of progressive political views among its voters have made Los Angeles a strong union town. However, many garment workers in Central L.A., most of whom are Mexican immigrants, still work in [sweatshop](#) conditions.

**Battle of the Los Angeles River** The [Los Angeles River](#) flowed clear and fresh all year, supporting 45 Gabrielino villages in the area. The source of the river was the [aquifer](#) under the [San Fernando Valley](#), supplied with water from the surrounding mountains. The rising of the underground bedrock at the Glendale Narrows (near today's [Griffith Park](#)) squeezed the water to the surface at that point. Then, through much of the year, the river emerged from the valley to flow across the floodplain 20 miles (32 km) to the sea. The area also provided other streams, lakes, and artesian wells.

Early settlers were more than a little discouraged by the region's diverse and unpredictable weather. They watched helplessly as long droughts weakened and starved their livestock, only to be drowned and carried off by ferocious storms. During the years of little rain, people built too close to the riverbed, only to see their homes and barns later swept to sea during a flood. The location of the Los Angeles Plaza had to be moved twice because of previously having been built too close to the riverbed. Worse, floods changed the river's course. When the settlers arrived, the river joined [Ballona Creek](#) to discharge in [Santa Monica Bay](#). A fierce storm in 1835 diverted its course to Long Beach, where it stays today.

Early citizens could not even maintain a footbridge over the river from one side of the city to the other. After the American takeover, the city council authorized spending of \$20,000 for a contractor to build a substantial

wooden bridge across the river. The first storm to come along dislodged the bridge, used it as a battering ram to break through the embankment, and scattered its timbers all the way to the sea.

Some of the most concentrated rainfall in the history of the United States has occurred in the [San Gabriel Mountains](#) north of Los Angeles and Orange Counties. On April 5, 1926, a rain gauge in the San Gabriels collected one inch in one minute. In January, 1969, more water fell on the San Gabriels in nine days than New York City sees in a year. In February 1978, almost a foot of rain fell in 24 hours, and, in one blast, an inch and a half in five minutes. This storm caused massive [debris flows](#) throughout the region, one of them unearthing the corpses in the [Verdugo Hills Cemetery](#) and depositing them in the town below. Another wiped out the small town of Hidden Springs in a tributary of the [Big Tujunga Creek](#), killing 13 people.

The greatest daily rainfall recorded in California was 26.12 inches on January 23, 1943 at Hoegees near [Mt. Wilson](#) in the San Gabriel Mountains. Fifteen other stations reported over 20 inches in two days from the same storm. Forty-five others reported 70% of the average annual rainfall in two days. Quibbling between city and county governments delayed any response to the flooding until a massive storm in 1938 flooded Los Angeles and Orange counties. The federal government stepped in. To transfer floodwater to the sea as quickly as possible, the [Army Corps of Engineers](#) paved the beds of the river and its tributaries. The corps also built several dams and [catchment basins](#) in the canyons along the San Gabriel Mountains to reduce the debris flows. It was an enormous project, taking years to complete.

Today, the Los Angeles River functions mainly as a flood control. A drop of rain falling in the San Gabriel Mountains will reach the sea faster than an auto can drive. During today's rainstorms, the volume of the Los Angeles River at Long Beach can be as large as the [Mississippi River](#) at [St. Louis](#).

The drilling of wells and pumping of water from the San Fernando Valley aquifer dried up the river by the 1920s. By 1980, the aquifer was supplying drinking water for 800,000 people. In that year, it was discovered that the aquifer had been contaminated. Many wells were shut down, as the area qualified as a [Superfund site](#).

**Water from a distance** For its first 120 years, the Los Angeles River supplied the town with ample water for homes and farms. It was estimated that the annual flow could have support a town of 250,000 people—if the water had been managed right. But Angelenos were among the more profligate users of water in the world. In the semi-arid climate, they were forever watering their lawns, gardens, orchards, and vineyards. Later, they needed more to support the growth of commerce and manufacturing. By the beginning of the 20th century, the town realized it quickly would outgrow its river and would need new sources of water.

Legitimate concerns about water supply were exploited to gain backing for a huge engineering and legal effort to bring more water to the city and allow more development. The city fathers had their eyes on the [Owens River](#), about 250 miles (400 km) northeast of Los Angeles in [Inyo County](#), near the [Nevada](#) state line. It was a permanent stream of fresh water fed by the melted snows of the eastern [Sierra Nevada](#). It flowed through the [Owens River Valley](#) before emptying into the shallow, saline [Owens Lake](#), where it evaporated.



Photograph of [Bunker Hill](#) in 1900, looking northwest from today's [Pershing Square](#)

Sometime between 1899 and 1903, [Harrison Gray Otis](#) and his son-in-law successor, [Harry Chandler](#), engaged in successful efforts at buying cheap land on the northern outskirts of Los Angeles in the [San Fernando Valley](#). At the

same time, they enlisted the help of [William Mulholland](#), chief engineer of the Los Angeles Water Department (later the [Los Angeles Department of Water and Power](#) or LADWP), and J.B. Lippencott, of the [United States Reclamation Service](#).

Lippencott performed water surveys in the Owens Valley for the Service while secretly receiving a salary from the City of Los Angeles. He succeeded in persuading Owens Valley farmers and mutual water companies to pool their interests and surrender the water rights to 200,000 acres (800 km<sup>2</sup>) of land to [Fred Eaton](#), Lippencott's agent and a former mayor of Los Angeles. Lippencott then resigned from the Reclamation Service, took a job with the Los Angeles Water Department as assistant to Mulholland, and turned over the Reclamation Service maps, field surveys and stream measurements to the city. Those studies served as the basis for designing the longest [aqueduct](#) in the world.

By July 1905, the *Times* began to warn the voters of Los Angeles that the county would soon dry up unless they voted [bonds](#) for building the aqueduct. Artificial drought conditions were created when water was run into the sewers to decrease the supply in the reservoirs and residents were forbidden to water their lawns and gardens.

On election day, the people of Los Angeles voted for \$22.5 million worth of bonds to build an aqueduct from the Owens River and to defray other expenses of the project. With this money, and with a [Act of Congress](#) allowing cities to own property outside their boundaries, the City acquired the land that Eaton had acquired from the Owens Valley farmers and started to build the aqueduct. On the occasion of the opening of the [Los Angeles Aqueduct](#) on November 5, 1913 Mulholland's entire speech was five words: "There it is. Take it."

## Post Script

A slave woman born in Georgia endured becoming an orphan when she was sold away from her parents to other plantation owners, moved from Georgia to South Carolina and Mississippi enslaved to new owners, became Mormon joining the long march of 2,000 miles to Utah with the plantation owner's family, fathered her 3 female children, and, lastly marched again behind another long wagon train 1,200 miles to California. Her name was "Biddy", but she was never provided a legal surname until she was emancipated at age 30 in San Bernardino, California. She chose the name, "Mason" taken after the Mormon Apostle, she knew, Amason.

Biddy Mason was a highly skilled enslaved worker, cattle herdsman, housekeeper, mother and midwife. She achieved professional celebrity after emancipation in California to become Dr. John S. Griffin's medical assistant and midwife. Biddy invested wisely in real estate to become one of California's wealthiest women, with an estimated wealth of over \$300,000 that in today's economy would be equivalent to \$8,000,000. She remained charitable for the needy, lived in her home downtown until she passed away in 1891 at age 73.

This manuscript includes further detailed summaries about the Church of Latter Day Saints, whose Mormon territory is described, as well as the Mormon conflicts over slavery. Additional details are included about the State of California and particularly Los Angeles whose cultures evolved from the native, Spanish, Mexican and American polities. Biddy Mason was certainly a heroine, professional and compassionate woman. She fought her way from slavery and is honored as such in this manuscript. We now understand the basis of her life successes and why Bernard Zakheim included her in his masterful mural frescos displayed in the UCSF Toland Hall.



Nurse Biddy Mason Assisting Dr. John S. Griffin with Malaria Stricken Victim

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