



County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors

SUPERVISOR JULIAN A. CHAVEZ

Term: 1852, 1858, 1861
District: Not Applicable
Date of Birth: 1810
Death: 1879

Julian A. Chavez served three terms as county supervisor. He was elected to the office in 1852, 1858 and again in 1861.

Born in 1810, Chavez was a native of Aliquot, N.M., located on the Chama River in the north central part of the state. He was the son of Francisco Chavez and Francesca Rosa Verlarde.

He arrived in Los Angeles in the early 1830s, and it's believed that he may have come with one of the many trapping parties from New Mexico. The city census of 1836 listed Julian Chavez, age 27, and his occupation as laborer.

Beginning in the mid 1830s, Chavez began investing in real estate. To acquire land during these years, a person simply petitioned the Ayuntamiento (a body equivalent to a city council) and asked for a specific piece of vacant land. According to official early records of the city, Chavez petitioned the governing body many times. In 1844 he acquired 83 acres of land near downtown. During the 1850 and 1880 smallpox epidemics, this tract of land was used as the county "pest farm" to care for a number of Chinese and Mexicans who suffered from the scourge. Chavez Canyon, as it was called then, was the site of the isolation hospital. More than 100 years later, this land, renamed Chavez Ravine, was to become the stadium site for the Los Angeles Dodgers when the franchise moved from Brooklyn. The Coliseum was the original home of the team prior to the building of Dodger Stadium.

As he began to own more land and become a well-known city resident, Chavez became actively involved in city politics. In 1838 he served as suplente alcalde (assistant mayor), his first political job. This was followed by terms as a regidore (councilman) in 1846 and 1847, and as juez de aguas (judge of the waters) during the waning years of Mexican rule.

In June 1852, Chavez was elected a member of the first Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. From 1850 to 1852, County affairs were administered by the Court of Sessions composed of the County judge and two associate justices. As part of his supervisorial responsibilities, Chavez was appointed Juez del Campos (judge of the plains) for Los Angeles. The office was in force for several years after the conquest of California by the Americans. His duties were to settle cattle disputes and to see that justice was done between owners of livestock.

As his political career began to take off, Chavez was also becoming socially prominent. On July 4, 1852, the townspeople gathered at the Bella Union Hotel, where they observed the first part of a program to honor Independence Day by the reading of the Declaration of Independence. This was followed by a parade of about a mile to Chavez's vineyard (on Harwood Avenue just off Riverside Drive), where dinner, consisting of barbecued meat and other California dishes, was served.

In May 1865, Chavez was again elected to the City Council. During this term he served on the Finance, Water and Police Committees and also became a member of the Board of Equalization. In November he was appointed to the Los Angeles River Improvement Committee, where he led efforts to fortify the river and straighten it to prevent flooding.

On Nov. 4, 1865, Chavez, at the age of 55 and a widower, married Maria Luisa Machado, age 23, a native of Los Angeles and the daughter of Ignacio Machado. The Reverend Francisco Mora, later bishop of Los Angeles-Monterey Diocese, performed the ceremony.

From 1870-1871, Chavez served another one-year term as councilman and was again appointed to many committees, including the Plaza Improvement Committee. He resigned from the office on Dec. 1, 1871, 10 days before the final completion of his term.

In 1873 Chavez was again elected to the City Council. It was during this final term in office that he worked very closely with William Henry Workman, Henry Dockweiler and Prudent Beaudry. The accomplishments and portraits of these men are found in most of the early histories of Los Angeles.

On July 25, 1879, Chavez died of a heart attack. He was 70.

Sources: Westways, 1962; Pioneer Register and Index; Sixty Years in Southern California; Great Register of Los Angeles County.