

History Comes Alive!



ON THE RADIO

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Tales From the City Archives



by Michael E. Holland
City Archivist

There is a film in the City Archives taken by an LAPD helicopter April 18, 1958. It was the very first home game for the relocated Brooklyn Dodgers, who were to play for four years in the Coliseum in downtown L.A. The footage shows cars backed up on the streets and on the Harbor Freeway in both directions as more than 78,000 people attended the first major league baseball game in the City's history.

The heart of this month's article is not that first season of 1958 but the next year of 1959. There were other things taking place in Los Angeles that had nothing to do with baseball. Those events are part of a larger story of one era – the 1950s – ending and the 1960s getting ready to make its first appearance.

The team that ended the 1957 season in Brooklyn was not the same one that began the following year in Los Angeles. Jackie Robinson had retired. Roy Campanella was crippled in an auto accident that left him in wheelchair the rest of his life. In his book *Dodgers Move West*, author Neil J. Sullivan points that changing faces of the franchise in L.A. reflected a new identity and was leaving the Brooklyn past behind as Pee Wee Reese and Don Newcombe moved on. New players like Wally Moon and Maury Wills would belong to Los Angeles fans exclusively as the franchise settled into the Coliseum. Their future "real" home in Chavez Ravine was still in dispute as the 1959 season began.

A game that has become legendary in Dodgers lore was the exhibition game with the New York Yankees on May 7. More than 93,000 fans packed the Coliseum for a game where all ticket sales went to a former Brooklyn player while his long-term pension was in dispute. The gesture of civility and loyalty to one of their own gave the Dodgers organization a badly needed boost. That goodwill was quickly unraveled by events taking place across town in Elysian Park. The following day, May 8, saw the last evictions in Chavez Ravine. The Arechiga family was forcibly removed by L.A. County Sheriff's deputies while TV station cameras rolled.

The resulting outcry forced the City Council to hold a special meeting. The conclusion was that, while it could have been handled better without the presence of the media, the evictions were legal and the Arechigas were not indigent but owned several properties outside of the area being developed. Nobody had clean hands – the media, the Dodgers or the Arechigas themselves.

There had been rising tensions between the Hispanic community and local government for years; the most serious tensions involved the LAPD. With Mexican American Edward Roybal on the City Council, Hispanics had a voice and an advocate for their concerns. Los Angeles would be a stage for some of the civil rights history in the coming decade. Ground was broken on the future Dodger Stadium Sept. 17, 1959.

Two days later, the greatest challenge to Los Angeles that year came in the form of a bald man from Russia. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev spent one day and one night during his 11-day American tour. This would

be the largest and most complex LAPD security operation in the City's history up to that time. More than 500 police officers were assigned to protect Khrushchev from the moment his plane landed at LAX until his train pulled out of Union Station headed for San Francisco. A request to visit Disneyland was denied due to security concerns and led to a famous denouncement by the Russian leader to his

League pennant on the last day on the 1959 regular season by defeating the Milwaukee Braves. Before the days of conference championships and wild card races, the World Series took place in early October. The Chicago White Sox hosted the first two and last two games. The L.A. Coliseum hosted the middle three games, and the home team won two of them. The series was decided in Chicago as the Dodgers won the sixth game and brought the World Series banner to L.A. in only their second year. A final victory came as the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the Dodgers favor on Oct. 19 by dismissing the last appeals of those opposed to the contract for the Chavez Ravine property.

So, how are all of these events tied together, you may ask? Fifty-six years after that first World Series that did more to establish Los Angeles as a sports town, we have basketball teams, a hockey team and a soccer team, and we may get football back very soon. We may be retreating to the Cold War stance with Russia, but we're back in Cuba. The challenges of equality and peace in the form of violence and racism are still very much a part of our daily conversation. 1959 was a preview of the political landscape from the Democratic National Convention of 1960 to the Ambassador Hotel in June 1968.

Let's end on a note of promise and hope. A special archival treat can be found on the City Clerk's YouTube channel. The 1959 World Series champs were given a ceremony and parade starting at City Hall and ending at the Coliseum April 12th 1960. We have a clip from footage shot by LAPD. The link is at <https://youtu.be/NZ0fUMxvsZs>. That's where a lot of other video clips from the City Archive can be found. Perhaps this will be the year for the Dodgers to take it all – again.

Baseball and Hardball

Building Dodger Stadium and a new era in L.A. caused turmoil in Chavez Ravine.

Photos courtesy the LA Archives and the Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

American hosts. The coming decade would bring both the United States and Soviet Union to the edge of nuclear war over Cuba and a shooting war in Vietnam, which would bring discord at home.

Meanwhile, the Dodgers managed to win the National



From 1959: Crowds pack the Coliseum to watch a Dodger game.



From April 1959: Mrs. Abrana Arechiga, 63, weeps as she reads an eviction notice tacked on her home by Deputy Sheriffs, ordering them to move from Chavez Ravine to make way for the construction of Dodger Stadium. This notice came on a Friday; her extended family was ordered to get off the property by 9 a.m. the following Monday.



From 1958: This was the scene one-half hour before game time as fans streamed into the Coliseum for the L.A. Dodgers-S.F. Giants opener.



One of the photos illustrating the story I wrote on the Watts Riots (August) was of two KHJ reporters under fire during the unrest. I had an email exchange with Roger Aldi, who set me straight on a couple of major details.

"Thanks so much Michael – I remember that picture well," Roger writes. "That is news director Art Kevin (holding the mic) and Frank Terry. That picture was on the cover of Time magazine with the headline 'How to Cover Hell,' or something close to that.

"Andy and I went out the first night and were following (chasing) three LAPD units down Avalon Boulevard. Suddenly the police cars disappeared and we found ourselves going

down a street lined with about 100 people on each side, and then came the rocks and bottles! The car was messed up pretty badly, but no injuries.

"The slide show was wonderful and especially moving, and brought back my favorite memory of the riots. Gov. Brown (Senior) was in Greece when the riots started. On the third or fourth night, he was scheduled to arrive at LAX, and as I was driving down the Harbor Freeway toward the riot area, I remember thinking, 'I sure wish the station calls me to go to the airport to meet the Governor. I don't want to go back there tonight.' I got the call."

Thanks to Roger Aldi for providing context to the photo.

Updates