

THE HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES

As Seen from the City Attorney's Office

BY LEON THOMAS DAVID

EDITOR'S NOTE

The publication of Leon Thomas David's oral history in this volume of *California Legal History* provides the opportunity to present his "History of Los Angeles as seen from the City Attorney's Office," which he completed in 1950. It is one of several works occasioned by his service as an assistant city attorney, a position he held from 1934 until his appointment to the bench in 1950, except for his period of active duty during World War II.

In addition to the legal, academic, and military careers discussed in his oral history, Judge David enjoyed a fourth public career as a pioneering legal historian. In this role, he gave special attention to the legal history of California. His service in the City Attorney's Office led to studies that combined the historical and substantive aspects of that office. For example, one of his earliest and best known works is a series of articles published in 1933–34 that discuss the development of municipal tort liability in California.¹ Many of his works in the field of legal history predate the creation

¹ Leon Thomas David, "Municipal Liability in Tort in California," published in five parts in *Southern California Law Review* 6 and 7 (1933–34); revised and expanded edition published as *Municipal Liability for Tortious Acts and Omissions with Particular Reference to the Laws of the State of California* (Los Angeles: Sterling Press, 1936). A procedural work arising from his city attorney service was *The Administration of Public Tort Liability*

in 1956 of the American Society for Legal History, of which he became an active member. At the time he first recorded his recollections in 1977, he was also the chair of the State Bar Committee on History of Law in California. His final published work is the article titled, "California Cities and the Constitution of 1879," which appeared in 1980.²

Judge David's history of the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office is today both a "history" and a documentary source on the viewpoints and attitudes of a prominent lawyer in mid-twentieth century Los Angeles. It was serialized in the *Los Angeles Bar Bulletin* from April to December, 1950.³ Chapter I, covering the Spanish-Mexican period, reappeared in Judge David's doctoral dissertation of 1957 (a three-volume work of 1470 pages on the role of lawyers in government from William the Conqueror to America of the 1950s).⁴

The complete ten-chapter history of the City Attorney's Office has been reedited for publication here, but without alteration of the content. Comments in [brackets] have been added by the editor. Citations of cases and sources have been checked and expanded. The spelling of names, particularly in Spanish, has been corrected wherever possible. The photographs that accompany the article have been newly obtained for this publication.

— SELMA MOIDEL SMITH

in Los Angeles, 1934–1938, coauthored with John F. Feldmeier, published by the Committee on Public Administration of the Social Science Research Council in 1939.

² Leon Thomas David, "California Cities and the Constitution of 1879: General Laws and Municipal Affairs," *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1980): 643.

³ A verbatim reprint, without indication of publisher, date, or copyright, was distributed by Judge David to selected law libraries in California. The copy in the UCLA Law Library bears a handwritten note indicating that it was received from Judge David on October 4, 1951.

⁴ Leon Thomas David, *The Role of the Lawyer in Public Administration*. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1957; Chapter IX(M)4, "Spanish-Mexican City Government: Los Angeles," pp. 261–71.