



Notes from the Archive

Seaver Center for Western History Research

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

July 2019

Welcome to Notes from the Archive, a publication of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, a section of the History Department.
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THE COLLECTION HIGHLIGHT

Daguerreotype of Pío Pico and Family

Did you know that this original portrait of Pío de Jesús Pico, the last governor of California under Mexican rule, posed with family members, is in the collections of the Seaver Center?



This frequently-published image shows Pico, his wife María Alvarado, along with their nieces, María Anita Alvarado on the left and Trinidad Ortega on the right. The daguerreotype is a half-plate size, 5 1/2" x 4 1/4", and dates from about 1852. Most of the Seaver Center's "case art" examples of early photographic processes - daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes - are smaller in size, typically quarter plate or sixth plate.

The donation records indicate that Charles J. Prudhomme (1854-1934) was responsible for steering many an artifact from the moment the museum doors opened. Gifts poured in from 1913 through 1932, and the Pico daguerreotype came in the year 1928.

Prudhomme was the son of Frenchman Leon Victor Prudon and a Californio mother, Mercedes Tapia. He was an active member of the Historical Society of Southern California. His enthusiasm for finding and collecting historical artifacts amounted to a mania, according to a remembrance by Rockwell D. Hunt. From the time the new City Hall was completed in 1928 until shortly before his death, he served as a guide and lecturer on site to thousands of visitors informing them about historic sites and landmarks.

He persuaded everyone he knew to preserve their Mexican-Los Angeles heritage by donating photographs, papers and artifacts. In the instance of the daguerreotype, he brokered Josefa Olvera del Castillo to donate the item.

In the course of preparing this article, a bit of new information was uncovered (actually a bit of old information being re-discovered). Internal record-keeping indicates a 1959 entry listing the name of María Alvarado's niece (María Anita Alvarado) as Marianita Alvarado. Name variations are a common occurrence, but I was surprised to find in the donation record that the girl in the picture was described as "Sta. Mariana Rocha, niece of Antonio Rocha, of La Ballona."

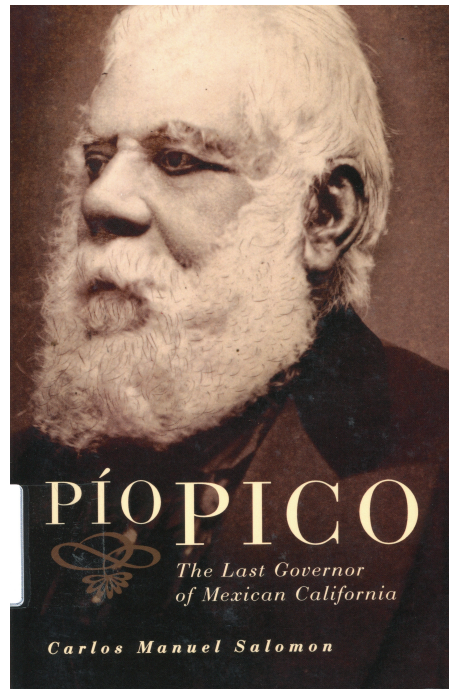
The discrepancy, I reasoned, can be explained in that both attributions were probably correct – the Alvarado, Olvera and Rocha families were related to one another.

Lastly, the other niece pictured, Trinidad Ortega, was a daughter of Pico's younger sister, María Casimira Pico, of San Diego. Spring Street in Los Angeles was named for Trinidad, "la primavera."

Betty Uyeda, Collections Manager

THE AUTHOR

It is incredulous that a biography of Pío Pico, the last governor of Mexican California, did not exist before Carlos Manuel Salomon's 2010 book.



University of Oklahoma Press

William David Estrada, curator and chair of our History Department, agreed. In his review of the Salomon book, Estrada pointed to the well-known Pico name in southern California but stated that prior to this publication, the man remained "clouded in myth." Estrada underscored the book's central theme that Pico should not be viewed as a victim of history. His political career proliferated within a unique geographical periphery due to California's distance from the central government in Mexico City. Pico achieved social mobility that was not based on race but on factors like family ties and his regional identity as a Californio. (Southern California Quarterly, Vol. 93, No. 2, Summer, 2011, pp. 239-241)

THE RESEARCHER

Last year, Mildred Inez Lewis was selected for the Rogue LAB, a year-long project of the Rogue Artists Ensemble. In June 2019, her piece *The Secret Life of LA Freeways* received a staged reading with professional actors and dancers in West Hollywood.

"I decided to center my play on Pío de Jesús Pico. Although I didn't want to write an historical or educational piece, I wanted the play to be grounded in reality. The Seaver Center gave me access to primary sources that made Pico and his world come alive. Looking at his tax records, calling cards, letters, newspaper clippings, photographs helped me find and amplify the magic of Pico's life rather than trying to impose a theatrical conceit on it. While I consulted other sources and visited the Pico Hotel and Pío Pico State Historic Park, the Center provided the framework that allowed me to put together a very special piece that incorporates dance and film.

I've always been fascinated by the Californios. While their names are on many streets and landmarks, their legacy has remained too obscure. This dynamic, multi-ethnic group laid the foundation for the things that still define California at its best. I felt that it would be difficult to convey these larger than life figures in a traditional play. When I was selected for the Rogue LAB, I jumped at the opportunity to create my first hypertheatre piece.

The LAB was a very special experience. It not only allowed me to incorporate dance and other elements into my work, but encouraged me to be bold. Part of this was because of the LAB's unusual structure. I was paired with choreographer Rhonda Kohl (*Theatre of Note's For the Love Of ...*) and director

Scarlett Kim (West Coast director of La MaMa) early on. Their input during the writing process made *The Secret Life of LA Freeways* a much better and more ambitious piece than it would have been otherwise.”



Dr. Lewis is produced playwright, screenwriter and director who teaches in the English Department at Chapman University. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild and the Playwriting Unit of Ensemble Studio Theatre-Los Angeles. In 2019, her short play *The Last Ride* was produced in the Company of Angels' TomorrowLand festival. *Vacuum Seal* was produced by the Itinerant Theatre (Lake Charles, LA). *The Gift* was read by the Playwrights Unit of Ensemble Studio Theatre-Los Angeles.

In 2018, she was selected as one of five Southern California playwrights for the Humanitas' PLAY LA workshop. Her short film *Can Also Play* screened in the Outfest and Outfest Fusion film festivals. Earlier awards include the British Theatre Challenge, Samuel Goldwyn Screenwriting and HBO New Writers awards. Her work has been included in the Last Frontier Theatre Conference and the William Inge Theatre Festival. She began her career as a director in the Actors Studio and Circle Rep LAB in New York City.



Plan your research visit

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Email seavercenter@nhm.org

Open by appointment

Monday and Thursday

10-noon and 1-4 p.m.

The Collections

[Search the Online Archive of California](#)

Over 370 general collections

Over 290 photographic collections

The collections are a part of the History Department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.
The Seaver Center opened in 1986 through a generous grant from the Seaver Institute.

Upcoming Events



Dr. Lori Bettison-Varga, Natural History Museum President and Director, Darryl Holter, and Gary Leonard, invite you to join them for lunch with

ARTIST BARBARA CARRASCO
and an up-close look at her mural
L.A. HISTORY: A MEXICAN PERSPECTIVE
now on view at the Natural History Museum

Hear from the artist herself the story of how she defied censorship to make this groundbreaking work a reality

August 8, 2019 • 12:00 pm
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County
900 Exposition Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90007

SPACE AT THIS EVENT IS LIMITED.
PLEASE RSVP NO LATER THAN JULY 24 BY CONTACTING
DOMINIC LO BUGLIO AT DLOBUGLIO@NHM.ORG OR 213.763.3348.

Dear Friends,

After moving to Los Angeles for a job at UCLA in 1991, I occasionally heard references to a “censored mural” that was originally commissioned by the City but then was considered to be “too controversial” for the public to see. It was only last year that I was able to see for myself this subject of controversy when the Natural History Museum, working with artist Barbara Carrasco, unpacked the mural and installed it for all to see.

I was greatly impressed with the mural and its treatment of LA history, and I enjoyed hearing Barbara describe how the mural was conceptualized and how a group of energetic young artists worked under her to bring this project to life. When I heard the Museum was considering purchasing the “Sin Censura” to make it publicly accessible, I thought it was a great idea. And when Lori Bettison-Varga asked me to host a luncheon to reach out to others who might be interested in learning about the mural and supporting it, I was happy to agree.

I reached out to my long-time friend and colleague, photographer Gary Leonard, and asked him to co-host the luncheon with me. Gary agreed and, between the two of us, we are sending out this invitation to a wonderful cross-section of Angelenos who are united by their interest in LA history.

Please join us on August 8 to meet Barbara Carrasco and learn more about “Sin Censura”. Click on this [link to RSVP](#) online.

Darryl Holter



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