

Background Information on Italian Hall and Historic Italian Hall Foundation

Historical Information

- 1823** The first Italian arrives in Los Angeles and the El Pueblo area rapidly becomes the city's Italian quarter.
- 1800s- 1900s** One-third of the buildings that comprise El Pueblo Historical Monument, including the Avila Adobe, Pico House, and Pelanconi House (now La Golondrina Restaurant) are owned or operated by Italians.
- 1907-08** The Italian Hall is built to serve as a social center for the Italians of Los Angeles. Weddings, concerts, cultural celebrations such as the *vendemmia*, or fall wine harvest took place on Hall's second floor while Ettore Paggi's saloon and the Frank Arconti hardware store occupied the ground level. The Hall served as the original headquarters of the oldest extant Italian mutual benefit organization, the Garibaldina Society and hosted numerous other individuals and groups from the Italian and pan-ethnic Los Angeles community, such as Ricardo Flores Magón and the Mexican Liberal Party, *Il Circolo Operaio Italiano* (an Italian worker's club) and Emma Goldman.
- 1930s** The Italian community, now numbering 30,000, requires a larger community center and vacates the second floor of the Hall. Arconti Hardware, and Elena Peluffo's *Casa di Pranzo* (later renamed *El Paseo Inn*) remain in the building. Other Italian-owned businesses such as Piuma's Grocery and Casa de Loza Gifts continue to thrive and the El Pueblo area remains an important focal point for the Italian community.
- 1930s-80s** The second floor of the Hall is used as an art school and as storage for El Pueblo.

1989-Present

- 1989** The historic significance of the Hall becomes evident to staff at El Pueblo State Historic Park in the course of preparing the Historic Structures Report. Luminaries of the Los Angeles Italian community, namely Councilman John Ferraro, Joe Cerrell, Phil Bartenetti and Maria De Tone Cooper organize a support group to secure use of the facility and to raise funds to develop a museum. Fundraising begins.
- 1992** The Los Angeles City Council passes an ordinance to create the El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument Authority. Within the ordinance, it is stated that, "The Department shall operate, manage, and control the above property in a manner that will enhance the theme of each of the unique areas located within the Monument boundaries consistent with Section 4.5 of Chapter 1358 of the Statutes of 1987... the Italian hall shall be restored and operated in a manner consistent with its theme."
- 1993-95** The Hall is seismically retrofitted by the City of Los Angeles.
- 1993-98** The support group, later known as the Historic Italian Hall Foundation is incorporated a non-profit organization and granted a 501(c)3 exemption.

Fundraising efforts continue; \$1.5 million is raised over the next few years.

- 1999** As part of the Marco Polo Bill which also assisted with the birth of the Chinese American Museum, the Historic Italian Hall Foundation (HIHF) receives a \$500,000.00 grant from the California Arts Council to be used for museum development and tenant improvement work and a \$30,000 grant from Getty.
- 2001** A cooperative agreement is created between the City of Los Angeles and the HIHF. It is identical to the cooperative agreement between the Chinese American Museum and the City. HIHF President Rosemarie Lippman and El Pueblo Commission President Maria Pacho sign the agreement, which is then given to the City Attorney, with whom it has remained, unsigned until present.
- 2001** Renovation begins using monies raised by the HIHF and State monies.
- 2001-03** At the request of former El Pueblo General Manager Ed Navarro, the Italian Hall's roof is repaired. Air conditioning units are installed on the roof for the Hall's ground floor tenants. This work was presumably paid for by the City and performed by an unknown contractor(s). HIHF's contractor is also asked to perform work on other sites at El Pueblo. Legal City contracts for this work were never created and some of the work has not been paid for.
- 2002** HIHF receives a grant of \$300,000 from the City of Los Angeles for tenant improvement work. A portion of this money pays for upgrades to the entire building.
- 2003** The majority of the repairs are finalized. Additional HVAC and plumbing work is necessary in order to complete project. The Italian Hall receives a Temporary Certificate of Occupancy, and several events are held at the Hall including ceremonies for the Ambassador of Italy, the Hall's re-inauguration (attended by Mayor Hahn, Councilman Villaraigosa and numerous other elected officials,) as well as a fundraiser for the Siqueiros Mural.
- August 2004** Sprinkler leak occurs. Monitoring company receives "trouble signal," and contacts HIHF president who is out of town. Company then calls number on file for GSD which has been disconnected. When sprinkler head bursts, audible alarm sounds and LAFD summoned. Hall is then closed.
- March 2005** BOE requested to visit the Hall to examine a roof truss deemed compromised. Truss had been reinforced approximately ten years earlier by an unknown contractor. BOE, unaware that seismic work was performed in 1990s, provides a figure of \$2.1 million for seismic retrofitting and repair of truss.
- June 2005** With the hiring of a new curator at El Pueblo, additional artifacts and oral histories are collected for the museum.
- Summer 2005** HIHF informed that repairs to Hall would be paid for using MICLA monies and would be included in El Pueblo capital improvements.

- March 2006** The El Pueblo Commission passes the proposed 2007/08 budget which includes funds allocated for the repairs needed to the Hall.
- April 2006** BOE, after being asked to evaluate the work performed by the Foundation, discovers that the building was seismically retrofitted in 1994/1995 and received Division 88 compliance.
- May 2006** The HIHF receives a grant from Getty for a summer internship.
- June 2006** The HIHF co-sponsors El Pueblo's "At Work: The Art of California labor" exhibit.
- Jun/Aug 2006** Former General Manager Rushmore Cervantes reports to El Pueblo Commission that the repairs to the Hall will be paid for as part of the \$12 million capital improvements. (See Commission minutes 6/22/06 and 8/10/06.)
- Sept 2006** The HIHF launches the Southern California Oral History Project
- Jan 2007** The Bureau of Engineering issues a partial report for the Italian Hall, recommending the hiring of a consultant to evaluate the truss. Consultant's services are estimated to cost \$70-100,000. Repairs estimated at \$100-300,000
- April 2007** The HIHF receives a grant from Getty for a summer internship.
- Present** HIHF prepares for its centennial celebration, gala fundraiser and exhibit on the history of Italians in a multi-ethnic Los Angeles.