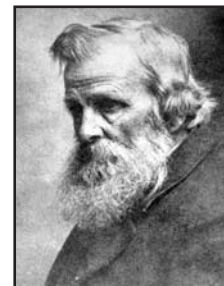




County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors



SUPERVISOR STEPHEN CLARK FOSTER

Term: 1856 - 1859
District: Not Applicable
Date of Birth: 1815
Death: Jan. 27, 1898

Stephen Clark Foster served as county supervisor for four terms. He was elected in 1856, 1858 and 1859. In 1857 he replaced Jonathan R. Scott, who resigned as county supervisor in March of that year.

Foster was born in Machias, Me. in 1815. He graduated from Yale College in 1840. He taught school in the South, and in 1845 headed for California via Santa Fe and El Paso. While in Santa Fe, Foster joined Mormon Battalion of Missouri Volunteers, then on its way to California to fight in the Mexican-American War. After many hardships, he arrived with the battalion in Los Angeles on March 16, 1847.

In the stormy period when California was under military rule, Governor Mason appointed him alcalde of Los Angeles to replace the dissolved ayuntamiento (government) of the Mexicans. For this reason Foster often has been referred to as the first American mayor of the city. He served as alcalde from Jan. 1, 1848 to May 21, 1849, and for the remainder of that year, or until the city came under American jurisdiction in 1850, as perfecto. As alcalde, Foster pioneered the chain-gang labor of criminal prisoners for public works, including improvements to the Spanish irrigation system.

He shared the alcalde office with Abel Stearns and these two men are credited with preserving much of the historical archives of the city and county.

During this time he married into the influential Lugo family, which owned many ranches and was one of the prominent families in the County. He and his wife, Dona Merced, had five children.

In 1849 Foster was elected a member of the constitutional convention, sitting in Monterey, which framed the state Constitution and petitioned Congress for admission of California into the Union. His first office under statehood was in 1850 when he was elected to the Los Angeles City Council for a one-year term.

In 1851 he was elected state senator from Southern California and served two years. Three years later Foster was elected mayor of Los Angeles, and is credited with establishing free education by appropriating public funds for the erection of a school. The first actual city school was a brick building begun in 1854 at Second and Spring streets, and completed with attending classes in 1855.

Foster's first official term was a hectic year in the city's history. Los Angeles was said to be at that time the toughest frontier town in America with a conglomerate population, and a riff-raff and disorderly element that ignored the vested forces of order. The surrounding territory was overrun by bandits driven from the mines southward into the cow counties. Great numbers of gamblers and criminals drifted into the city to escape the vigilantes of San Francisco. Mayor Foster, like most of the prominent citizens, was a member of the local vigilante committee and of the rangers, the mounted body of volunteer police. It was in the early part of this year Mayor Foster resigned his official position to lead a lynching mob. After the lynching, the people held a special election and returned Foster to office for the remainder of his regular term. While serving as mayor he was also appointed superintendent of schools.

It was in this first term that Foster put through an ordinance making the zanjero (water overseer) a city official. The office was considered of such importance that the incumbent received more salary than the mayor.

On May 7, 1856, Foster was re-elected mayor. Foster resigned Sept. 22, 1856, to attend to the executorships of the large estate of his brother-in-law, Colonel Isaac Williams. During this time Foster served as county supervisor from 1856-59.

In the couple of decades following his public service he continued prominent activities in civic life. He lived the last span of his life in virtual retirement, occupying his time in researching archival records.

Foster died Jan. 27, 1898. He was 83.

Source: History of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Records.