# DOWN BY THE STATION





## *Los Angeles Chinatown*

*1880-1933*

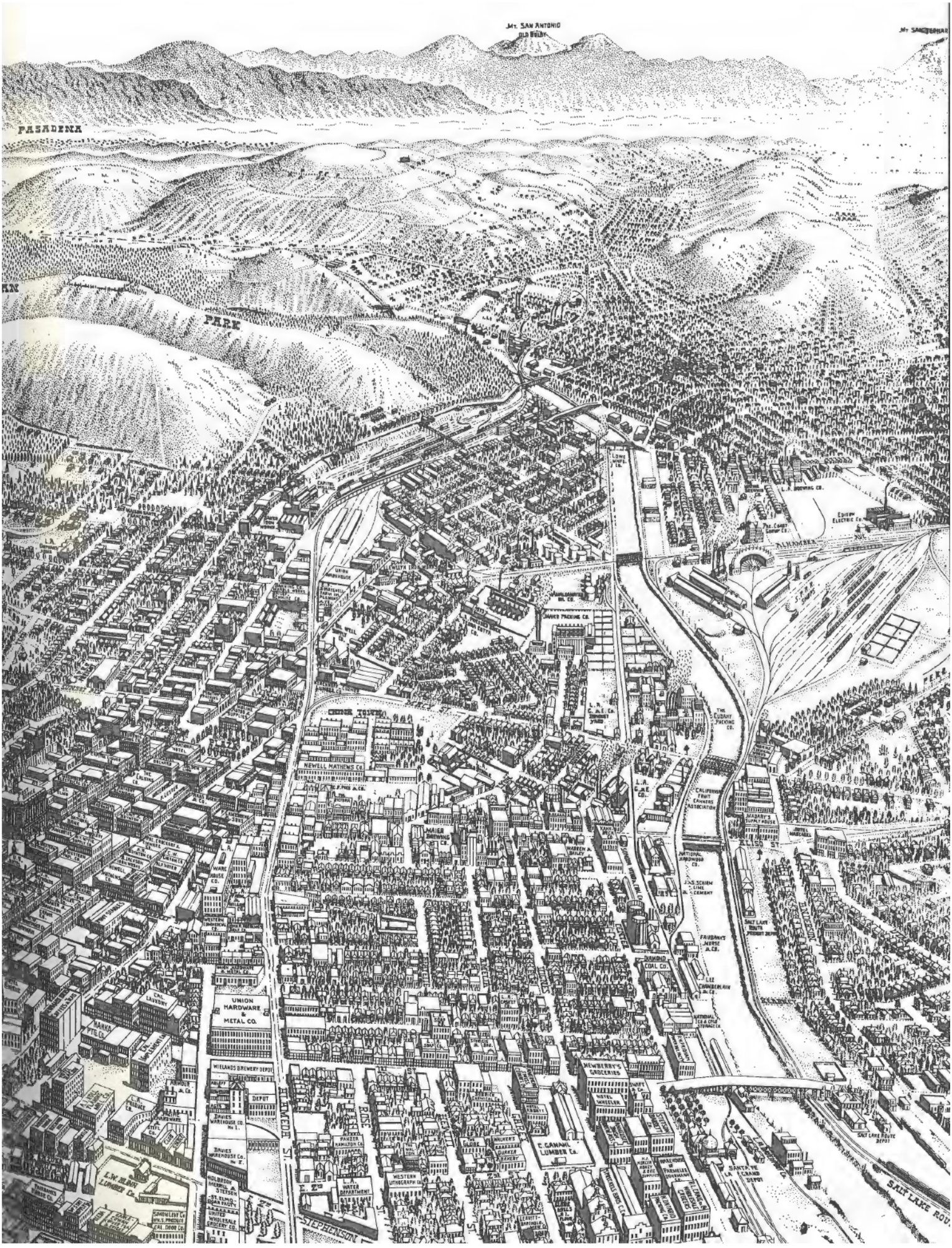


Roberta S. Greenwood



Monumenta Archaeologica 18
Institute of Archaeology
University of California, Los Angeles


MT. WILSON
OBSERVATORY
MT. LOWE
OBSERVATORY
EAGLE ROCK
GLENDALE
L.A. PACIFIC
BALLOON ROUTE
CENTRAL
PARK


MT. SAN ANTONIO
OLD BALDY
PASADENA
PARK
ALAMEDA
ALISO ST.
SALT LAKE ROUTE DEPOT
SANTA FE
UNION HARDWARE & METAL CO.
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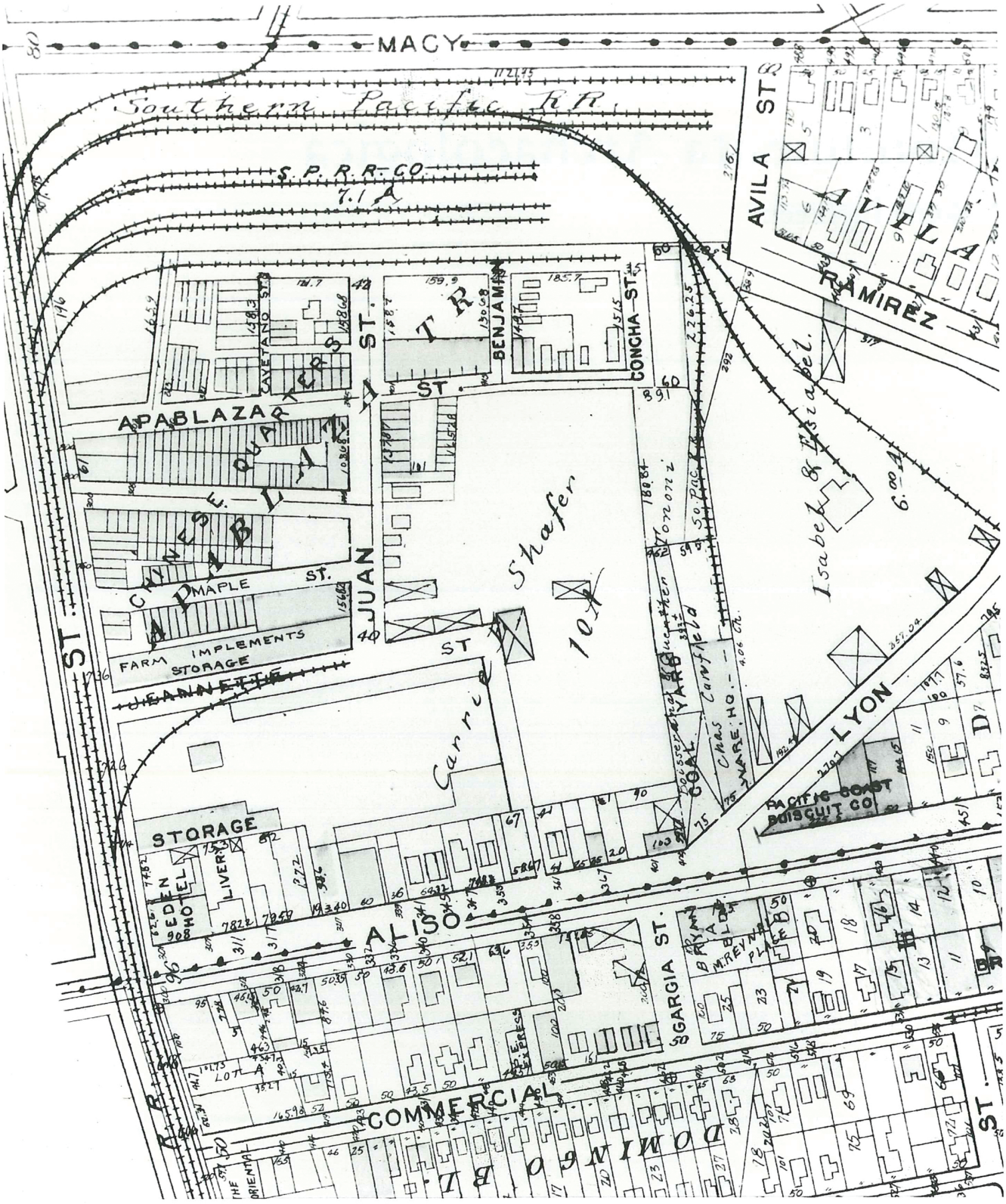


Chinese Quarters. *Baist's Real Estate Atlas: Survey of Los Angeles, California, 1910*

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Roberta S. Greenwood

*with contributions by Margie Akin, Ronald C. Egan,*
*Lothar von Falkenhausen, Lynn C. Kronzek, and Mark A. Roeder*

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# Acknowledgments

This volume is a version of the technical report prepared for compliance with the historic preservation stipulations governing the planning and construction of Los Angeles Metro Rail (Greenwood 1993b). As part of the effort to preserve and protect cultural resources which might be affected by construction of the new subway, the public agencies had to avoid and conserve archaeological resources whenever possible, and where preservation was not feasible, to recover and interpret the information which might otherwise be lost. The efforts began with background research, continued during construction with monitoring, included the scientific excavation reported here, and culminated in the analysis of many thousands of artifacts. Comparable efforts were directed toward the many types of fossils present below downtown Los Angeles; the paleontology reports were submitted separately.

Many people contributed to this endeavor by facilitating the contract and fieldwork or by providing special information and insight about the history and remains. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of John Adams, Vice President, Construction, Rail Construction Corporation; James L. Sowell, Manager, Environmental Compliance; Nadeem Tahir and Lynn Struthers in administrative support; and the many Inspectors and Resident Engineers for their cooperation in the field.

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# Time Line

Events, People, and Places in Chinatown, Los Angeles, and the World, 1850-1939

COMPILED TO SUGGEST the setting, atmosphere, and specific events that contributed to the development of Los Angeles and Chinatown, some of these items are intended to recall events on and around the specific parcel studied here, and others may help to establish the human context that conditioned the Chinese settlement and the host community's response to it. Among the many sources are Thompson and West's *History of Los Angeles County, California.* (1880), Newmark's *Sixty Years in Southern California 1853-1913* (1930), and Steve Harvey's "Only in LA" columns in *The Los Angeles Times.* Certain entries pertain to events affecting Chinatown; others reflect the goods, services, entertainments, and utilities available to the greater community as a whole.

1850s The *zanjero* (ditchtender) is the highest paid Los Angeles official and earns $1,200 per year.

1851 First Los Angeles newspaper, *The Star*, appears, with two pages in English and two pages in Spanish.

1852 Captain Jesse D. Hunter founds first brickyard in Los Angeles; Joseph Mullally founds the second in 1854.

1854 Two Frenchmen open the first tannery, on the corner of Aliso and Alameda.

1855 First large land sale in the city: Jean Louis Sansevaine purchases the vineyard, cellars, and enterprise of his uncle, Louis Vignes, for $42,000

1856 First shipment of wine from the county to New York is made.

1856 Sisters of Charity open a school, orphan asylum, and later a seminary in an imported frame house at the southeast corner of Alameda and Macy.

1864 Earliest known Los Angeles embossed bottle is marked "M. Keller California Wine Bitters."

1865 W. H. Perry is awarded a franchise for lighting the city streets by gas.

1866 Pershing Square is declared an official city park and is surrounded by picket fence to keep out cattle and horses.

1867 First local gas plant is built on Olvera Street.

1868 First two banks open in Los Angeles.

1868 Los Angeles City Water Company receives franchise; begins to replace old *zanjas* (ditches) and horsecart deliveries with wooden pipes and reservoirs.

1869 Railroad depot is built at southwest corner of Alameda and Commercial Streets, to serve the line between Los Angeles and Wilmington.

1869 Pico House and Merced Theater are built in El Pueblo.

1870 There were 110 saloons in the pueblo, one for every fifty residents. (In 1996, there is one bar for every 800 residents.)

1870 Houses in Los Angeles are numbered by City Council, with even numbers for the south and east sides of streets and odd numbers for north and west sides.

1871 Machine-manufactured ice first goes on sale. Previously, ice was shipped from Truckee and was therefore very expensive.

1871 Nineteen Chinese are killed in night of rioting at El Pueblo.

1872 First Los Angeles City Directory appears.

1872 First fire engine, a second class steamer, is brought to Los Angeles

1873 High school and Los Angeles Public Library are constructed.

1874 First street railway, 2½ miles long, is put into operation,

1874 Exploratory boring for oil begins in the mountains around San Fernando.

1875 Joss house in El Pueblo is demolished.

1876 Southern Pacific Railroad reaches Los Angeles.

1877 Caroline Severance opens first kindergarten.

1877 Evergreen Cemetery is laid out.

1880 University of Southern California is founded.

1881 *Los Angeles Times* begins publication.

1882 Chinese Exclusion Act is passed.

1882 *Los Angeles Times* publishes first illustration in a news story.

1882 On December 30, first seven electric street lights are turned on; thirty-six masts are installed by 1886.

1882 First Los Angeles telephone directory appears, with ninety assigned numbers. Evergreen Cemetery is 69.

1882 Gas streetlights are replaced by electric.

1882 Castelar School is founded. It is the second oldest Los Angeles school in continuous operation and is still the only predominantly Asian school.

1883 Worried pedestrians request that City Council enact a law requiring bells on speeding bicycles. Ralphs Grocery is founded.

1884 Southern Pacific operates out of River Station, out of Arcade Station from 1888 to 1914 and out of Central Station from 1914 to 1939.

1885 Santa Fe Railroad enters Los Angeles. There are eighty practicing lawyers.

1885-86 Los Angeles Trades & Labor Council, Anti-Chinese Union, and Knights of Labor promote boycott of Chinese.

1887 Major fire, of uncertain origin, destroys most of the earliest Chinatown west of Alameda Street.

1887 Chinese United Methodist Church is present at 204 Marchessault (at different location in 1893).

1887 Charity Street is renamed Grand Avenue because downtown residents didn't want to "live on Charity."

1888 Eastside Water Company lays 20 miles of pipes, serving Boyle Heights and area north of Aliso Street.

1888 First Sears, Roebuck catalog is distributed

1888 Stone monument to deceased Chinese is erected in Evergreen Cemetery.

1888 George Eastman markets the first Kodak camera. Cracker Jacks are introduced.

1889 First Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena.

1890 Sisters of Charity move from Macy and Alameda to Boyle Heights.

1890 Twenty-seven women doctors practice in Los Angeles; no female lawyers. Census records forty Japanese residents.

1891 First elevator, in the four-story Nadeau Hotel, operates in Los Angeles. Bekins Moving and Storage Company is established.

1893 Santa Fe Railroad dedicates La Grande Station on Santa Fe Avenue between First and Second Streets.

1893 On July 4, Mt. Lowe Scenic Railway in the San Gabriel Mountains opens.

1893 The first Ferris wheel is installed, in Chicago.

1894 Juan Street Mission School is known to be in operation.

1894 Bradbury Building is completed at 3rd Street and Broadway. Labor Day becomes a national holiday.

1895 Fossils are discovered at La Brea Tar Pits.

1896 Broadway Department Store is opened at 4th and Broadway. American premiere of *La Boheme* is staged at Los Angeles Theater, 227 S. Spring Street.

1897 *Guide to Los Angeles Brothels* is distributed during the City's annual fiesta.

1897 First golf course, at Pico and Alvarado,

opens. First record of an automobile being driven on Los Angeles streets.

1898 Fire destroys fourteen Chinese dwellings on Apablasa Street.

1901 Angel's Flight inclined railway is installed at 3rd and Hill Streets. It is removed in 1969 and reinstalled in 1996.

1902 Chinese Gospel Mission operates at 425 Apablasa Street.

1905 Chinese soldiers, training with the US Army in Los Angeles, march in Tournament of Roses Parade.

1905 State requires license plates on autos; owners had to make their own until 1914.

1906 First motion picture studio in Los Angeles opens.

1907 Bullock's opens at Broadway and 7th Street. Mother's Day is observed for the first time in US.

1908 Philippe's opens on Alameda Street. First taxicab in Los Angeles operates, with a fare of 30¢ for the first ½ mile and 20¢ for each additional ¼ mile.

1909 City reform administration eliminates brothels.

1909 First motion picture filmed entirely in Los Angeles is made at the rear of Sing Loo Laundry, on Olive Street between 7th and 8th.

1910 Los Angeles appoints Alice S. Wells as first policewoman.

1912 First gas station operates at Grand Avenue and Washington Blvd., with gas costing 8¢ per gallon. Boos Brothers, first cafeteria, opens.

1913 Automobile Club of Southern California reports that California leads all states in number of autos owned, one car per twenty-eight people.

1913 William Mulholland opens Owens Aqueduct.

1916 First power pole for overhead lines goes up in Highland Park area. Driver's licenses are required.

1916 David Jung, Los Angeles noodle manufacturer, invents fortune cookie.

1917 First Los Angeles parking lot, at 4th and Olive Streets, charges a 5¢ a day.

1920 Female suffrage amendment passes.

1923 Auto dealer Earle C. Anthony operates first neon display in US, at corner of Wilshire and La Brea.

1927 Charles Lindbergh flies nonstop from New York to Paris.

1928 Los Angeles City Hall is completed.

1933 On December 23, demolition of Chinatown begins.

1937 First McDonald's restaurant, near Pasadena, opens.

1938 Built on a vacant Santa Fe Railroad yard, New Chinatown opens on June 26. The main square is one of the first pedestrian malls in southern California.

1939 On May 7, first train arrives at the new Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal.

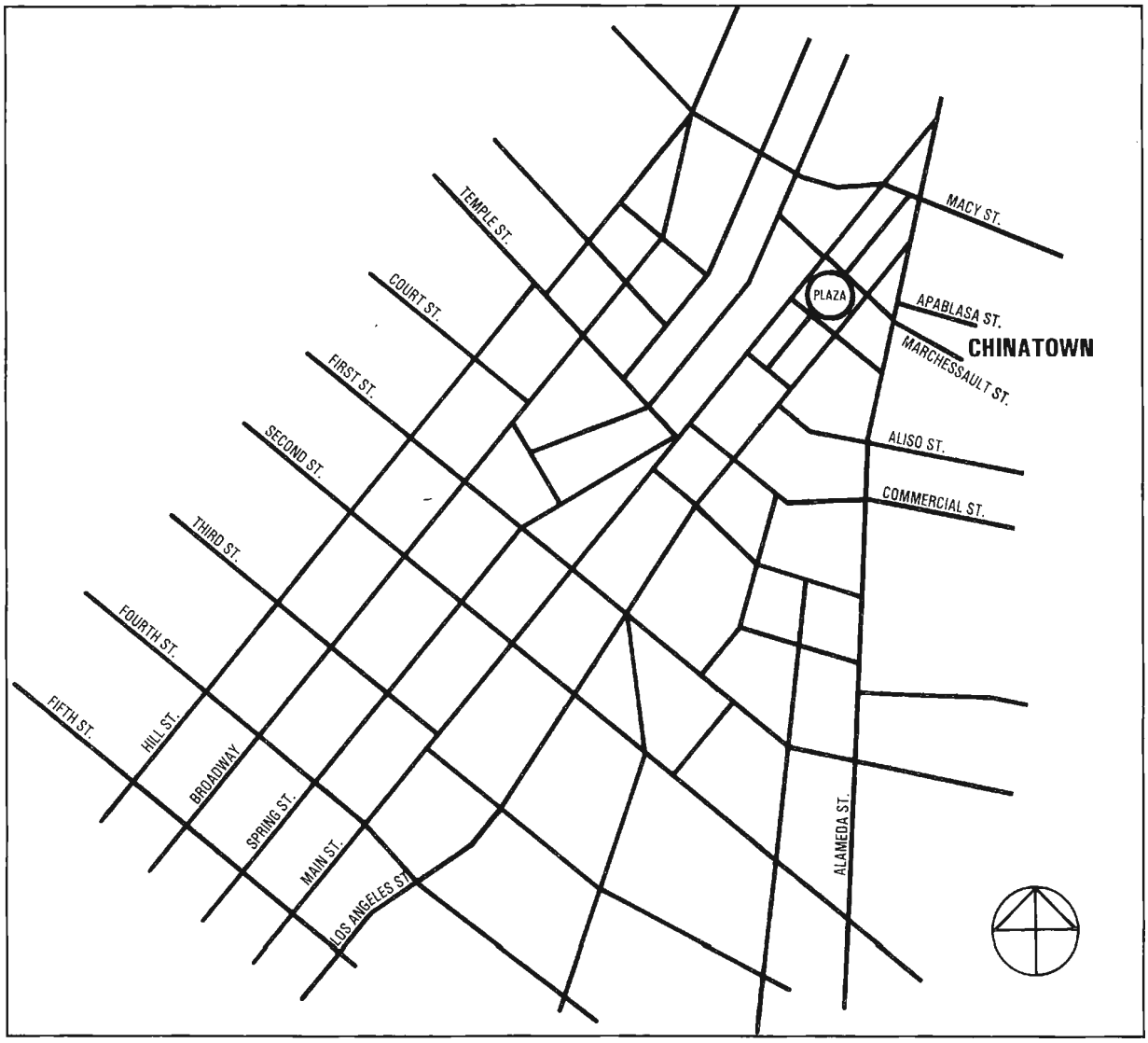


FIGURE 1.1
Location of old Chinatown.
*Map by D. Slawson*

Chapter I

# Introduction

> No one anywhere has written anything meaningful on the cultural life of "ordinary" Chinatown people. For all of their extensive efforts in the 1960's and 1970's, scores of social scientists, historians and psychologists provided very little in the way of substantive, penetrating insight. The myths, legends, folklore, rituals, festivals and beliefs of a burgeoning segment of the American community have neither been taken seriously nor fully understood for what they represent: the very context within which an entire people exist and assert their being.
>
> – Benjamin R. Tong,
> *Chinatown Popular Culture*, p. 233

THIS VOLUME makes no pretense of filling that great gap in the portrayal of the experience of Chinese Americans. It does attempt to add to the "very context" for a portion of the Chinatown of Los Angeles. Historical research and archaeological excavation are combined to illuminate a way of life that escaped adequate or accurate documentation at the time. Although human behaviors are not fully represented by objects found in the ground, such artifacts can provide evidence of rites or customs and can be used to test the conventional beliefs expressed in the English-language press and scholarship alike. Explained by some as a voluntary association for sociability and economic exchange, as a mechanism to guarantee the survival of traditional lifeways, or as a defensive response to hostility on the part of the host community, Chinatown's very existence eludes the assignment of any single cause or motivation. Conventional wisdom also tells us that there were no women in Chinatown, that gambling was exclusively a Chinese pastime, that the society of Chinatown was rigid and unchanging, and that there was no interaction between the people of Chinatown and the rest of Los Angeles. Such oft-stated beliefs can be evaluated in light of the evidence from the documents and the physical remains.

The physical remains reported here come from a portion of the Chinatown of Los Angeles that is circumscribed in time, from the 1880s to 1933 when all the structures were demolished, and in space, being limited to the area behind the 1939 Union Passenger Terminal exposed by construction of the Metro Rail subway system. The settlement reported here was not the very first area occupied by the Chinese in Los Angeles, but the earliest focus – in the adobes around the Plaza abandoned by the Hispanic pioneers – has largely been destroyed by successive development and redevelopment. The community reported here took root on vacant land that had been used almost entirely for agriculture and persisted intact until the demolition that sealed its remains below many feet of sterile fill – unique therefore in its state of preservation and the unmixed nature of its deposits.

Los Angeles was not unique in having a Chinatown. "There is not a large city west of the Rocky Mountains free from a Chinatown" (Wu 1928:149);

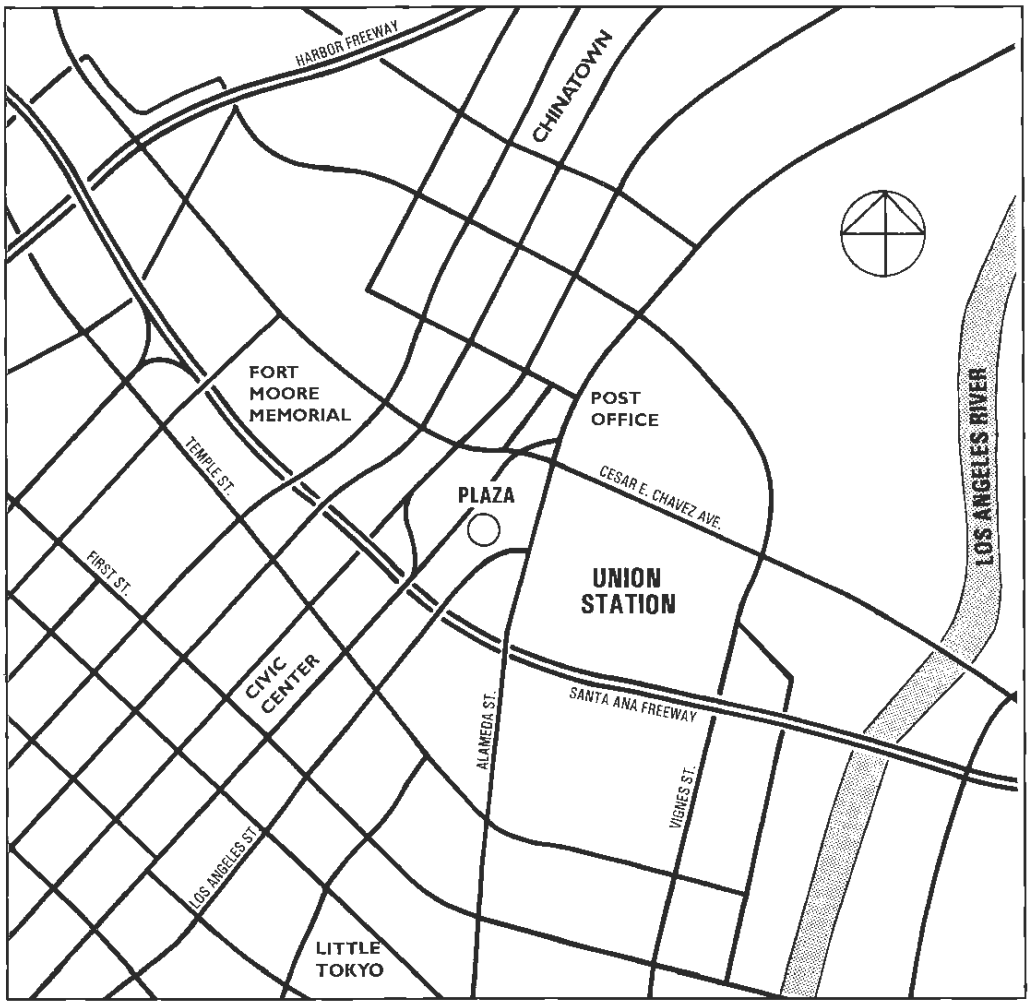


FIGURE 1.2
The construction of the Metro Rail subway system exposed the area behind Union Station, which was occupied from the 1880s to 1933 by Chinese settlers and was demolished in 1933 to make way for the station. The area is unique in its state of preservation and the unmixed nature of the deposits. Location of new Chinatown and other landmarks are also shown. *Map by D. Slawson*

so, too, New York, Boston, and Chicago all had early Chinatowns. There were Chinese settlements in the small Gold Rush towns of the Sierra, as well as in labor camps supporting the construction of railroads and water systems and the fishing and agricultural industries. By 1860, there were Chinese in all but five counties of California, and by 1870, Chinese Americans in all the counties (Wey 1984:319). At first, the majority resided in rural areas (Miller 1955:177), but as the railroads were completed and employment opportunities dwindled in mining and water projects, the newcomers moved to the cities.

The study of the Chinatown of Los Angeles (fig. 1.1) is unusual because of its unparalleled integrity, its size, its fifty years of continuous occupation, and the federal requirements for data recovery. Further, this was a total community – with families, businesses, social and ceremonial organizations, and an internal structure. Smaller or transient occupations, created by small, largely male groups engaged in mining, farming, railroad construction, or fishing, have left behind scant evidence at best and little archival history. These occupations have often gone unrecognized or unstudied before being destroyed. Some sites – those in Phoenix, San Francisco, and several in Idaho – are of mixed national origin; the deposits in Riverside were disturbed; and others – including San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara – have been excavated but never reported. Dating and association of materials from the Tucson Chinatown are somewhat obscured by the culturally mixed long-term occupation and inclusion of ethnological collections as late as the demolition for urban renewal in 1973. Beyond civic improvements and the inexorable pace of urban growth, natural forces, such as the flooding in Napa and erosion on the Channel Islands, have contributed to the destruction of other sites.

This volume summarizes the historical research, fieldwork, and laboratory analysis undertaken dur-

ing the construction of the Los Angeles Rail Rapid Transit Project, Minimum Operable Segment 1 (MOS-1), from 1987 through 1992. The studies of cultural resources were conducted in compliance with the regulatory context of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969; Sections 3(d) and 14 of the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, as amended; Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966; and Section 4 (f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966. The Memorandum of Agreement among the California State Historic Preservation Officer, Urban Mass Transit Administration, Southern California Rapid Transit District, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation specifically recognized the potential for significant archaeological resources below the Union Passenger Terminal which would be affected by the construction of the Metro Rail tunnel and its associated facilities. Already listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its historical and architectural qualities, the railroad station is now also recognized as a unique archaeological resource.

One of the first five stations of the Metro Rail Red Line, the Union Passenger Terminal vicinity (fig. 1.2) was monitored for archaeological resources beginning in April of 1987. During monitoring, isolated or displaced historical artifacts were collected, and professional personnel responded to unanticipated discoveries: an intact Chinese deposit underneath an elevator shaft inside the station and another within the baggage handling area. These finds confirmed predictions that significant remains of Chinatown would be affected when heavy construction began. Historical maps and data were compiled and digitized maps – illustrating the structures of Chinatown with reference to modern streets, the railroad terminal, and the projected Metro Rail alignment – were generated in preparation for encountering the anticipated resources behind Union Station. An archaeological site record was developed, and the Union Station block was designated CA-LAN-1575-H.

Controlled archaeological excavations in Chinatown were limited to the right-of-way and further constrained by existing passenger tunnels, facilities, operation of the trains, and prior impacts such as excavation for the passenger bridge (fig. 1.3). The fieldwork was planned to accommodate the construction schedule; in effect, the investigations were conditioned in both time and space by windows of opportunity. Major phases of excavation occurred during construction of the slurry wall (24 October to 4 November 1989), at emergency exit no. 10 (8 to 13 February 1991), and at the west entrance (25 February to 15 March 1991). Most of the materials described here were recovered during these efforts.[1]



FIGURE 1.3
Excavations for the passenger bridge. *Photo by R. S. Greenwood*

Within the small areas accessible for scientific excavation, fifty-nine distinct features were identified and either sampled or recovered in full. Many contained unprecedented numbers and densities of artifacts. In feature 29, for example, there were 1,171 pounds of stoneware shipping jars, 456 porcelain vessels, 207 glass tokens used in gambling, 17 Asian coins, 25 items related to opium smoking, 10 ceremonial candlesticks or incense burners, fragments of 5 Chinese porcelain spittoons, a carved ink stone, pieces of at least 2 clay stoves, 113 medicinal vials, 10 toothbrushes, 321 buttons, 17 toy marbles, 3 dolls, and an abundance of food remains and other materials. Together, the assemblage documents food import, preparation, and service; recreation; health practices; presence of women and children; rubbish disposal practices; and participation in local retail network. Translations of Chinese characters on ceramics, glass, and newsprint; elemental analysis of stoneware and porcelain; identification of seeds; faunal study of two features and selected fish; and interpretation of more than three hundred Asian coins all contributed to creating a rich picture of community life and relations.

The events, structures, persons, and organizations within the Union Station context before and during the years of Chinatown are documented. To-