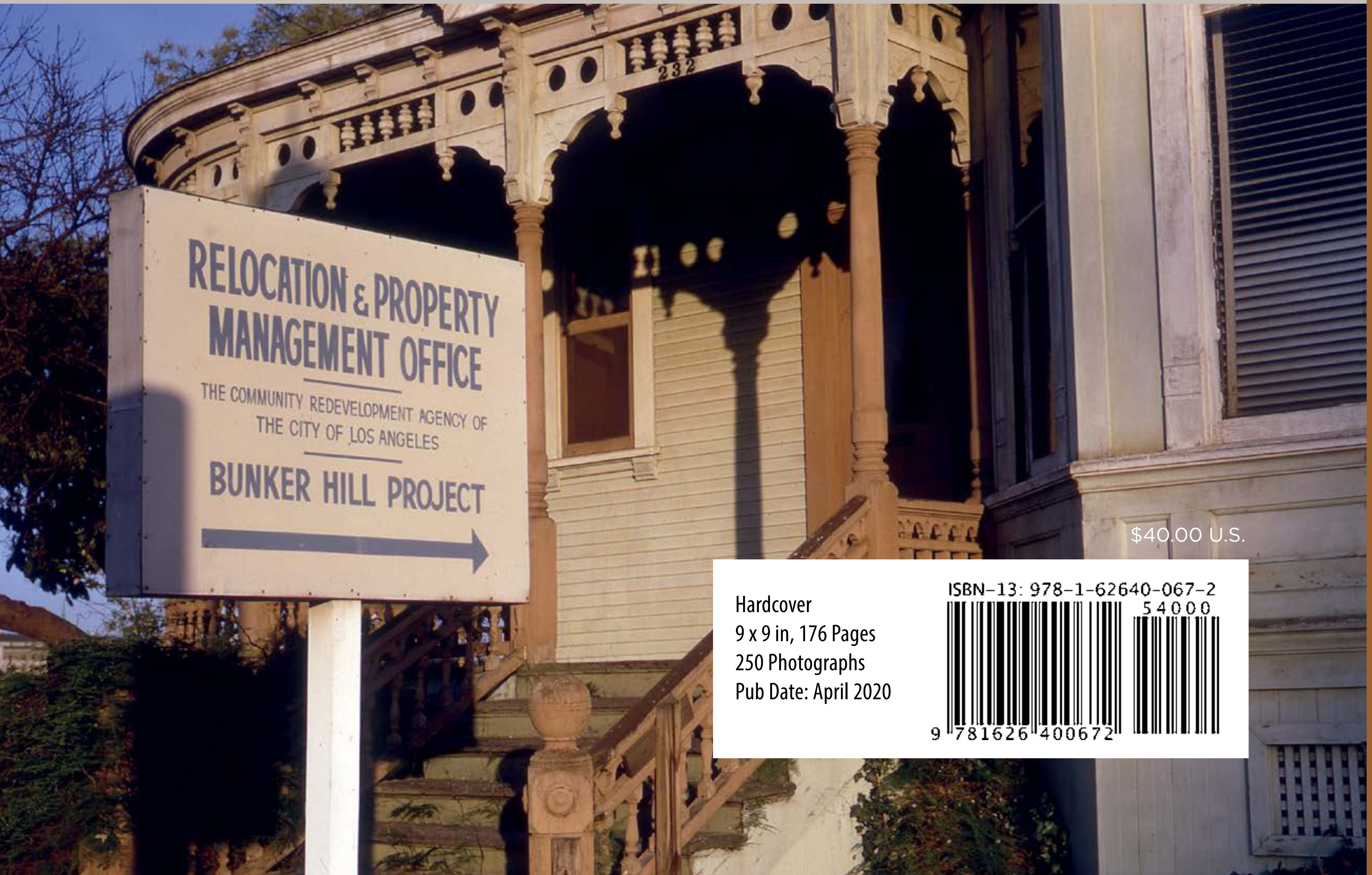
Bunker Hill is the highest point of downtown Los Angeles, both literally and figuratively. Its circle of life has created a continuous saga of change, each chapter rich with captivating characters, structures, and culture.

Bunker Hill, Los Angeles: Essence of Sunshine and Noir, tells the story of the Hill, from the district's inception in the mid-nineteenth century to its present day.

Historian Nathan Marsak commemorates the poets and writers, artists and activists, little guys and big guys, and of course, the many architects who built and rebuilt the community on the Hill—time after historic time. Any fan of American architecture will treasure Marsak's analysis of buildings that have crowned the Hill: the exuberance of Victorian shingle and spindlework, from Mission to Modern, from Queen Anne to Frank Gehry, Bunker Hill has been home to it all, the ever-changing built environment. With more than 250 photographs—many in color—as well as maps and vintage ephemera to tell his dramatic visual story, Marsak lures us into *Bunker Hill, Los Angeles* and shares its lost world, then guides us to its new one.

Nathan Marsak studied under the eminent historian of Los Angeles, Reyner Banham, at University of California, Santa Cruz, and completed his graduate work with noted Sullivan/Wright scholar Narciso Menocal at University of Wisconsin, Madison. He worked on the curatorial staff of Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and served as historian for the LAPD Museum archives. *Bunker Hill, Los Angeles* is his second book; his first was *Los Angeles Neon* (2002).



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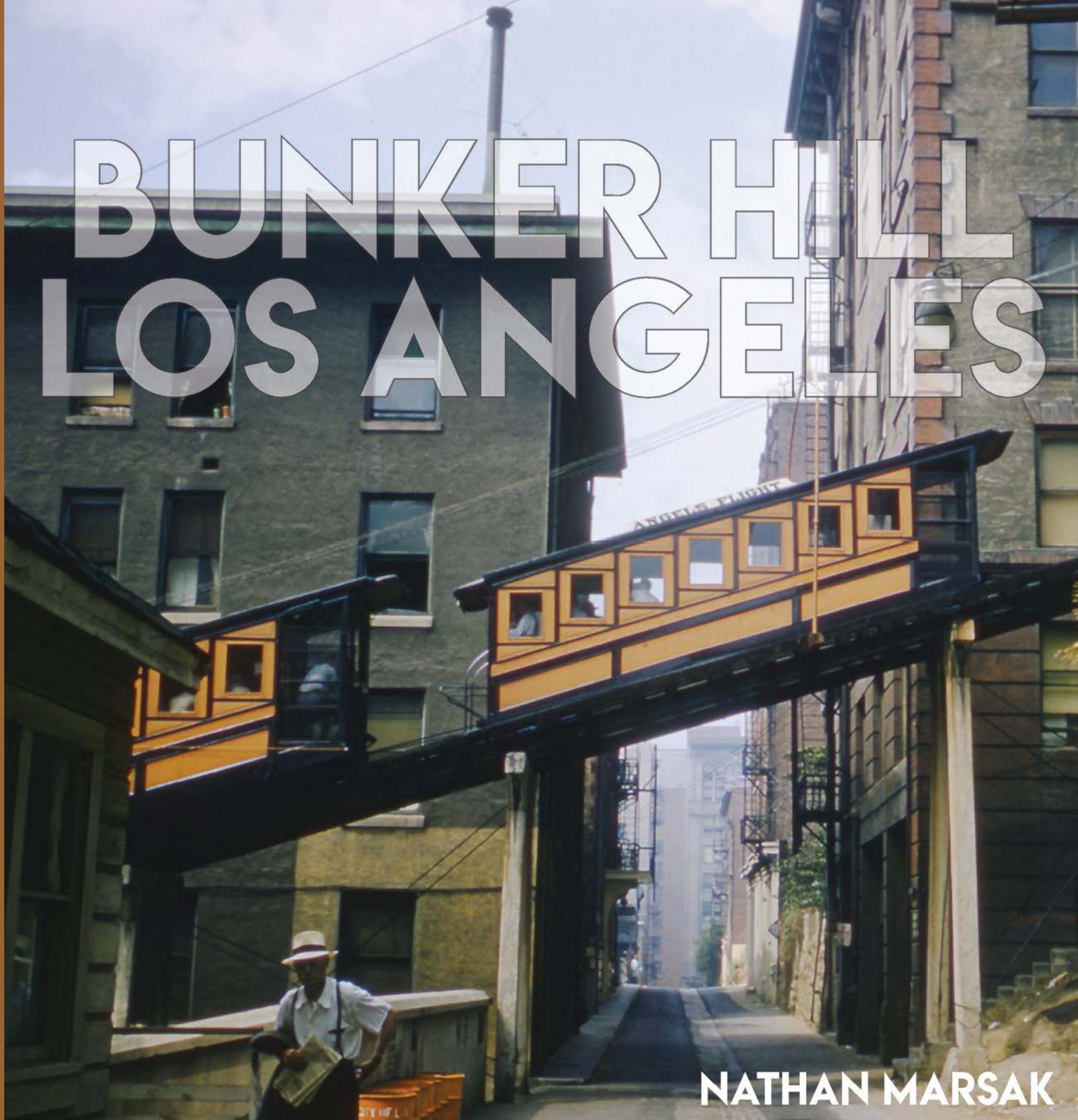


NATHAN MARSAK

Our story begins with a hill, a dusty promontory to the west of a river. This was the river that Spanish explorer Captain Fernando Javier Rivera y Moncada and his expeditionary force—the first overland party to reach California—saw in August 1769. Rivera's diarist, Father Juan Crespí, described the scene as "a very spacious valley, well grown with cottonwoods and sycamores, among which ran a beautiful river." No mention was made of the hill, but the river was named—*El Rio de Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles de la Porciúncula*.

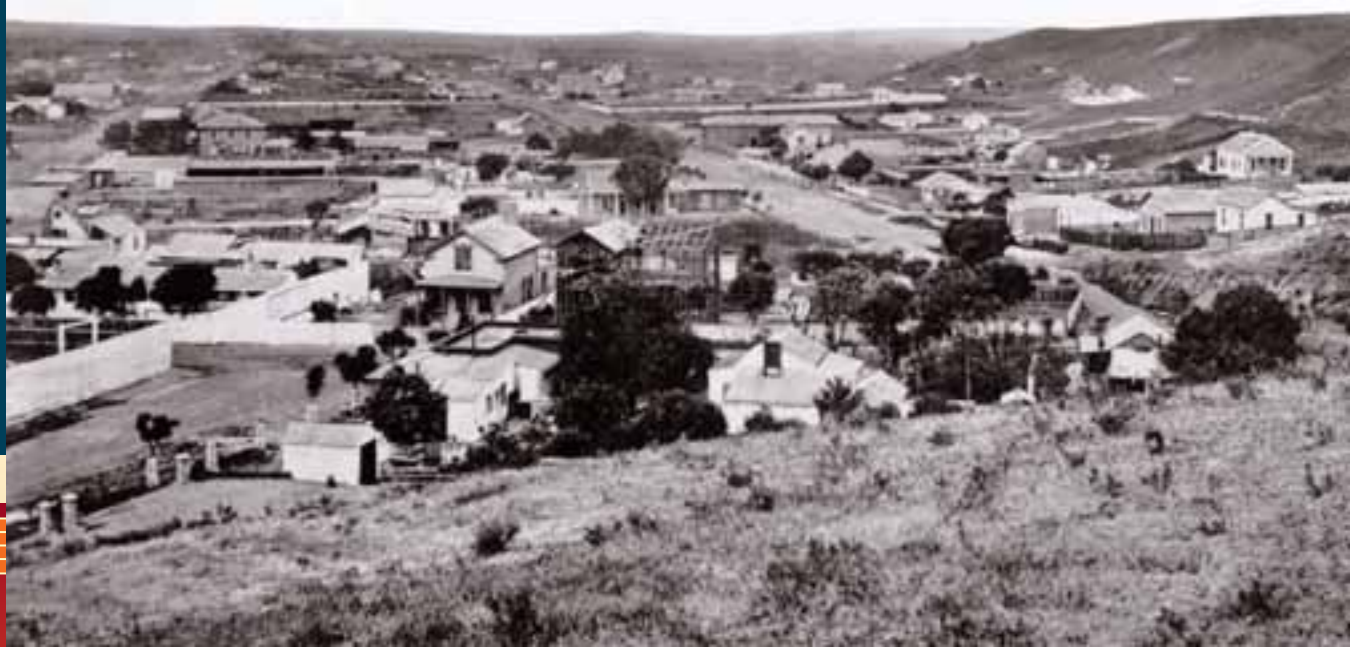
Captain Rivera returned to Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles with a contingent of *pobladores*—forty-four settlers and a small contingent of soldiers—to settle a pueblo on the low hillside above the west bank of the Porciúncula River in the summer of 1781. The hill loomed above them, and as the pueblo grew, it acted as a barrier against the yowling hinterland to the west. That was the hill's sole use; even the native Tongva people who had settled the area millennia ago had little use for it.

The promontory loomed over the growing pueblo, known to the Spaniards as *Reina de Los Angeles*. On occasion, sheep would graze on the hill's grasses after the rains. In March of 1825, Mexico overthrew Spanish rule, and the Mexican flag flew over Los Angeles until February of 1848, when the United States took official possession of California through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Newly a part of the United States, Los Angeles was a difficult place in the 1850s and 1860s. It was populated by reprobates wandering south from the Sierra Nevada goldfields, earning it the nickname "Hell Town." It was rough, lawless. The little city of four thousand people was nearly abandoned after a disastrous cycle of drought, flooding, and the subsequent destruction of the cattle industry. After the drought of 1862–1865, many landowners like the Pico brothers and Lugo family had trouble paying taxes and servicing debt. As they began to lose property to foreclosure, a new word crept into the Los Angeles lexicon: subdivision. Former governor John J. Downey bought up most of the major land holdings along the river and split it up into small farming plots in 1865. In 1869, recent Ohio transplant Robert Maclay Widney engineered the purchase of 180,000 acres of Abel Stearns's extensive ranchos, which stretched from Long Beach into what is now Orange County, and created enormous subdivisions. Widney—who would come to live on Bunker Hill—began publishing the *Los Angeles Real Estate Advertiser* in 1870, selling lots to families from Eastern states, mostly disenfranchised folk from the war-torn Confederate South. In that same year Phineas Banning, an entrepreneur known as the "Father of the Port of Los Angeles," built a railroad between Los Angeles and the port at San Pedro; this made the importation of building material cheaper and easier.

Los Angeles has always had men of visionary acumen, and one of particular importance made his mark around the same time: Prudent Beaudry. Beaudry was born in 1816 to a fine Québécois family, one of five brothers and three sisters. He won and lost numerous fortunes in mercantile ventures, including in the ice business, the syrup business, and in the shipping and commission game across Canada, Europe, New York, New Orleans, and many a point in between. After a disastrous warehouse fire in San Francisco, he elected to begin anew, as so many do, in Los Angeles. The year was 1852. Beaudry began to buy and sell office blocks; before long he was a wealthy and respected citizen of Los Angeles.

The story of Bunker Hill begins in earnest in March of 1867, when Beaudry attended a public auction to purchase Jesse D. Hunter's property, twenty acres of steep hillside land roughly bounded by Fourth, Second, Charity, and Hill Streets, a plot that cost Beaudry $517. (Charity Street would be



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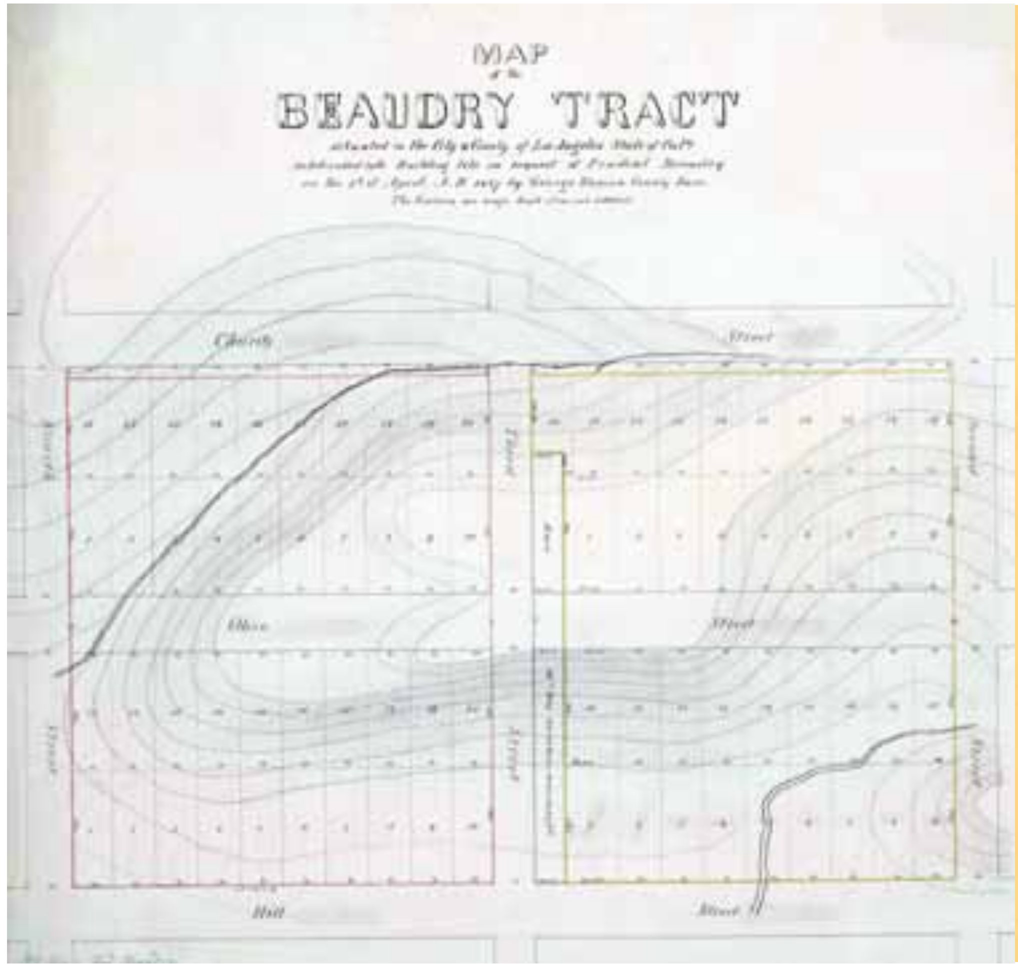

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> way and in the clearest tones, “God is good, the harvest will be abundant.” The city lay at our feet with its green and leopard-colored orange groves, its long lines of pepperell and its rippling willow-lined zanjas. The river stretched along and could be traced by the willows which grow on its banks. In the points of the compass the country could be seen for miles upon miles away. One could scarcely help being romantic and poetical if they lived up the hill. — *Los Angeles Herald*, December 13, 1873

The reporter describes how Beaudry surveyed and platted all the lots, and wrote that they were available for inspection and sale at reasonable terms—fifteen dollars down, fifteen dollars per month, no interest, immediate possession; lots were priced from $100 to $525. Street grading was a mammoth undertaking, but Hill, Olive, Flower, and Hope Streets were completed in 1874. Beaudry was elected mayor of Los Angeles in December of that year.

While early photographs suggest that there were already small structures at the base of the Hill at the time of Beaudry’s development—most likely buildings ancillary to sheep grazing—the first recorded structure on the Hill was the African Methodist Episcopal Church, at the corner of Fourth and Charity Streets, in 1869; its bishop was T.M.D. Ward. Others would soon follow up onto the arcadian acreage.

Just as structures began to dot Bunker Hill, 1875 arrived: it was a tough year for Los Angeles. The Panic of 1873, which triggered inflation and bank failures across much of Europe and North America, caught up to California in the summer of 1875, up to and including ruinous speculation fever on the Comstock Lode. Panic withdrawals shut down the Farmers and Merchants Bank. The Temple and Workman Bank, with its home in the magnificent Temple Block at Temple and Main Streets, closed its doors. Los Angeles pioneer and banker William Workman shot himself in his office; F.P.F. Temple, ruined, had a stroke and died. Land sales dramatically slowed.

And yet recovery was on the way. The 1870s were a great decade for Los Angeles boosterism. Charles Nordhoff published California: For Health, Pleasure, and Residence in 1873, which promoted Southern California’s curative climate, and over the course of the decade the infirm, inspired, arrived in droves. The citrus industry sold the orange as a metaphor for the California dream, for the orange was, as Carey McWilliams years later said, “the gold nugget of Southern California.” Most importantly, in September 1876, the Southern Pacific Railroad linked Los Angeles to San Francisco, opening a transcontinental rail connection. The development of the first streetcars in 1874 boosted urban expansion. New arrivals to Los Angeles began to spread out from around the plaza.

Architecturally, Los Angeles was dominated by the vernacular of its Spanish past. Los Angeles had numerous American settlers during the Mexican era, but they adopted the local building style. The houses and commercial structures were for the most part single-story adobe, flat-roofed, and covered in brea—the tar that bubbles up from pits west of town, mixed with rocks and horsehair—with a sheltering corredor running along the front. Pitched red tile roofs were rare, though pitched roofs covered in shake were seen with greater frequency after the first sawmill was opened in San Bernardino in 1851.

After California was annexed to the United States, homebuilders, aided by illustrated weeklies and lithographs sold in dry goods stores, sought to build “picturesque” cottages of their own, reflecting East Coast styles. The gabled roofs of Victorian folk style, affixed with spindlework, and the bracketed eaves of the Italianate style, began to dot the landscape in the 1850s; the prodigious French community constructed dwellings in the popular mansard-roofed Empire style. The Gothic Revival was the style of choice for those still under the sway of architectural and landscape theorist Andrew Jackson Downing,

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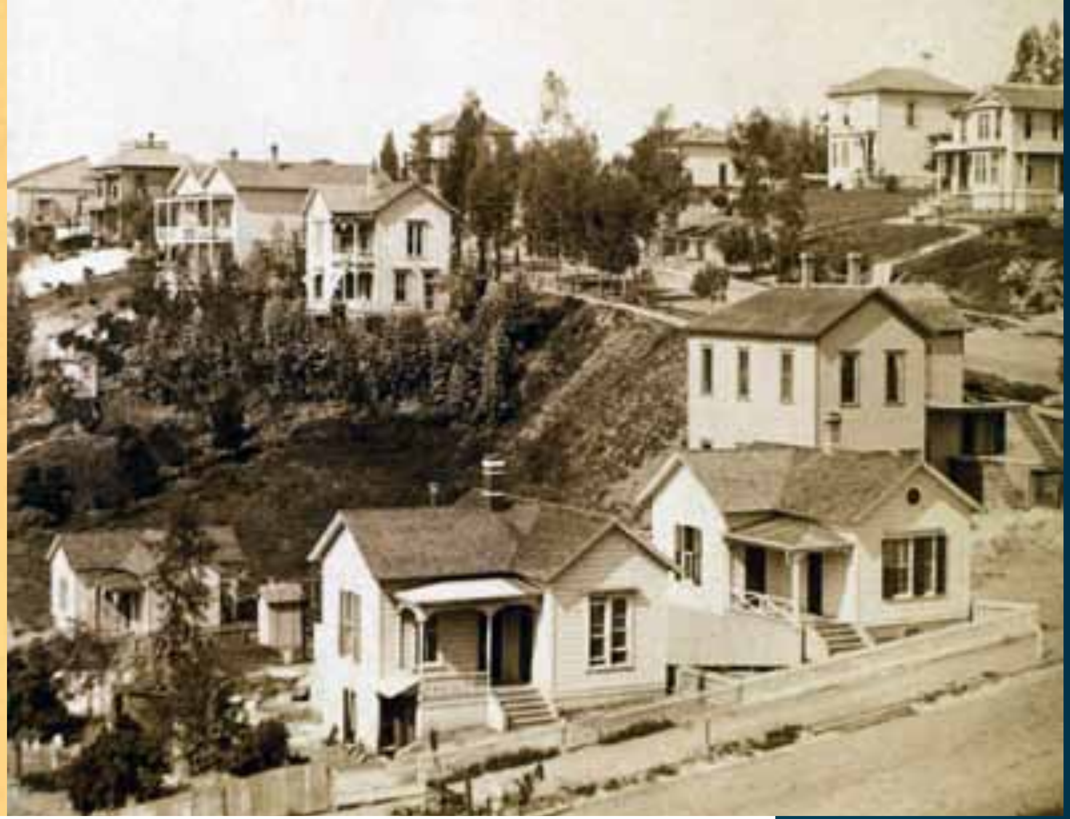

who published enormously influential treatises through the early 1850s on moral betterment through thoughtfully designed cottages. The transcontinental railroad brought carpenters, turners, and glaziers into town as the lumber schooners brought endless board-feet of redwood and old-growth Douglas fir to Banning’s docks in Wilmington. With plans and materials in hand, many homebuilders looked to the newly subdivided Bunker Hill to put down roots.

The homes built along Hill Street and atop Bunker Hill in the 1870s and into the mid-1880s were primarily designed in the Folk Victorian and Italianate styles. Folk Victorian was some of the earliest and simplest construction on the Hill. Most often these houses displayed a gable front and side wing, with spindlework detailing on the porch. The Italianate style derived from the Picturesque movement, which sought through asymmetry, variety, and texture to inspire the sublime. Italianate style was modeled on the rural Italian farmhouse and was marked by tall windows with elaborate crowns, wide bracketed eaves, low hipped roofs, and single story porches. Along with Gothic Revival, Italianate style was promoted by Andrew Jackson Downing as the right and true American architectural expression, as opposed to the prevailing formality and exactitude of the Greco-Roman model.

> Other sections of the city that are growing rapidly are the Beaudry highlands, and the hills threaded by Olive, Temple, Hill, and Hope streets, and Bunker Hill avenue. This latter section is the Nob Hill of Los Angeles.The homes recently built here are the most modern class, and possess many attractions, not least among which, to the lover of the picturesque, is the marvelous view to be had from these heights.On clear days, across the broad and sunny plains, beyond the olive groves, vineyards, and gardens the sea is plainly visible, its silver surface shining between the breaks in the hills. — *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1883

Architecture of the Boom Years

> To those who remember the unpretentious buildings erected in this city fourteen years ago, when a one-story building was considered fine, and a two-story edifice was worthy of admiration, the change to the present styles of architecture must be most noticeable and interesting. In all parts of the city the new styles of architecture, that require largely increased expense, are everywhere to be seen. The styles are almost innumerable. The Queen Anne, the Arabesque, the Moorish, the Italian, the Gothic, with variations by French architects, the Oriental, the Grecian, the English cottage style, are all abroad, producing a wonderful variety, that is most attractive and interesting. Should the present prosperity of the city be unchecked, it will soon show the most delightful varieties of architecture of any American city…from present appearances Los Angeles will soon be the most beautiful city in the world. The old style of Egyptian and Doric architecture that prevailed so long in Boston and New York will never give their funeral aspects to Los Angeles, and the Corinthian and Ionic will have to accept radical variations in this 'sun-kissed land.'" — *Los Angeles Herald*, 17 September 1887

The great homes we equate with Bunker Hill were largely built in a very narrow time period, primarily between 1886 and 1889. This was a great boom time for Los Angeles. The Santa Fe Railroad brought in a second transcontinental line in 1886, giving the Southern Pacific some competition. A rate war between the two railroads drove the price of an immigrant's train ticket down to absurd lows; the price of passage from Kansas City to Los Angeles in March of 1887 famously dropped to $1. Midwestern migrants came in droves, clutching Nordhoff's California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travelers and Settlers and Charles Dudley Warner's Our Italy—the founding documents of California boosterism—and were met at the station by subdividers and real estate agents. They came to take in the curative climate, practice gentleman farming, bask in the glow of the wondrous orange, and dive into the romance of the "days of the dons," torn from the pages of Helen Hunt Jackson's 1884 novel Ramona. Los Angeles's population soared from roughly 11,000 to 80,000 by 1887.

As the population expanded, building intensified on the Hill. However, most homes were built by established Angelenos rather than new transplants, as the well-to-do sought to escape the increasingly congested residential neighborhoods and move above the effluvia. Hill Street, which ran along Bunker Hill's eastern flank, had become increasingly commercial. The noise and clamor of the commercial district abutted the industrial district along the river. Wealthy residents felt it necessary to rise above the

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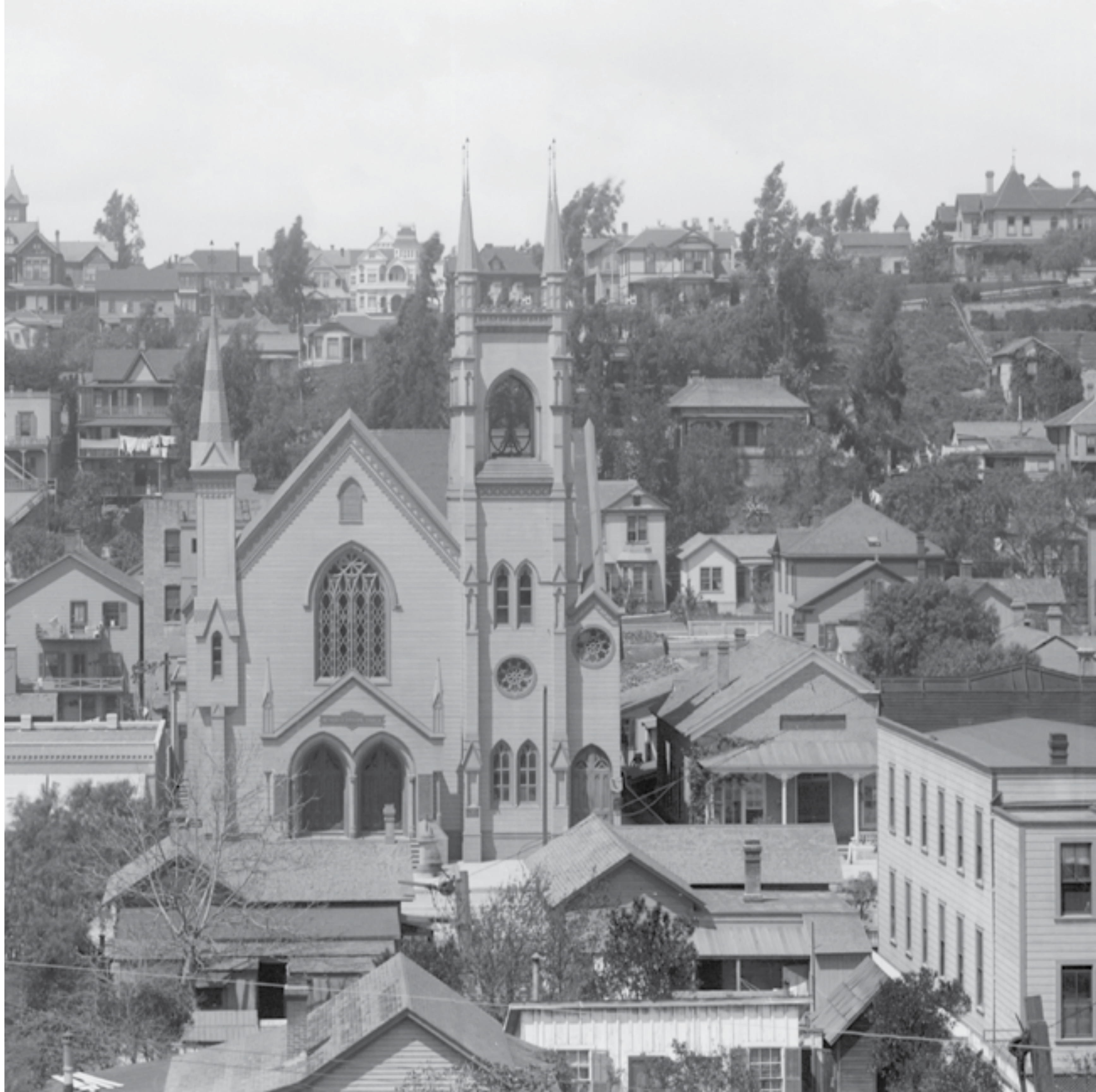

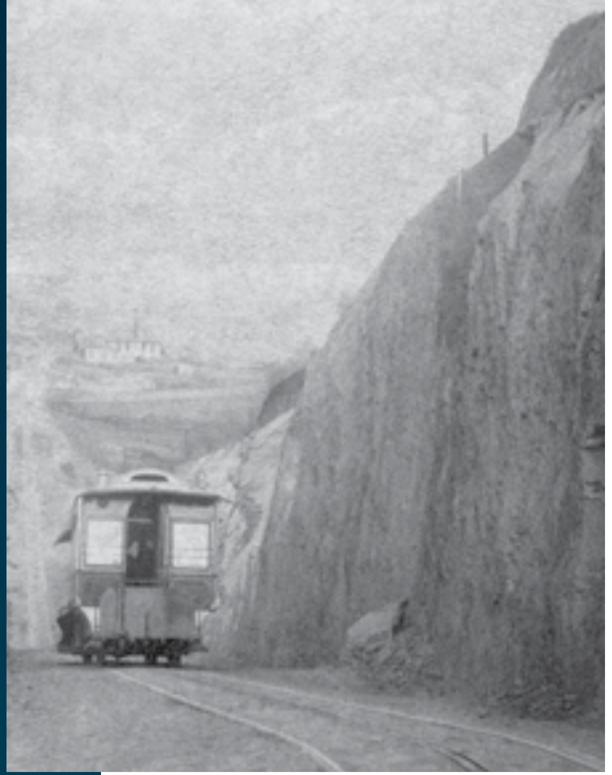

Cable Car Railway Company incorporated in November 1885, the month after the Second Street Railway began operation. The Temple Street Cable Railway opened July 14, 1886, and ran along Temple Street between Main Street and Belmont, in a little valley between Bunker Hill and Fort Moore Hill. The Temple railway later extended up to Hoover Street and connected with the Cahuenga Valley Railroad, a steam train to Hollywood.

In 1898, Pacific Electric railroad magnate and real estate developer Henry Huntington purchased the Temple Street Cable Car Railway line, and swapped its cables for an electrical system in the fall of 1901. Huntington's interests lay in extending the reach of the Pacific Electric Railway Company's cars beyond the immediate area around Bunker and Crown Hills and Angelino Heights, and after the Temple Street Cable company was officially absorbed by Pacific Electric, he replaced the cable cars with his streetcars in November 1902.

Angels Flight

Residents of Bunker Hill at the turn of the twentieth century shared a common problem: a steep walk up and down a narrow switchback of stairs between Hill and Olive Streets. The Second Street Cable Railway had recently fallen into ruin. Hill Street was becoming increasingly commercial, and Bunker Hill itself had yet to add the number of small markets that would open around 1905–1910, so residents faced a daunting endeavor as they tended to business in the city below.

Colonel James Ward Eddy stepped up to the task. The Colonel—his military rank gained during time spent as Lincoln's bodyguard during the Civil War—was a restless sixty-nine-year-old widower, a recent transplant to Los Angeles, and a retired railroad man. In May of 1901, Eddy approached the City Council with an idea: a funicular that would run up Third Street, paid for out of his own pocket.

The Los Angeles Electric Incline Railway—a funicular whose biblically named cars "Olivet" and "Sinai" would forever be known as "Angels Flight"—made its inaugural trip on December 31, 1901. Mayor Meredith Snyder was the Flight's first passenger on that 325-foot, 33 percent grade, which took one minute for a one-way trip. From there, Angels Flight was an enormous hit. It shuttled Hill residents, to be sure; but its role as a piece of twentieth-century technological utopianism was cemented immediately. The Flight consisted of counterbalanced cars running up and down the incline railway each fixed to a cable attached to the fifty-horsepower motorized pulley in the station house at the top. For most of the railway the two cars share a central rail, but in the middle of the railway the tracks bow out to four rails so the cars may pass each other.

There was also a manicured park above Clay Street called Angels Rest, which featured a 100-foot steel observation tower called Angels View, topped with a camera obscura providing a view of the city inside a darkroom. While Angels Flight served a simple purpose—getting people up to the Hill—it

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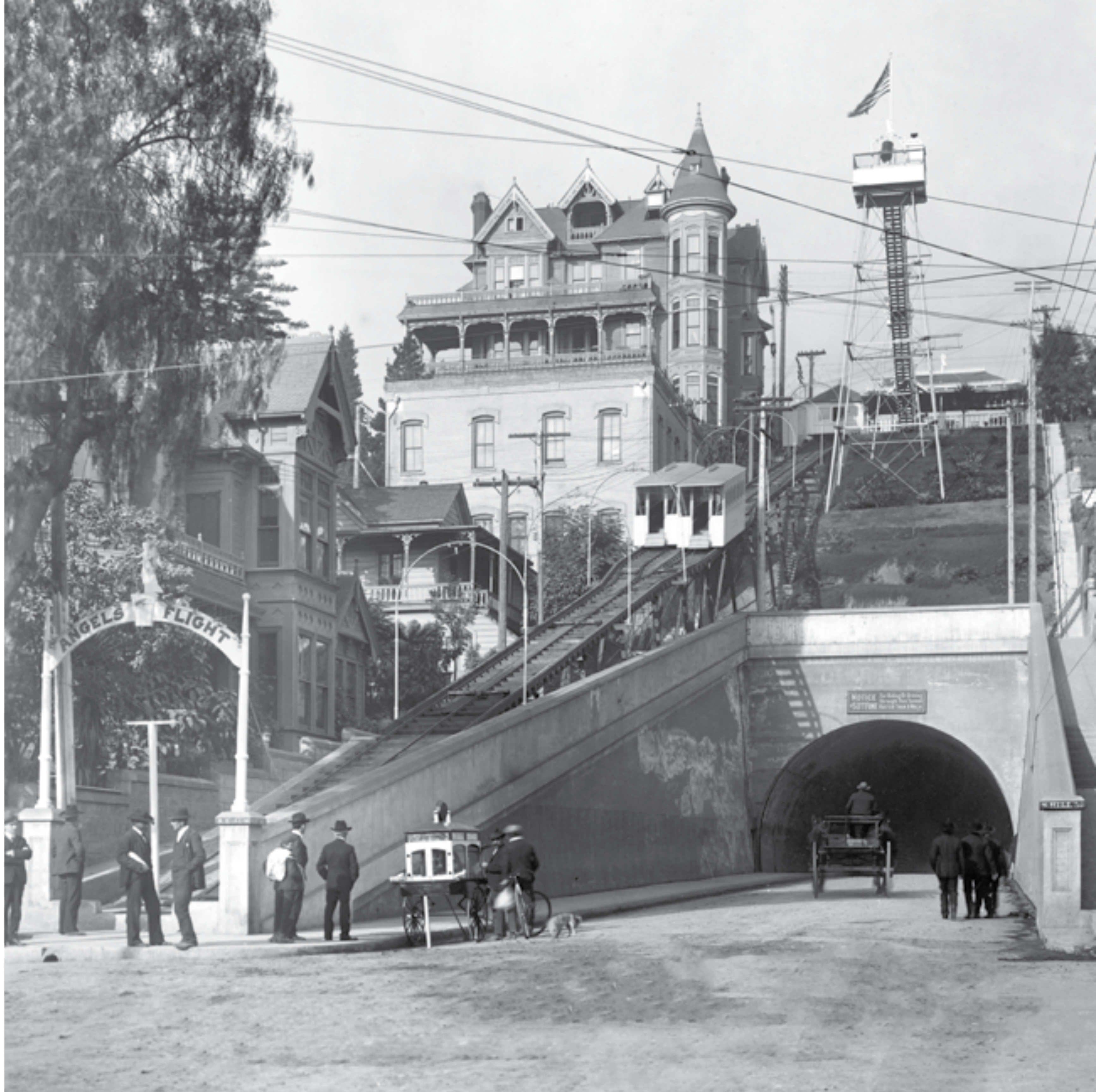

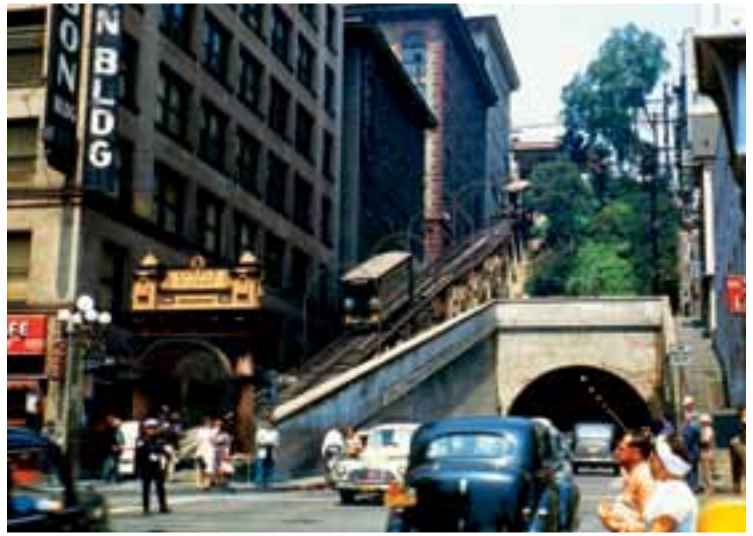

also engendered no small measure of civic pride. Countless postcards of the Angels Flight works were printed, purchased, and mailed home. Tourists took Angels Flight to the observation deck above. In 1912, Colonel Eddy, now eighty, sold the enterprise to the Funding Company of California for $80,000 (the equivalent of roughly $2.15 million in 2020) in cash, stocks, and bonds, leaving a comfortable fortune to his family; he passed away in 1916.

Angels Flight had some changes over the years—the "jog" at Clay Street was replaced in 1905 with an elevated track, at which point her cream-colored, open-air cars were swapped for enclosed ones (to be famously painted orange and black in the mid-1920s). In 1910, noted architects Train & Williams were hired to design the Flight's Beaux-Arts station house on Olive and the Doric-columned lower arch on Hill Street; both were built by the California Ornamental Brick Company.

Angels Flight persevered by and large without incident (derailing once in 1913, and killing a sailor walking up the tracks in 1943) until 1969. Then, the City removed and stored Angels Flight as part of the Redevelopment Plan for the Bunker Hill Urban Renewal Project. Angels Flight returned twenty-seven years later in February 1996, though not at its original location at Third and Hill (because of the late-1970s construction of the Angelus Plaza retirement community) but one-half block south on Hill Street toward Fourth Street. The City, however, decided that Edwardian technology, which functioned perfectly over the funicular's operative sixty-eight years, required updating, and subsequently engaged Lift Engineering, a ski-lift company uniquely ill-suited for the job: they had had a dozen lawsuits involving collapsing ski lifts, broken cables, seventy-plus injuries, and multiple wrongful deaths. Nevertheless, the Flight's original technology was swapped for Lift's modern cables, drums, and gears. In 2001, Lift Engineering's equipment malfunctioned: the two cars crashed into one another, and the collision killed Leon Praport, an eighty-three-year-old man who had survived the Holocaust, but not Los Angeles's attempts at modernity. After the accident, Angels Flight spent nine years sitting fallow. Reopened briefly in 2010, Angels Flight was closed in 2011 and 2013, again due to failures with its advanced technology.

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After a four-year shutdown by the Public Utilities Commission, its mechanisms were updated again, with a new braking system and software design by ACS Infrastructure and SENER Engineering. The first ride on the restored Angels Flight was taken by Mayor Eric Garcetti on August 31, 2017, just as the initial ride on Angels Flight was taken by Mayor Snyder on December 31, 1901.The beloved funicular continues to transport tourists fascinated with Old Los Angeles and the occasional local with some need to ascend the Hill.

Court Flight

There were dual funiculars in the Bunker Hill area—in the region sometimes referred to as "Court Hill," or the part of Bunker Hill that runs between First and Temple Streets, there was a companion to Angels Flight. Known as Court Flight, it was located at 208 North Broadway, adjacent to the Broadway Hotel. It was the brainchild of Samuel G. Vandergrift and his Observation Tower Company. Vandergrift broke ground in December 1904 and built a 180-foot, 2'6" parallel two-track funicular that rose to a 335-foot elevation at a 52 percent grade. The two cars saved riders 141 steps up to the dead end of Court Street, just east of Hill. Vandergrift ran the flight until his death in 1932, after which his widow Annie took control.

While Court Flight was intended as a tourist operation, and to serve the homeowner and apartment dwellers above, Annie relied mostly on courthouse workers and other Civic Center habitués journeying up to the parking lots through the 1930s and into World War II. During the war, however, finding reliable operators proved difficult. The little incline railway began to run at a loss. And then suddenly, in October 1943, a carelessly tossed cigarette destroyed Court Flight. Wrote the Los Angeles Times:

> Sparks raced speedily in the palms and underbrush and onto the ties of the old cable car line…and many a pioneer resident paused in the Civic Center to reminisce in sorrow…lawyers, judges, veterans in public services left their offices to see flames adding their fury to help erase another bit of the past from a streamlined Los Angeles.

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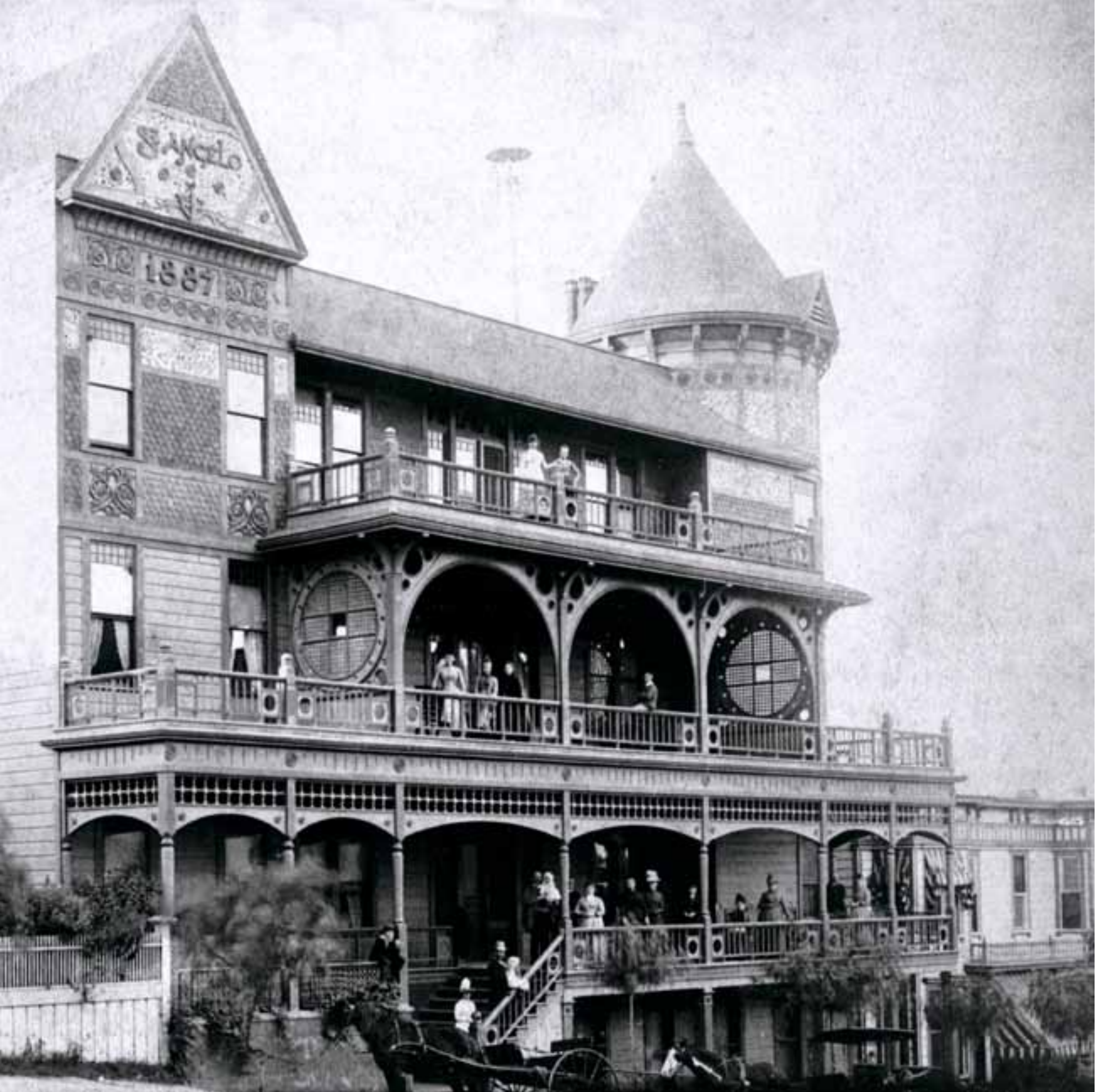

Building Resumes: Beaux-Arts Comes to the Hill

While not as numerous, apartments and hotels sprang up on the Hill contemporaneously with single-family houses. They catered to the traveler who sought renewed vigor from the life-giving Los Angeles climate, and in language reflecting the boosterism of the day, hotel advertisements often touted "sunny rooms." An advertisement for St. Angelo Hotel in October 1888 claimed:

> Pleasure Seekers or Tourists—Looking for a good, healthy elevated place to spend a few months, ought to take a look at the St. Angelo, on Grand Avenue, near Temple. Highest, healthiest locality of any hotel in Los Angeles.

vBuilding on Bunker Hill took a hiatus when, after a speculative land boom, banks tightened their loan policies, and land promoters became overextended. Following the real estate bust of the late 1880s, there came the Panic of 1893, caused by railroad overbuilding and failure, and the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. With the collapse of major employers and the subsequent national economic crisis, American unemployment leapt from 3 percent to 18 percent. Banks closed. When Los Angeles emerged from its economic doldrums, tastes had changed: the Brooklyn Daily Eagle wrote in 1899 that Queen Anne style was "tiresome and homely, result[ing] in grotesque and sometimes hideous constructions of a higglety-pigglety class of architecture in which every style was mixed up and no style either predominated or appeared to good effect."

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