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# Seventh & Broadway: Photos of Downtown's Crossroads through the Decades

By Nathan Masters

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A traffic jam at the downtown L.A. intersection of Seventh and Broadway, circa 1920.  
Courtesy of the Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

Quoting **John E. Fisher** of the L.A. Department of Transportation, the L.A. City Nerd recently **shared** this interesting fact on Facebook: in 1924, the downtown L.A. intersection of Seventh Street and Broadway was the busiest in the world with 504,000 people crossing those streets each day.

The chaotic scenes captured in the photograph above would have been unfathomable to someone standing at Seventh and Broadway in middle of the nineteenth century. Running more than a mile southwest of the original pueblo, Seventh Street was little more than a line on surveyors' maps. Broadway, then known as Fort Street, lost itself in the agricultural lands that separated Seventh street from L.A.'s original urban core.

The intersection first gained notability in 1865, when St. Vincent's College opened on the intersection's northwest corner. Since renamed Loyola Marymount University, the boys' college occupied the entire city block bounded by Broadway and Seventh, Hill, and Sixth streets. **St. Vincent's Court**, a quaint alleyway, traces the path of the college's driveway.

But for many years, St. Vincent's represented the edge of L.A.'s urban development. It was after Southern California's population boom of the 1880s -- brief but spectacular -- that Seventh and Broadway grew into a true intersection of city streets. Amid the influx of settlers and tourists from the Midwest, several buildings rose around the intersection.

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later, the Loew's State Theatre -- one of several movie palaces to locate on Broadway -- opened across the street.



Seventh and Broadway, circa 1910. Courtesy of the Title Insurance and Trust / C.C. Pierce Photography Collection, USC Libraries.

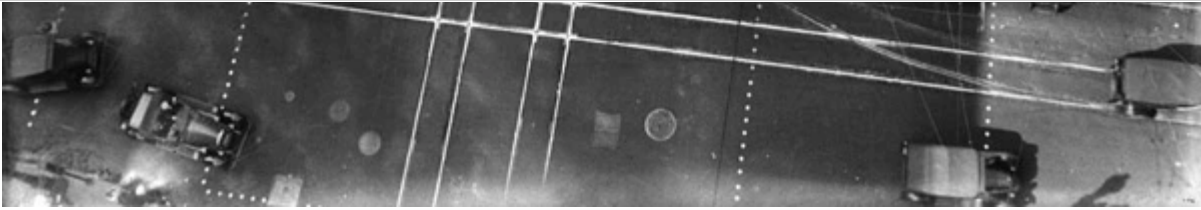


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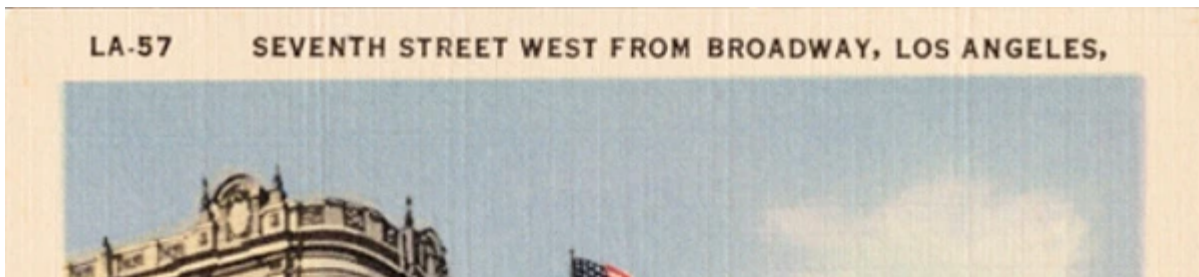
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Aerial view of the intersection, circa 1925. Courtesy of the Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.



Postcard depicting the intersection, circa 1925. Courtesy of the Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

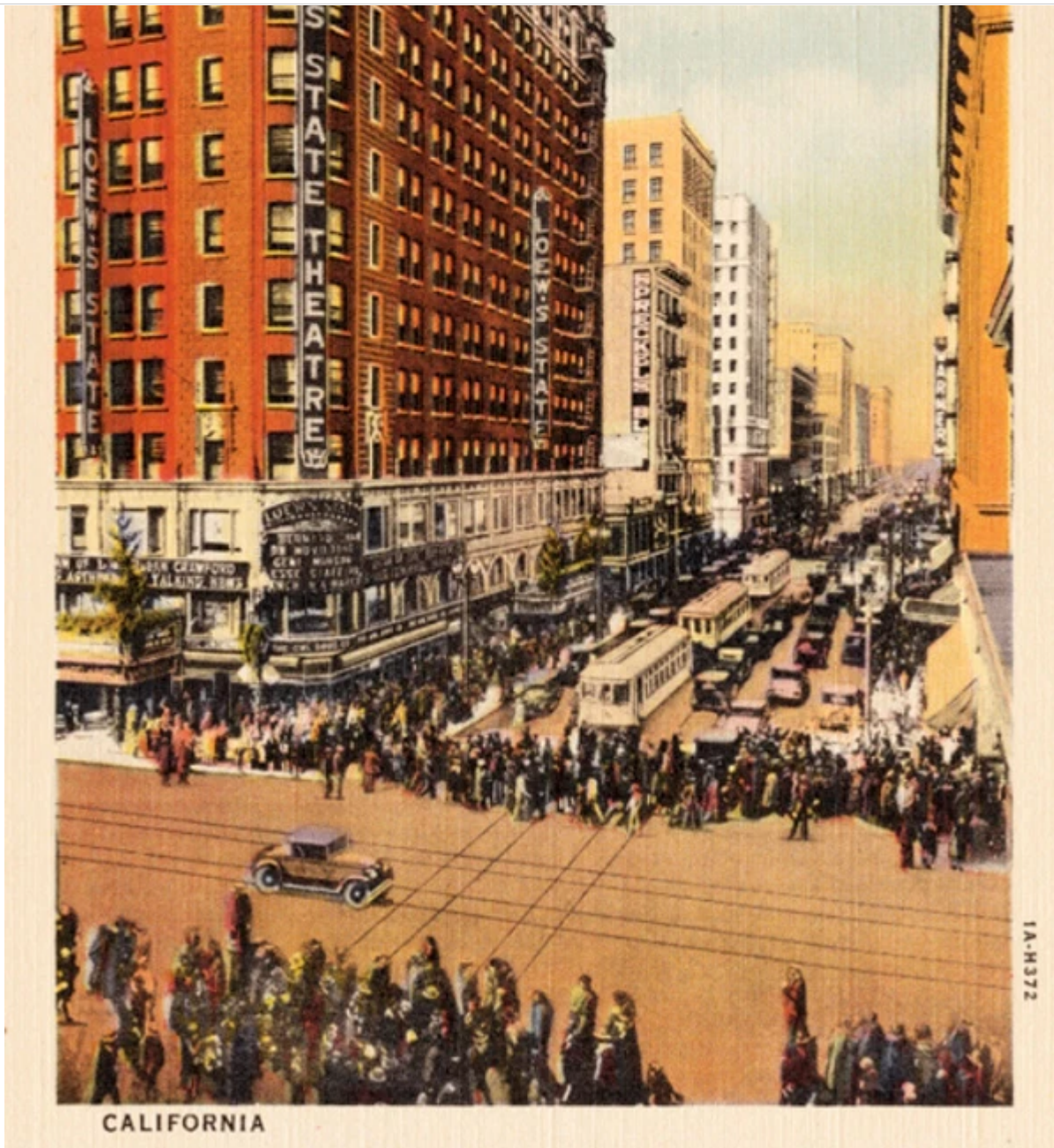


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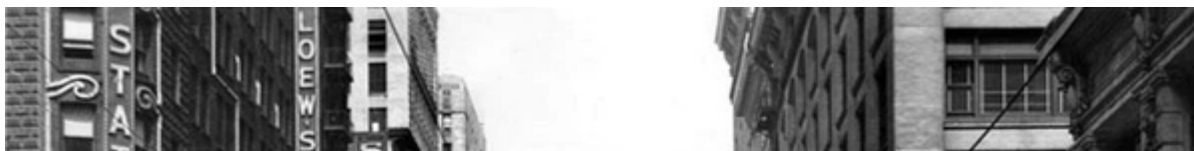
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Postcard depicting Seventh and Broadway. Courtesy of the James Rojas Collector, Metro Transportation Library and Archive. Used under a Creative Commons license.



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1938 postcard depicting the intersection. Courtesy of the Frasher Foto Postcard Collection, Pomona Public Library.



Pedestrians crossing the intersection in 1958. Courtesy of the Los Angeles Examiner Collection, USC Libraries.



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Pedestrians crowd the intersection of Seventh and Broadway, circa 1937. Courtesy of the Herman J. Schultheis Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.



Seventh and Broadway in the early 1950s. Courtesy of the James Rojas Collection, Metro Transportation Library and Archive. Used under a Creative Commons license.

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Seventh and Broadway circa 1956. Buses and streetcars share the road with pedestrians and automobiles. Courtesy of the Metro Transportation Library and Archive. Used under a Creative Commons license.



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Former Bullock's department store at Seventh and Broadway in 1986. Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive, Young Research Library, UCLA. Used under a Creative Commons license.

Though these buildings gave the intersection a visual identity and attracted thousands of shoppers and theatergoers on a daily basis, Seventh and Broadway was perhaps best defined by its role as a crossroads. Broadway served as an important retail corridor and hosted the city's early theater district. Seventh Street likewise became home to a collection of upscale retail shops, and as the street ran to the south of Bunker Hill, it became an important route between downtown and L.A.'s growing suburbs to the west.

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Thus, by 1924, more than half a million people traversed the intersection daily -- 200,000 in streetcars, 35,000 in autos, and 269,000 on foot. London's Hyde Park Corner, by comparison, saw only 478,000 pass through each day. In 1930, the intersection's daily traffic exceeded 750,000.

By then, though, downtown Los Angeles' importance as a commercial center was already waning. Rival shopping districts like **A.W. Ross' Miracle Mile** drew customers -- and retail chains -- away from Broadway and Seventh Street, and downtown's notoriously

congested streets slowed streetcar service and encouraged Southern Californians to avoid the city's historic core by staying in their automobile suburbs.

Downtown's decline continued throughout the city's postwar years, and Seventh and Broadway slowly transformed from its status as shopping mecca to a more modest role as the heart of the city's discount jewelry district. In 1983, the flagship Bullock's department store at Seventh and Broadway closed, and the building became a jewelry mart. Other nearby buildings, meanwhile, sat vacant, including Broadway's grand movie palaces.

In recent years, the intersection has been a focal point for efforts to revitalize Broadway. The **Los Angeles Conservancy's Last Remaining Seats** series opens the street's historic theaters to preservation-minded moviegoers each summer, while **Bringing Back Broadway** -- a joint initiative by city leaders, property owners, and the Conservancy -- promises to give new life to the thoroughfare's stately structures. A **streetcar** may soon roll through the intersection for the first time in decades. Meanwhile, Seventh Street's emergence as downtown's restaurant row crowds the intersection's crosswalks each night. Its former title as the world's busiest crossroads may be beyond its reach, but Seventh and Broadway still hums with the life of the city.

## The Buildings of Seventh & Broadway



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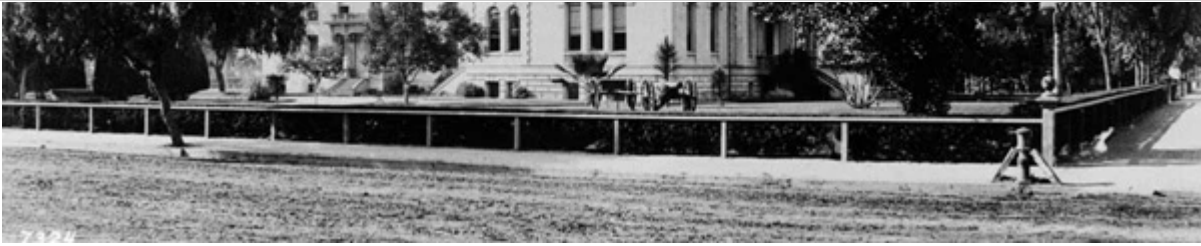
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St. Vincent's College, circa 1887. Courtesy of the Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

Lankershim Flats, a fashionable hotel at the corner of Seventh and Broadway, circa 1900. Courtesy of the Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

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Built in 1893, the Vogel Block once stood at the southwest corner of Seventh and Broadway. Circa 1910 photo courtesy of the Title Insurance and Trust / C.C. Pierce Photography Collection, USC Libraries.

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1910 view of the flagship Bullock's department store at Seventh and Broadway. Courtesy of the Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

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Loew's State Theatre under construction in 1921. Courtesy of the Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

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