

PÍO PICO AND ANTONIO CUYAS: Creators of the Pico House, the “Finest Hotel South of San Francisco”

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ABSTRACT: The 1870 Pico House luxury hotel on Los Angeles's historic Plaza has always been associated with Pío Pico, the last governor of California in the Mexican Era. Based on historical evidence in the Archive of the city's El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument and El Pueblo Park Association and on further research, archives manager Michael Henderson traces the proprietorship of the hotel from its first conception as a partnership between Pico and Antonio Cuyas, through successive management and legal cases to its eclipse and the deaths of its original proprietors in the 1890s.

Keywords: Pío Pico; Pico House hotel; Los Angeles Plaza; historic landmarks; Los Angeles; Antonio Cuyas; El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument

The Pico House, built in 1870, was the first luxury hotel in Los Angeles. At the opening, a local Los Angeles newspaper, *The Republican*, printed a lengthy article describing the new hotel, calling it “an ornament for the city.”¹ It went on to be known as the “Finest Hotel South of San Francisco.” The three-story brick building across from the plaza was the first three-story structure in Los

¹. *Los Angeles Weekly Republican*, May 20, 1870. As the *Republican* is not available online, the article has been included in its entirety at the end of this paper. See Appendix.



The Pico House, the first luxury hotel in Los Angeles, opened in 1870 and operated by Pío Pico and Antonio Cuyas, appears in an 1875 photograph, with well-dressed guests, coach, and luggage conveyance. *Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, 00007555.*

Angeles. It was in the Italianate style and covered with limestone stucco reported to be nearly blue in color. It stood out from its neighboring buildings in a dramatic fashion (Figure 1). The architect was Ezra Kysor, the leading architect in Los Angeles in his day. He also designed the Merced Theater (1871) and St. Vibiana's Cathedral (1876). There were eighty-one rooms in the hotel. Gas lighting and water were found on all floors. Expensive brussels and satin carpets and mahogany furniture from San Francisco were used throughout. The hotel had three dining rooms facing the plaza, one of which was a French restaurant with meals prepared by a well-known French chef. Guests were welcomed with a fountain, flowers, and birds. A saloon, billiards room, and Wells Fargo office were on the ground floor of the building along Main Street.² A 1955 article by Maymie R. Krythe describes in interesting detail the many notable celebrities

2. Ibid.

and dignitaries who stayed at the hotel, the celebrations and weddings held there, as well as numerous engaging anecdotes.³

The two men responsible for the hotel were Pío Pico and his partner in the endeavor, Antonio Cuyas. Pico, with his vision and commitment to the plaza area, provided the funds. Cuyas contributed to the design of the hotel and, as proprietor, gave the hotel the atmosphere expected of a first-class hotel. Yet despite success, there was a protracted struggle between the two of them over the control of the hotel. It resulted in a lawsuit, *Pico v. Cuyas*, that took four years and the intervention of the California Supreme Court in three different cases to resolve in favor of Cuyas in 1875. Cuyas took control of the hotel for the next three years. Then, unexpectedly, he returned control back to Pico. While a great deal has been written about Pico, there has been very little about Cuyas. This paper focuses on the relationship between the two men and the ups and downs of the hotel under six different proprietors from the opening in 1870 to 1880 when Pico lost the hotel due to financial problems.

Pío PICO

Pío de Jesús Pico (Figure 2) was a politician, rancher, and business man. Over his ninety-three years, he lived under Spanish, Mexican, and American rule. He was born in 1801 at the San Gabriel mission when Alta California was under Spain. At age eighteen, he moved to San Diego. There he became involved in politics and in 1832, during a time of political struggle between factions of northern and southern California, he was named governor for a short period. In 1844, he was chosen leader of the California Assembly and then again appointed governor in 1845. The capital of California moved south to Los Angeles where he governed from his home facing the plaza. He would be the last governor of Mexican California. But his political activities had a big payoff. He held almost 500,000 acres from land grants he received over the years. He was a major cattle baron and one of the richest persons in Mexican California. Sadly, as with other land-rich Californios, he would eventually lose all his holdings through fraud and bad business decisions. In his biography of Pico, Carlos

3. Maymie R. Krythe, "Pico House: The Finest Hotel South of San Francisco," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (June 1955): 139–160.

Salomon covers in detail Pico's many financial problems and his losing battle to retain his empire.⁴

Through the 1860s, the population of Los Angeles grew very slowly and remained less than 6,000 people. But businessmen saw opportunities for investment with an expected influx of Americans.



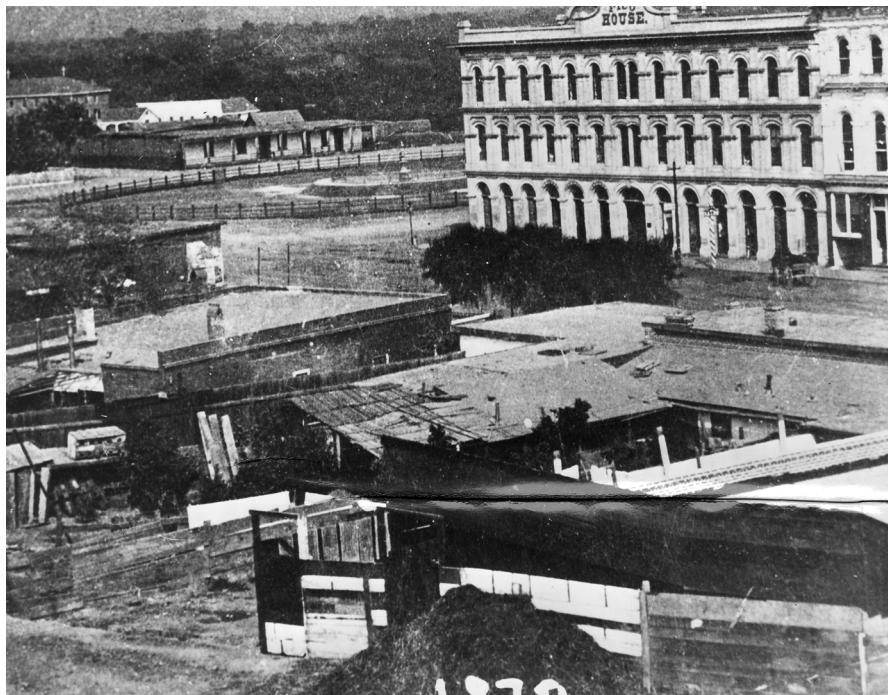
A formal portrait of Pío Pico (1801-1894), former governor of California in the Mexican era, rancher, businessman, and the original owner-partner-proprietor of the Pico House hotel, located on the historic plaza of Los Angeles. *Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, ooo43873.*

Contributing to this was the belief that Los Angeles would be a stop on the Southern Pacific Railroad. In 1869, Pico joined in and sold 160,000 acres of his San Fernando ranch for \$115,000 to raise money for the Pico House enterprise,⁵ in which he invested around \$48,000 for the building and \$34,000 for furnishings.⁶ He also saw an opportunity to revitalize the plaza area that had once been the center of the

4. Carlos Manuel Salomon, *Pío Pico: The Last Governor of Mexican California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

5. *Los Angeles Daily News*, July 7, 1869, 2.

6. Jean Bruce Poole and Tevvy Ball, *El Pueblo: The Historic Heart of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 100.



An 1870 photograph of the newly-built Pico House, with a dilapidated house and what may be a manure pile in the foreground. Across the bare Los Angeles Plaza is the Olvera adobe at the entrance of what is now Olvera Street. Pico envisioned his hotel as the anchor to the revitalization of the plaza area that had been left behind as downtown businesses were locating southward. *Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, ooooo8118.*

pueblo's social, business, and religious life. With the arrival of increasing numbers of Americans, the center of town was moving south along Main Street, leaving the plaza as one of the most violent and unsafe places in Los Angeles.⁷ Hoping to counteract this trend, he chose to locate the Pico House directly facing the plaza (Figure 3). He purchased the Carrillo adobe, which had been vacant for seven years, as the site of the new hotel. The old adobe had once been the most distinguished residence in the pueblo and a center of social life. In fact, Pico married there in 1834 in a ceremony and celebration that lasted eight days. The cornerstone of the hotel was laid in September 1869.⁸ His association with Cuyas started the same year.

7. Ibid., 7–18; William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 43–80; Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 143.

8. *Los Angeles Daily News*, September 18, 1869, 2.

ANTONIO CUYAS

Antonio Cuyas y Ribot was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1818 to a family of limited means. Through hard work and a good business sense, he advanced to become a director of one of the first railroads in Spain. The venture did not prove to be financially successful, so he left Spain. He came to the Americas in the 1850s, first to Havana and the sugar trade and then on to New York, where he became a “gentleman widely and favorably known to the Spanish-American Community.”⁹ In 1862, he took on the job of proprietor of the newly opened Hotel de Barcelona at 23 Great Jones Street, a location touted as one of the most respectable and quiet in New York. The hotel was described as “a spacious and lofty double mansion refitted with every modern appliance of comfort and adorned inside and out with exquisite taste.”¹⁰ There were thirty-four apartments catering to visitors from Spain. The hotel staff spoke Spanish, French, and English; meals were served in Spanish and French styles. It also had permanent residents. While in New York, he married Miss Lucy Peltier. It is not clear why they left New York, but they went to Mexico and then on to Los Angeles, arriving in the late 1860s at the time when Pico needed a proprietor for his new hotel.¹¹

PARTNERSHIPS

Just how the two men met is not clear, but the timing was fortunate. Pico made two separate agreements with Cuyas. The first was for the lease of the building to Cuyas beginning June 1870 for \$570 per month.¹² The second was a partnership agreement for five years.¹³ Pico was to own and furnish the hotel while Cuyas was to operate it. Under the agreement, Pico gave Cuyas \$30,000 to furnish the hotel. Profits were to be split, two-thirds to Pico and one-third to Cuyas. Losses were to be split 50–50. No written record of the agreement was made but business was conducted under these terms.

9. *New York Times*, October 16, 1862.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Obituary, *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1896, 7; *New York Times*, October 16, 1862, 2.

12. California Supreme Court, *Pico v. Cuyas*, 47 Cal.174, case 3726, Jan. 1873. *Ravel Law*, a Harvard Law School open source for legal cases from State and Federal Courts.

13. *Ibid.*

LOS ANGELES!

PICO HOUSE

Corner Main street and Plaza,
LOS ANGELES.

NEW AND COMMODIOUS,
—WITH ALL—
Modern Improvements.
IN EVERY RESPECT
A FIRST-CLASS HOTEL.

CUYAS & CO.,
PROPRIETORS.

jy1-3m

Newspaper advertisement, *San Francisco Examiner*, July 5, 1870.

The hotel opened to the public on June 18, 1870, with Cuyas & Co. as proprietors (Figure 4). A gala opening was delayed three months awaiting the return of Pico to Los Angeles. The event on September 5th was covered by the *Daily Star*:

The Pico House in this city was splendidly illuminated last night. The court yard of the Hotel was wreathed around with evergreens, hung with wreaths of flowers, and lighted by Chinese lanterns of strange and beautiful design. These preparations were made in honor

of the arrival of Don Pio Pico. The Hotel was crowded with his friends, who called to congratulate him on his recovery, and welcome him back to Los Angeles.¹⁴

Despite the successful opening and positive press about the hotel, Pico attempted to terminate the partnership after only one year. He took out the following notice in Los Angeles papers in June 1871: "Notice is hereby given that the co-partnership heretofore existing between Pio Pico and Antonio Cuyas, as Cuyas & Co., in the Hotel business, or otherwise, is hereby dissolved, and that the undersigned will not be responsible for any obligation or debt contracted after this date in any business connected with the said Pico House, or otherwise by Antonio Cuyas."¹⁵

Pico went a step further and sued Cuyas on two counts. The first was to recover possession of the building due to failure to pay the rent. The second was for the \$30,000 paid to Cuyas for the furniture and paintings he procured for the hotel. At trial, Cuyas was at a disadvantage from the beginning when a motion by Pico's lawyers to strike evidence of Cuyas as a partner was sustained because there was

14. *Los Angeles Daily Star*, September 6, 1870, 3.

15. *Los Angeles Daily Star*, June 9, 1871.

no written agreement. The court ruled in favor of Pico. Cuyas was ordered to return possession of the building and pay the rent due plus court fees. It appeared that Pico had gotten out from under the agreements he found unfavorable. But he found out it would not be that easy. Cuyas appealed. The case would spend almost four years shuffling between the County Superior Court, the District Court of Appeals, and the California Supreme Court before ruling in favor of Cuyas.¹⁶



Newspaper advertisement. *Los Angeles Daily Star*, September 20, 1873.

leased the hotel and furniture for two years at \$750 per month. Previously, he had operated a hotel in Paso Robles, California, for three years. He oversaw a renovation of the Pico House. The French restaurant reopened. While the atmosphere inside the hotel was restored, outside was a different matter. He immediately petitioned the Common Council (predecessor of the Los Angeles City Council) to address the smell of sewer gas that permeated the area. When the sewer line was replaced, the first newspaper ad he placed was to let people know the odor was gone (Figure 5).

The sewer wasn't the only problem. The company that supplied gas to the businesses in the area had its works directly across from the Pico House (the storage tanks are seen in the foreground of Figure 6). For years, Pico had complained about the production and burning of

But in the meantime, Pico needed to find a new proprietor. In August 1872, he placed a notice in local papers of his intent to "absent himself from Los Angeles for an indefinite time,"¹⁷ and offered the Pico House for lease. It took seven months to find a new proprietor. In this interim period without a proprietor, the restaurant closed for a while although the hotel remained open for lodging. In March 1873, Charles Knowlton

16. California Supreme Court, *Pico v. Cuyas*, 48 Cal. 639, case 4253, Oct 1874; *Ravel Law*.

17. *Los Angeles Daily Star*, August 24, 1872.



In the foreground of this photo, ca. 1875-1876, are the works of the Los Angeles Gas Company, which Pico claimed created “noxious” odors. Across the Plaza was the grand old Lugo Adobe. The Plaza itself was on the verge of transforming into a pleasantly landscaped park. *Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, oooo8204.*

chemicals in that location. He claimed they created “noxious, offensive, unwholesome and discoloring gases, odor and smoke.” In October 1873, he sued the Los Angles Gas Company to end the practice. Pico lost and was ordered to pay \$2,000.¹⁸

However, the area was slowly improving. In 1874, improvements were made to Main Street from the Pico House to 4th Street. The street was given sidewalks of wooden planks fifteen feet wide, cobblestone gutters, and a gravel roadbed. The following year, the plaza, which had been an eyesore for years, was finally addressed. Circular walkways were added throughout, flanked by flower beds and orange trees.

At the end of his two-year lease in March 1875, Knowlton left for San Francisco. Once again, the hotel was without a proprietor and

18. Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 151.

had to close the dining rooms although it remained open for lodging.¹⁹

PICO V. CUYAS AND THE CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT

It took three years for Cuyas's appeal of the 1871 case, *Pico v. Cuyas*, to make its way through the County Superior Court, the District Court of Appeals, and finally the California Supreme Court. With suits for dismissal, reversal orders back to lower courts, and an additional appeal filed by Pico, the case went before the California Supreme Court three times. The *Daily Herald* called the process seemingly interminable. The *Evening Express* said "it would puzzle a Philadelphia lawyer to keep the run of the litigation in this case."²⁰ In 1873, the Supreme Court ruled on the partnership issues. Key findings were:

- When a verbal contract of partnership is made for the term of more than one year, and the parties act upon it, and conduct the partnership business upon the terms agreed upon, and in the firm name, neither party can afterwards avoid the obligations of the contract.²¹
- If the lessor of a hotel [Pico], after the lease is made, enters into a contract of partnership in keeping the hotel with the lessee [Cuyas], which contract is carried to execution, the lessee may prove the same as a defense in the action of unlawful detainer afterward brought by the lessor to recover possession of the premises.²²
- Where the owner of a hotel [Pico] executes a lease thereof, and thereafter enters into a contract of partnership in keeping the hotel with the lessee [Cuyas] with an agreement that the rent reserved shall be a charge on the firm, if the latter contract is separate from the first, it does not work a surrender of the lease, the lessor [Pico] cannot sue at law to recover the rent, but must sue in equity for partnership accounting,

19. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, April 1, 1875, 3.

20. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, April 26, 1875.

21. California Supreme Court, *Pico v. Cuyas*, 47 Cal. 174, case 3726, Jan 1873.

22. *Ibid.*

as the rent must be paid out on the net profits of the partnership.²³

The first two findings dealt with admissibility of evidence. The court found from the facts of the case that a partnership agreement did exist even though it was verbal because the partners acted upon the agreed terms. It therefore found that the County Superior Court erred in the initial trial by refusing to allow Cuyas to introduce such evidence. The original judgement in Pico's favor in the case was reversed and sent back to the lower courts.

The third finding clarified the relationship between the lease and the partnership agreements, stating that the rent must be paid out of partnership profits (i.e. rent to be treated as a liability which reduces profits). This was a big blow to Pico and suggests at least one reason why he fought so hard to dissolve the partnership. If, as Pico sought, Cuyas were required to pay rent under terms of the lease then he would owe the entire \$570 a month. But with the partnership agreement and its profit-sharing terms, treating rent as a liability meant Cuyas was only responsible for contributing one-third in reduced profits in paying the rent while Pico would have to contribute two-thirds. In effect, Pico was responsible for paying the majority of the rent on his own building! On May 4, 1875, the District Court ordered an accounting during the period of the partnership with profits and losses apportioned one-third to Cuyas, two-thirds to Pico, and treating rent as a partnership liability.²⁴

The question of possession of the building was settled in 1874 after the California Supreme Court ruled on a second appeal, this one made by Pico. He believed he could not return possession as it was leased to Knowlton. The court ruled:

- If a judgement passes against a defendant [Cuyas] in unlawful detainer, and the plaintiff [Pico] is placed in possession of the premises, and the defendant appeals, and the judgement is reversed, the defendant is entitled to be restored to the possession, even if the plaintiff has rented the premises to a tenant.²⁵

23. California Supreme Court, *Pico v. Cuyas*, 47 Cal. 180, case 3520, Oct 1873; Charles A. Ruttle, reporter, *Report of Cases determined in the Supreme Court of the State of California*, Vol. 47 (San Francisco: Bancroft Whitney Co., 1906).

24. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, May 4, 1875, 3.

25. California Supreme Court, *Pico v. Cuyas*, 48 Cal. 639, case 4253, Oct 1874; in *Ravel Law*.

The court rejected the rental argument. The possession of the hotel reverted to Cuyas. It was carried out on April 29, 1875, when Pico was served notice to vacate the premises within three days. The sheriff turned over the keys of the hotel to Cuyas on May 12. The second appeal did have one benefit for Pico as it delayed the ruling until Knowlton's lease had expired.

PICO HOUSE BACK UNDER CUYAS



Newspaper advertisement, *Los Angeles Herald*, November 23, 1875.

a hotelier in 1868 when he purchased the British American Hotel in Kingston, Ontario, and acted as its proprietor.²⁶ In 1873, he became president of the Licensed Victuallers' Association, which

Cuyas wasted no time in getting to work. The hotel underwent a major renovation, causing not only the restaurant to close once again, but in addition, for a period, hotel guests were asked to vacate. The number of rooms were increased from eighty-one to one hundred, with gas lighting introduced into each room. The dining room was enlarged.²⁶ Cuyas took on a new partner in managing the hotel, Captain H. E. Swales, of Kingston, Canada. In the 1860s, Swales had been a steamboat captain for the Lake Ontario and Riven St. Lawrence Line.²⁷ The line provided Royal Mail service along with travel for business or pleasure. Swales became

26. *Los Angeles Herald*, November 10, 1875, 3; *Los Angeles Herald*, October 5, 1875, 3.

27. *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, November 10, 1863, 1.

28. *The Gazette* (Montreal, Quebec, Canada), February 6, 1868, 1.

represented suppliers of alcoholic beverages.²⁹ He visited Los Angeles in the winter of 1874 and was so pleased with the area and the climate he made arrangements for extensive purchases of land.³⁰ He returned the following November. The first ad in local newspapers identifying him as co-proprietor along with Cuyas appeared within a week of his arrival in Los Angeles on November 17, 1875 (Figure 7).

The reputation of the hotel had suffered somewhat under Knowlton. In order that the re-opening under new management would not go unnoticed, the new partners planned a banquet for the Los Angeles press on December 26. The event was a huge success and had the desired effect for publicity. The Los Angeles newspapers were effusive in their coverage and said: "the tables were decorated in taste and elegance"; "cooks of supreme skill reign over the cuisine of the Pico House"; and "the universal verdict of the guests was that, where Messrs. Swales and Cuyas [are] under hospitality, they do it in a very thorough and successful way."³¹

The press banquet was not the only event they planned for reintroducing to hotel. In February 1876, the partners sponsored a "hop" for the leading citizens of Los Angeles. It was actually more like a ball with a formal *carte de dance* listing the fifteen dances for the evening with everything from the Virginia reel to a quadrille and a waltz to a polka. An invitation committee including Mayor Prudent Beaudry came up with the list of 275 invitees. On the night of the dance, the hotel was decorated with flowers throughout. Tables were removed from the newly remodeled dining room for dancing. Again, the praise in the newspapers was enthusiastic: "Messrs. Swales and Cuyas have spared neither pain nor expense to tender a brilliant success, and the result was beyond expectation."³²

The future looked bright for the new partnership. Yet it would only last for six more months. In July, Swales had an attack of typhoid fever. He returned to work later that month but only part-

29. *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, July 12, 1873, 4.

30. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, July 8, 1875, 3.

31. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, December 27, 1875; *Los Angeles Herald*, December 28, 1875.

32. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, February 22, 1876.

time because he was still weak. In August 1876, returning from a trip in greatly improved health, he announced his retirement. The partnership was formally dissolved by notice of "Dissolution of Co-partnership" in local papers. His house and furniture on Charity Street (Grand Avenue today) in the new development of Bunker Hill were then auctioned off in October. He departed from Los Angeles after only eleven months.³³

The short partnership of Cuyas and Swales had been very beneficial for both, but now Cuyas was again the sole proprietor. He worked with two different managers over a seven-month period and then in May 1877, he made an announcement that surprised everyone, especially Pío Pico. Cuyas hosted a dinner to honor Pico on his seventy-sixth birthday. *The Evening Express* covered the event and reported Cuyas's address to the guests:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now eight years since my business relations with ex-Governor Pico commenced and resulted in the erection of the building in which we now meet. Nobody can deny that to the existence of this hotel the city of Los Angeles owes in some measure the rapid and marked progress in its buildings in general which I believe will continue until Los Angeles becomes one of the most beautiful cities of America. This assertion may appear to many exaggerated, and I cannot wonder if they think so when I call to mind the almost general remark laid at the time of the laying of the foundation of the Pico House, that I must be crazy to advise Don Pico to build so costly an edifice in such a bad place. The time has already arrived when all those critics acknowledge their mistake.

True, it is, that the understanding of this promising enterprise was soon decided, and the troubles which as is well known which have occurred between Governor Pico and myself, fomented in great measure by rival parties, commenced and continued greatly to the prejudice...of both of us, but as everything in this world has its end, I propose in a friendly way to terminate all questions pending between us, voluntarily giving all and every right to any claims I may have against Don Pio Pico, of which I now make a verbal renunciation, and will do so in writing tomorrow, to celebrate this event and at the same time congratulate Don Pio Pico on arriving at his [76th] birthday, I propose the following toast "Hail, long life and prosperity to Don Pico."³⁴

33. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, July 13, 1876, 3; July 18, 1876, 3; August 10, 1876, 3; August 18, 1876, 3; September 12, 1876, 4; September 22, 1876, 3.

34. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, May 7, 1877.

Pico then spoke:

Ladies and gentlemen, I rise to speak, but am much perplexed, inasmuch, as during the 76 years of life, to which age I to-day attain, I have never experienced such pleasant feelings as I do at this moment. Mr. Cuyas, in addition to the high compliment of inviting me to the agreeable reunion, has given utterance to words which will ever remain engraven in my memory, and which I assure him and you will accompany me to the grave. Overwhelmed with feelings of the sincerest gratitude I propose the health and prosperity of Mr. and Mrs. Cuyas.³⁵

Thus, Pío Pico once again had control over his hotel. Cuyas stayed on through the end of the year to give Pico time to make arrangements for the next proprietor.

PICO HOUSE BACK UNDER PICO



Pico House Advertisement, ca. 1878. Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, 0007560.

The next two and a half years were ones of turmoil with four different changes in proprietorship while Pico's mounting financial problems were finally impacting the hotel. The first proprietors under Pico were the Roth brothers, who had been in charge of the hotel saloon and were familiar with the hotel's operations. They took over in December 1877. Mr. Hough, who had assisted Cuyas after Swales left, stayed

³⁵. Ibid. Pico most likely spoke through an interpreter.

on. The *Daily News* praised their management.³⁶ Yet the proprietorship only lasted four months. Cuyas stepped back in for a few months during which, for the fourth time since it opened, the hotel offered only lodging.

In August 1878, Pico turned to Francisco Pico³⁷ as manager. The following month he became the next proprietor. He in turn brought in Mr. Whitney as manager. Whitney had been the host at the St. Charles Hotel, also in Los Angeles (formerly the Bella Union), and was described as a suave and competent manager.³⁸ During this period the hotel started offering free transportation (See Figure 1) from the newly opened Southern Pacific railroad depot then located in their railroad yard north of downtown where the Los Angeles State Historic Park (“The Cornfields”) is now located (Figure 8). They also occasionally published the entire “Bill of Fare” of the Pico House’s restaurant in the local newspapers. It is clear from the menus that the French influence on the restaurant was still strong. In addition to more traditional offering on the menu, entrees included *Paté à la Riene*, *calf’s head à la Tartare*, and *salmi of duck à la Provinçal* (sic: Provençal).³⁹ Whitney took over the lease in October 1879. The hotel was thoroughly cleaned and new carpets and upholstery brought in. Another re-opening followed with once again a glowing review in the newspapers.⁴⁰

The hotel’s financial problems first became apparent in April 1878 when some furniture was attached for failure to pay the mortgage on it. The attachment was followed by a public auction on the seized furniture in July.⁴¹ The auction brought in \$2,600 for the mortgage holder against an expected \$10,000. In an ironic twist, 80 percent of it was bought by Pío Pico!⁴² It seems Pico kept his furniture at a greatly reduced price. In December, the *Evening Express* published a list of individuals in Los Angeles County with delinquent property taxes, which showed Pico as delinquent on

36. *Los Angeles Daily Star*, February 26, 1878, 3.

37. The relationship between Francisco and Pío Pico is not known at this time despite a search of the Pio Pico genealogy found on *Pio Pico State Historic Park* website.

38. *Los Angeles Herald*, November 30, 1878, 3.

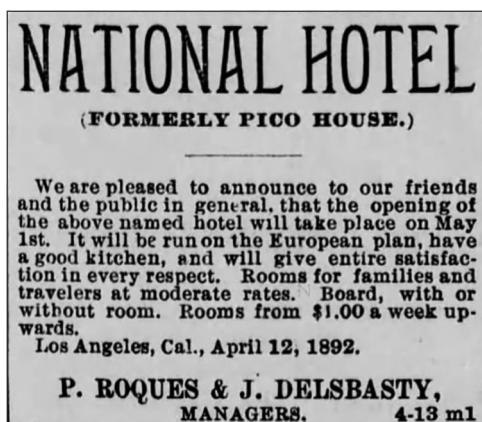
39. *Los Angeles Herald*, December 8, 1878, 3.

40. *Los Angeles Herald*, October 2, 1879, 3; and October 22, 1879, 3.

41. *Los Angeles Star*, April 28, 1878, 3.

42. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, July 3, 1878, 3.

ten parcels around the plaza with an assessed value \$25,706 in property and \$10,909 in improvements. The largest of the ten was the Pico House at \$10,710 and \$2,500 respectively.⁴³ A delinquent tax sale took place in March 1879 with a small portion of the Pico House property auctioned off. The Savings and Loan Society of San Francisco paid \$5,000 for "one inch and a half square of Pico House property" to settle the taxes for his ten parcels.⁴⁴ The final blow came in June 1880 when Pico was unable to pay the interest on a loan of \$40,000 against the hotel, which he had negotiated in 1873. The hotel was sold at auction for \$16,000. The Pico House and one other property were conveyed to the same Savings and Loan Society of San Francisco in August.⁴⁵ The Pico House closed entirely.



Newspaper advertisement. *Los Angeles Herald*, April 14, 1892.

"quaint and rubbishy."⁴⁷ By this time, the Pico House was no longer the only first-class hotel in town. The Cosmopolitan Hotel, also designed by Kysor, opened in 1879. It was located farther south on Main Street, closer to the center of the city and described itself as "The Finest Hotel in Southern California." In

The hotel reopened in November under Dr. Norman Griswold of San Francisco, who had leased the building.⁴⁶ Col. Filkins of the St. Charles hotel in San Francisco also came to Los Angeles as manager. But by this time, the hotel was showing its age. Krythe reported that Helen Hunt (Jackson), the author of *Ramona*, stayed at the hotel when gathering material for her novel and found it very

43. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, December 2, 1878, 4.

44. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, March 8, 1879.

45. *Los Angeles Evening Express*, August 21, 1880, 3.

46. *Los Angeles Herald*, September 29, 1880, 3.

47. Krythe, "Pico House," 158.

a back-handed slap to the Pico House with all its problems, ads for the *Cosmopolitan* claimed to be “the only reliably first-class hotel in Los Angeles.”⁴⁸ A steady decline in popularity of the Pico House took place over the next decade. The hotel changed hands several times until 1892 when the Pico House name was changed to the National Hotel. It was no longer a first-class hotel. (Figure 9).

PICO AND CUYAS IN THEIR LATER YEARS

Cuyas remained in Los Angeles after his association with the Pico House ended. He was involved in various activities. He had opened the *Café de Paris* restaurant opposite the Pico House in 1878.⁴⁹ In 1879, he became an instructor of Spanish as a member of the Board of Instruction of the Los Angeles Academy and Commercial Institute, where he was known as Professor Cuyas.⁵⁰ He also offered translation services. In 1888, he was the official United States delegate to the Universal Exposition of Barcelona, a World’s Fair that took place in his native Spain.⁵¹ He continued instruction in Spanish and also French from his home. He was a respected elder citizen at this point. Two years earlier, in an effort to recognize Cuyas, a proposal was made to change the name of New High Street to Cuyas Avenue. Such a change was needed to eliminate confusion with the nearby High Street. A heated debate ensued, with critics complaining that the name was too hard to pronounce for the “Saxon tongue” and calling for “good old American names.” The Board of Public Works recommended the name change but the City Council did not approve.⁵² The street eventually became Ord Street, named after Lt. Ord who surveyed the pueblo in 1849 and drew up the town’s first official map. Cuyas died in June 1896 of a severe case of peritonitis at the age of seventy-eight. The *Los Angeles Times* noted that “Professor Cuyas was one of the oldest and most scholarly of the Spanish residents of Los Angeles.”⁵³

48. *Los Angeles Herald*, August 28, 1880, 3; and March 31, 1881.

49. *Los Angeles Herald*, October 12, 1878, 2.

50. *Los Angeles Herald*, September 5, 1879, 2.

51. *Los Angeles Herald*, May 4, 1888.

52. *Los Angeles Times*, June 21, 2003, 51.

53. *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1895.

Pico's financial problems continued to mount in his later years. The final blow came when he lost his beloved Rancho Paso de Bartolo Viejo. The "ranchito" was his home since the early 1850s and is now part of the Pío Pico State Historic Park in Whittier, California. Pico's problems started in 1883, when he arranged for a loan of \$60,000 with Los Angeles businessman Bernard Cohn, whom he had known for over ten years. The rancho served as collateral. When he went to repay, Cohn maintained the document Pico signed was actually a bill of sale for the property, not a loan. Cohn wanted \$185,000 to return the property.⁵⁴ Pico, who never learned to read or write English, claimed fraud, saying he had been tricked as he would never have agreed to sell the rancho at such a discounted price. He sued Cohn in yet another case that went to the California Supreme Court, *Pico v. Cohn* (1885). The court eventually sided with Cohn.⁵⁵ A key witness in the case had been Pico's interpreter, Pancho Johnson. He testified that there was nothing said at the signing about Pico having the right to reclaim the property. Some believed that Johnson had been paid off by Cohn.⁵⁶ In any event, Pico lost the rancho and was evicted in 1892. At this point he was financially ruined and in his nineties.⁵⁷ He lived his remaining years in a house in southwest Los Angeles provided to him by Col. J. J. Warner. He died in September 1894 at the age of ninety-three and was buried in the old Calvary Cemetery in downtown Los Angeles.⁵⁸ When the cemetery was dismantled, he was reinterred in the El Campo Santo Cemetery in the City of Industry.

THE PICO HOUSE TODAY

In the final paragraph of her article on the Pico House, Maymie Krythe imagined Pico and Cuyas returning in 1955 to view the deteriorated condition of the hotel at that time:

It is fortunate that aristocratic Don Pio Pico and Senor Cuyas are not here to see the sad state of their once famous hotel—Pico House—one of the few

54. Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 163–164.

55. California Supreme Court, *Pico v. Cohn* 67 Cal. 174, case 9665, July 1885. *Case Law Project*, a Harvard Law School open source for access to U.S. law.

56. Salomon, *Pío Pico*, 167.

57. *Ibid.*, 171.

58. *Los Angeles Herald*, September 12, 1894, 4; *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1894, 10.

remaining monuments that remind us of the gay festivities that took place in Los Angeles and the many celebrities that slept there.⁵⁹

Today, their visit would elicit far more positive feelings. The Pico House, now part of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument, has been restored. It has not reopened as a restaurant or hotel, nor is there any intent to do so. Rather, it is used for celebrations and special events that bring life back to this remarkable historic building.

APPENDIX

Reprinted from *The Los Angeles Republican*, Thursday, May 20, 1870:

The Pico House – This ornament to our city will be opened for the accommodation of the public about the 10th of June. The delay in opening is on account of irregularity in the packing and receipt of furniture from New York. A day or two since, by the politeness of Mr. Johnson, we were conducted through the entire building, and inspected all the rooms. Work is nearly completed on the second and third floors, the carpets being down and curtains hung, and some of the furniture placed. The building is at the south west corner of the Plaza, on Main Street, and fronting 120 feet on Main Street, and on the Plaza 95 feet and reaching to Sanchez Street, thus facing three streets and being amply provided as to light and ventilation. The walls are of brick resting on heavy stone foundations and on the Plaza and Main street fronts are stuccoed, the color being nearly a blue limestone. The windows of the first and third floors are arched, those of the second floor though not arched harmonize and the walls are so heavy that all the windows are in recess. The height of the building is three stories and the ceilings are lofty. Viewed from the street, the building makes a very neat appearance and would not be ashamed if set down in New York. The first floor corner room and the one adjoining it on Main Street will be let for stores. The main entrance is on Main Street, whence an ample staircase leads to the upper floors. At the right of the hall is the office and next the

59. Krythe, "Pico House," 160.

reading room and bar, all on Main Street. There are three dining rooms facing on the Plaza. The kitchen and its offices are on Sanchez Street. The building encloses a court, and a portico reaching the third story runs around the court. A fountain will be placed in this court and flowers planted. On Sanchez Street are wide sliding doors which will permit wagons to drive inside the yard for convenience in unloading baggage, etc. At the head of the stairs on the second floor is the drawing room, which will be richly furnished. Two large mirrors and some beautiful pictures will decorate the walls. The remainder of the second floor will mainly be assigned to lodgers, especially those who may wish suites of rooms. The billiard room will be on this floor. The third story is designed entirely for sleeping rooms. There are eighty-one rooms in the house beside those intended for public use. All the rooms are elegantly furnished. On the second floor all carpets are brussels or satin. On the third floor are best ingrain carpets of neat patterns. The halls are covered with oil cloth with a walking strip of carpeting in the middle. The furniture on the second floor is mainly walnut; on the third floor of lighter woods and less costly but all pleasing to the eye and of good quality. The rooms on the third floor are many of them insuites. From the windows on Sanchez Street a fine view is had of San Pedro bay as well as of the plains and mountains to the east. Wardrobes are furnished for every room and water and gas have been carried to every hall, and will be carried to various rooms when it is desirable. There are bathrooms for gentlemen on the first floor for ladies on the second floor with dressing rooms attached, and water closets on every floor.

Mr. Antonio Cuyas will be landlord. He has had extensive experience in the hotel business. For several years he was proprietor of the Barcelona House in New York City. Mr. Johnson will also assist in the management. Two French cooks of reputation have been engaged, and no pains will be spared to give the table a high reputation. Parties wishing accommodations can engage board, without rooms, or rooms without board or can have both. The new hotel is a credit to the city, and to the architect, C. F. Kysor, and to its proprietor, Gov. Pico, and we hope and believe that its liberal spirited proprietor may be well repaid for his enterprise.

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