

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Q: Is the County of Los Angeles able to work with the agencies of the City of Los Angeles, the State of California, and the US Federal Government and if so, how effective are those relationships.

At the start of Dr. Tom Sitton's book "The Courthouse Crowd," Tom has inserted an insightful quote from another researcher: "The American county is an important yet often neglected and maligned unit of local government."

While often "neglected" and "maligned," there is nothing simple about Los Angeles County. It is the largest county in the US by population and one of the largest by size. It has mountains, deserts, beaches and islands, with 88 cities and well over one hundred of unincorporated areas. Yet, federal, state and municipal governments are often seen as more significant and relevant by citizens of Los Angeles County.

That was not always the case. Dr. Sitton's research shows that in 1850 and for the first hundred years of its existence, the County of Los Angeles was the principal unit of government for its citizens.

From its founding in 1850 through 1865, the principal business of the County was cattle. The principal functions of the County Board of Supervisors were similarly modest: maintain law and order, record land and personal records and collect taxes.

As thousands migrated to Los Angeles from cities in the East and South following the Civil War, farming, agriculture and thousands of new residents quickly transformed LA County. And the County government responded with new roads and railroads and the City government took the lead on a new port.

CITATION

Author:
Sitton, Tom

Title:
The courthouse crowd: Los Angeles County and its Government, 1850-1950

Year: 2013

Call #: 352.0794 S623

Author:
Los Angeles Metropolitan History Project

Foreword by Mrs. Fletcher Bowron. Ed. with an introd. By Doyce B. Nunis, Jr.

Title:
Los Angeles and its environs in the twentieth century; a bibliography of a metropolis.

Year: 1973

Call #: 979.41 L88LANmh

Author:
Compiled and edited by Hynda L. Rudd; foreword by Doyce B. Nunis.

Title:
Los Angeles and its environs in the twentieth century: a bibliography of a metropolis, 1970-1990, with a directory of resources in Los Angeles County

Year: 1996

Call #: 979.4102 L88Ru

But even after 50 years, the real “change” for LA County was just beginning. The Progressive Era and World War I brought modernization, a new airfield, and new wealth and tens of thousands of new residents to the County, but the Great Depression, World War II and the expansion that followed saw the County and State governments often eclipsed by Federal funds and programs.

In addition to Dr. Sitton’s book, those interested in learning more about Los Angeles County (or anything about Los Angeles and its environs), can refer to two great bibliographies funded by the Haynes Foundation (1973 and 1990) which can be found on the shelves of the Los Angeles Public Library.

In sum, Dr. Sitton observes that Los Angeles County and its five supervisors, although rarely in the spotlight, have been busy creating a new model of county governance for the 21st Century.

