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**NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY TO OPEN LANDMARK  
EXHIBITION ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES IN  
DECEMBER 2012**



**Becoming Los Angeles, New 14,000-Square-Foot Exhibit, Will Offer  
Unique Take on Los Angeles' Stories —  
How Land and People Interacted, and How those Interactions Affect  
the L.A. We Know Today**

**LOS ANGELES, January 12, 2012**—In December 2012, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (NHM) will open *Becoming Los Angeles* (working title) in a permanent hall that illustrates the city's transformation by exploring its cultural and ecological histories — and illuminating their interconnectedness. Powerful storytelling, contemporary design, exceptional objects, and multi-media will allow visitors to interact with the exhibition, and by extension, contemporary Los Angeles, in real time.

“When *Becoming Los Angeles* opens a year from now, Los Angeles County will have, for the first time, a permanent museum exhibition dedicated to telling the stories of Southern California, providing residents and tourists with a major resource for understanding L.A., and how L.A., in turn, shapes and influences the rest of the world,” said Dr. Jane Pisano, NHM President and Director.

The Museum's unparalleled collection of early Southern California artifacts, as well as its extraordinary scientific specimens, will be the foundation of the new 14,000-square-foot exhibition, delving into 500 years of Los Angeles history from European contact to its rise as a global capital.

Inside a suite of four galleries in the Museum's newly-renovated 1913 and 1920s buildings, a visually striking canopy will symbolize the sweep of history and lead visitors through the exhibit's major sections or historical eras: the pre-Spanish landscape; Mission Era; Mexican Rancho Era; the early years of the American Period; the emergence of a new American city in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; and L.A. as a global city of the 21st century. This canopy will touch down at four points, triggering the walkthrough experience from once section to the next. Iconic objects at these trigger points include a cross from Mission San Gabriel and an inscribed sword from the Mexican war of independence. Other important objects in the exhibit include a wooden oil well pump from a 1920s Los Angeles city oil field, and Walt Disney's animation stand that was built in his uncle's L.A. garage in 1923. (Disney used it to film "Steamboat Willie," the first cartoon released that featured Mickey Mouse.)

The exhibition ends with a summation of recurring themes and an interactive multi-media experience that combines historic themes with a real-time component. By juxtaposing the past and present, the exhibition engages visitors in imagining what the future holds for Los Angeles.

*Becoming Los Angeles* follows the successful openings of *Age of Mammals* and the new Dinosaur Hall, and will be a key museum experience leading up to the Museum's centennial in 2013. The exhibition is a dynamic collaboration among NHM experts, designers, and educators — with lead curator and NHM History and Anthropology Division Chief Dr. Margaret Hardin; lead historian and History Department Chair and Curator Dr. William Estrada; and NHM Creative Director Simon Adlam, who is responsible for design, development, and project management.

"There are a lot of ways to tell the stories of a city, but nobody has told one quite like this," said Dr. Margaret Hardin. "We will use our historical treasures as touchstones to explore the development of Los Angeles, weaving its natural and cultural developments into one narrative. And we'll illuminate the causality between them — people's actions and their impact on the environment, and the way natural events spiral back to affect human society."

### **Unraveling Los Angeles at NHM**

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County has been collecting Los Angeles history for generations, and will use a wide spectrum of material culture — family heirlooms, everyday housewares, tools, toys, cars, movie-making equipment, and other machines dating back to before the founding of the city in 1781 — creating a visceral experience of Angelenos and their stories. In fact, throughout much of the Museum's nearly 100-year history, it was the only place pioneering L.A. organizations and families could donate their historic treasures.

A number of extraordinary collections came to NHM from the Chamber of Commerce, for example, and families including the Coronels, Temples, and del Valles. Rare objects, many of them never before displayed in public, will be on view from the Native American, Spanish colonial, Mexican, and early American periods, the emerging motion picture industry, early L.A. city and county government records,

automotive and aviation history, and photographs that document the landscapes and communities of Southern California in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The design and multimedia components of the new exhibition will give visitors the opportunity to get up close to the objects and hear the first-person stories that bore witness to the historic events that have shaped Los Angeles. Some of these stories are well-known, such as how the acquisition of water through the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct in 1913 influenced our contemporary suburban sprawl. Other natural and human influences might surprise visitors: how cattle, the Gold Rush, floods, plagues of grasshoppers, railroads, and outlandish booster campaigns all played a part in transforming the region into an agricultural empire. “The Museum has always been L.A.’s repository for housing its rich treasures from the past,” says exhibit lead historian, Dr. William Estrada. “It is now time for these treasures to come out and tell their stories.”

During NHM’s centennial year (2013), the stories of Los Angeles’ transformation told in the exhibit will be complemented with an extensive series of public and educational programs, and partnerships with local historical organizations. Panel discussions as well as a social media series are some of the components that will surround the opening of the new exhibition hall.

*Becoming Los Angeles*, presented in the Kevin Sharer Hall, has been made possible by grants from The Ahmanson Foundation, the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and the W. M. Keck Foundation.

### **About the Natural History Museum**

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County serves nearly one million families and visitors annually, and is a national leader in research, exhibitions and education. The Museum was the first dedicated museum building in Los Angeles, opening its doors in 1913. It has amassed one of the world’s most extensive and valuable collections of natural and cultural history — with more than 35 million objects, some as old as 4.5 billion years. The Natural History Family of Museums includes the NHM (Exposition Park), the Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits (Hancock Park/Mid-Wilshire), and the William S. Hart Park and Museum (Newhall, California).

NHM is located at 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles, CA, 90007. For more information, visit NHM’s website at [www.nhm.org](http://www.nhm.org) or call (213) 763-DINO.

### **The NHM Next Campaign**

NHM is now more than halfway through its transformation. The milestone re-opening of the Beaux Arts 1913 Building began in Summer 2010 with *Age of Mammals* and new exhibitions inside the iconic Haaga Family Rotunda. In Summer 2011, the Museum opened its new Dinosaur Hall. *Becoming Los Angeles* will open in December 2012. The year of NHM’s 100th anniversary, 2013, will see the debuts of: the North Campus, 3½ acres of nature and urban wildlife experiences that will increase the Museum’s public space by 50 percent; the Nature Lab, their indoor component; and the glass-encased Otis Booth Pavilion.