

THE ARGONAUT

JOURNAL OF THE SAN FRANCISCO HISTORICAL SOCIETY



THE ARGONAUT

Journal of the San Francisco Historical Society

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BEFORE THE MIDWINTER FAIR: <i>The Mechanics' Institute's "Pacific Rim" Industrial Exhibitions of 1869 and 1871</i> by Taryn Edwards	8
THE WINTER OF OUR DREAMS <i>San Francisco Inaugurates a New Era of Prosperity</i> by Lee Bruno	24
A LOOK AT THE MIDWINTER FAIR: <i>Photos from the 1894 California Midwinter International Exposition</i> by Lorri Ungaretti	34
A RARE MIDWINTER EXPOSITION ARTIFACT: <i>Lost, Found, and Lost Again</i> by Rodger C. Birt	66
★FRACCHIA PRIZE WINNER★ ART ACTIVISM: <i>San Francisco's History of Counterculture and Its Impact on the Mission District</i> by Sofia Herron Geller	74

This issue is dedicated to:

THE CALIFORNIA MIDWINTER FAIR

by Charles A. Fracchia

Less than a half-century after the sleepy hamlet of San Francisco was turned into a bustling city and one of the largest ports in the world, the city threw a party and invited the world. It was called the California Midwinter Exposition (or, more commonly, the “Midwinter Fair”).

It is called a “world’s fair,” but it was not officially one. Rather, it was the result of a fascination with an earlier world’s fair held in Chicago by two men sent as part of a California commission to represent the state at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The men were M. H. de Young, owner and publisher of the *Chronicle*, the leading newspaper in San Francisco; and James. D. Phelan, real estate mogul and banker. So impressed were they by their visit to the fair in Chicago that they returned to San Francisco determined to replicate what they had witnessed in Chicago. The reason they gave for hosting a fair were, first, to provide employment during that time of depression in San Francisco; and, second, to showcase California’s salubrious and beneficent climate during the winter. In short, the fair’s planners sought to seek economic benefit, which included a component of boosterism.

The Midwinter Fair not as magnificent as the fair in Chicago, did not draw anywhere near the numbers the Chicago fair did, and did not have the cultural impact and significance that the Columbian Exposition did; but it was a successful event, given the short amount of time for preparation and the limited resources to assemble a complex event.

Built in Golden Gate Park, the Midwinter Fair produced the catalyst for a municipal fine arts museum and developed a sense of confidence among San Franciscans. That confidence would blossom, less than a quarter century later, into the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE)—one of the most important and significant world’s fairs ever held.

The California Midwinter Fair has received little attention from writers, scholars, or people in the media. The San Francisco Historical Society attempts to rectify this lack of attention in this themed issue of *The Argonaut*.

Charles Fracchia is the Founder and President Emeritus of the San Francisco Historical Society. He is the Publisher of Panorama and The Argonaut.

BEFORE THE MIDWINTER FAIR:

The Mechanics' Institute's "Pacific Rim" Industrial Exhibitions of 1869 and 1871

by Taryn Edwards

Lai Yong carefully hung his second portrait on the wall of the picture gallery and stepped back to admire how it looked. The subjects, a Chinese man and woman in traditional garb, gazed back at him with slight smiles playing on their lips. It was a few days before the opening of the 1869 Industrial Exhibition, the seventh exhibition hosted by the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco. The Pavilion at Union Square was loud with the clamor of saws, hammers, and shouts as other exhibitors hurried to construct their booths. The picture gallery was one of three spaces set aside to show the talent of San Francisco's burgeoning art community. Lai Yong cleared away the paintings' wrappings and, with them under his arm, ducked his head into the adjoining photograph gallery to admire what was presented there, and then he strolled farther down the arcade. Everything from locally made wire to wine was staged to entice fairgoers, potential customers, and judges responsible for awarding the coveted gold and silver medals to the best in each category. This was Yong's first public exhibition of his work since arriving three years earlier from China, where he had studied portraiture under the master Chay Hin. He was eager to promote himself and attract new clients to his small studio on Clay Street.¹

It is not certain how Yong found out about the exhibition—perhaps he noticed an advertisement in one of the city's newspapers or had been solicited by fair managers when they canvassed the city. Or

perhaps he had attended the previous year's fair. He might have decided to exhibit this time because he had heard that this year's fair, 1869, was special because China, Japan, and most of the countries of the Pacific Rim had been invited. It was the first attempt in California to host an international exhibition.

INTRODUCTION

The California Midwinter International Exposition of 1894 is described as the state's first World's Fair. But there were many fairs before the Midwinter that attempted to involve multiple countries, including the fairs held in 1869 and 1871 organized by the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco. Both fairs were efforts to engage countries, especially those on the Pacific Rim, to foster international communication and trade and to develop San Francisco's reputation as a worldwide center of industry and culture.

Talk of California, especially San Francisco, as the potential site of a World's Fair started after the success of New York's exhibition of the Industry of All Nations in 1853, but at that time, California was too young a state and too far away from the rest of the world for the idea to be feasible. That distance, however, seemed to get smaller every day as work on the local and long-distance railroads continued at a feverish pace, and engines and steam-powered ships became cheaper to build and more efficient.



Mechanics' Pavilion at Larkin and Grove Streets. Courtesy of Mechanics' Institute Archives.

Congress, eager to improve mail service and capitalize on trade with Asia, passed an act in February of 1865 authorizing the establishment of ocean mail-steamship service to Asia. Advertising in cities such as Washington, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco, Congress called for proposals from relevant companies to serve as contractors to carry U.S. mail between San Francisco “and some port or ports in the Chinese empire, touching at Honolulu, in the Sandwich Islands, and one or more ports in Japan, by means of a monthly line of first-class American sea-going steamships.” The contract was awarded to the Pacific Mail Steamship

Company, which immediately commenced building four side-wheel steamships with the goal of starting service by January 1, 1867.²

As the deadline approached, the state-of-the-art vessels weren’t quite ready. Unwilling to risk delay, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company employed its then fleetest ship, the *SS Colorado*, which on its first run made a record-setting trip to Yokohama in twenty-two days. Its return to San Francisco on March 20 brought 178 passengers, including two representatives and their assistants from the Japanese government, along with a full hold of tea, opium, silk, seaweed, cuttlefish, and firecrackers.³

Eventually, monthly trips were made to Yokohama, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. The route led to an immediate influx of Japanese and Chinese immigrants and opened up extraordinary new trade vistas that titillated business leaders about the possibilities to come.

Meanwhile, California readied its contribution to the International Exposition in Paris, which was set to open the following week on April 1, 1867. Several civic leaders planned to attend, and those who did returned with their minds full of glorious stories and future promise. Those who could not afford the trip to Paris eagerly read the telegraphed accounts that arrived in San Francisco about six weeks after the events. The *Daily Alta California* advised, "If the Government of the United States is wise it will profit by this French example, and take steps for the inauguration of a 'World's Fair' in this country . . . and not later than the summer of 1869."⁴

The combination of the success of the China line and the excitement surrounding the Paris exposition set business leaders and newspaper editors in San Francisco on fire. Among those whose imaginations were aroused to action were James Warren, Andrew Hallidie, Horace Dunn, and the leaders of the Mechanics' Institute.

COLONEL JAMES L. L. WARREN

Colonel Warren settled his wiry frame behind the crowded desk that overlooked Clay Street. He spread out and pored over the daily papers. As he paged through the stack, clipping this or that article with a pair of heavy scissors, he noticed the telegraphic dispatch that announced to the Commissioner General of the American Commission to the Paris Universal Exposition that, "out of the 524 [American] exhibitors at Paris there have been awards in favor of 262, including 4 grand prizes, 17 gold, 62 silver and 103 bronze medals . . . and 79 exhibitors honorably mentioned."⁵ Though the California contributions had been roundly criticized as small and poorly managed,⁶ this was an astounding victory for the nation. Warren inked his pen and furiously jotted notes.

An inveterate collector of curios, books, stamps, coins, and just about everything else, Warren was a compulsive reader and thinker with a restless



James Lloyd Lafayette Warren, publisher of the *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*. Courtesy of California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

spirit. His favorite cause, which colored the pages of *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences* (the journal he had published since January of 1854), was the promotion of his adopted state's bountiful natural resources. In the *California Farmer's* issue of July 11, 1867, Warren, with his characteristic zeal, congratulated the nation on its efforts at the Paris Exposition and declared that it was critical to California's success as an industrial leader of the Pacific to claim the World's Fair for 1871. He wrote: "Providence with her unerring signs, tell us that the next World's Fair should be held in CALIFORNIA [sic]. Does anyone doubt our capacity . . . as a state to accomplish this? . . . our own self interests demand

this to be done, if we wish to build up our own State and the Pacific Coast.”⁷

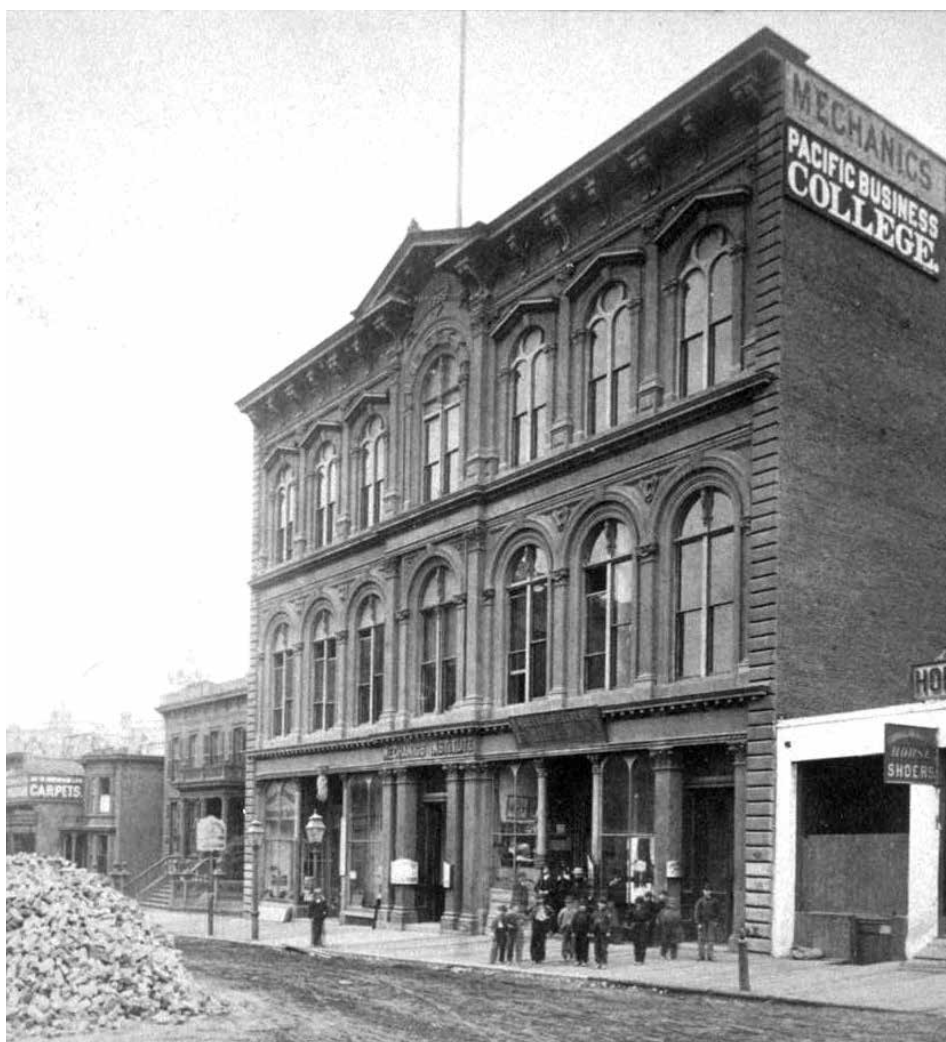
For Warren, the signs that a World’s Fair was possible were the impending completion of the trans-continental railroad; the new ship lines to China and Japan, which would result in “tens of millions of dollars” in trade; and the lucrative acquisition of Alaska, which would prove a “great value to our country and also to the Pacific of millions in trade annually.” He believed that between July of 1867 and 1871, “the whole trade of the world will have changed its course and the ‘Golden Gate’ of San Francisco Bay will have become the real Golden Gate of Commerce.”⁸

Warren was not all talk; he had an impressive record of feats since settling in California in 1849. He was the founder and owner of Warren & Co., a firm that specialized in fruit trees, seeds, and agricultural implements. From its San Francisco headquarters he published the weekly *California Farmer*. He also was an experienced fair planner. In 1852 he had designed the state’s first agricultural and cattle show—a privately funded venture that excited the farming and business communities so much that it led to the formation of the State Agricultural Society (the progenitor of the California Department of Food and Agriculture). The Agricultural Society, in turn, produced the first state fair with Warren’s help in October 1854, held in Musical Hall on Bush Street.⁹ Born in 1805, Warren had the vigor of someone much younger. A world’s fair for California was a project he could throw himself into as long as he had the support of allies who shared his dreams. One of those allies was the Mechanics’ Institute.

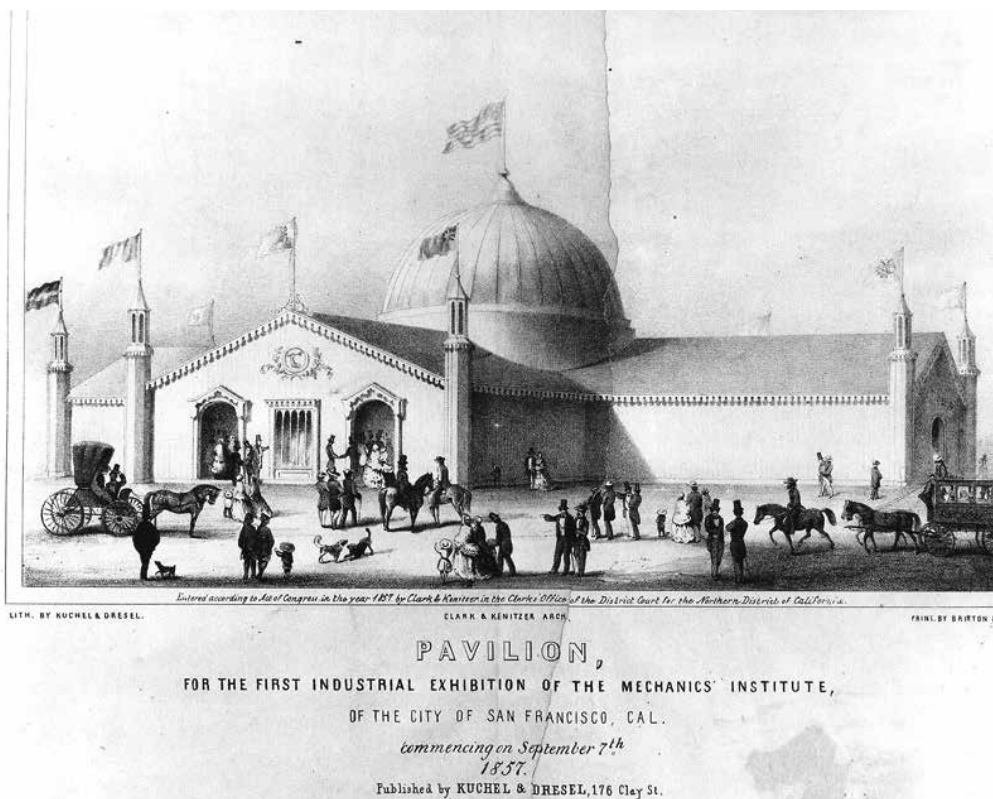
THE MECHANICS’ INSTITUTE

The Mechanics’ Institute, a pioneering library and vocational training center which is now located on San Francisco’s Post Street,¹⁰ was founded in December of 1854 during the thick of the economic slump that gripped the state after the production of mined gold slowed. The Mechanics’ Institute aimed to provide under-employed gold miners, artisans, those skilled in trade and crafts, and their respective families with social and learning opportunities that would enable them to get new jobs and invigorate the economy.

The San Francisco Mechanics’ Institute had been in the fair business since 1856, first managing the mechanical department of the third state fair in San José with Warren’s backing; and then pulling off



*Mechanics’ Institute on Post Street, circa 1866. Photograph by Eadweard Muybridge.
Courtesy of Mechanics’ Institute Archives.*



First fair building of the Mechanics' Institute, 1857. Courtesy of Mechanics' Institute Archives.

its own fair the following year. This fair took place on Montgomery Street between Post, Sutter, and Kearny, on land that was loaned for this purpose by James Lick. The fair was hosted in September of 1857 and housed in an 18,000-square-foot building, then the largest structure in the state. At the fair, one could see an astounding array of California's natural resources, inventions, and ingenuity, including four examples of billiard tables; cabinets filled with curiosities; samples of the state's minerals; a bountiful display of the finest flowers, fruits, and vegetables; two fire engines; fancy articles such as needlework, fabrics, and laces; and art from the Nahl brothers, William Jewitt, and many others.¹¹ It was similar to the state's other fairs, but with an emphasis on breaking technologies and local talent.

The fair had about 10,000 visitors—roughly 25 percent of San Francisco's adult population at the time. The event was such a remarkable success that it set the pattern for virtually all of the following Mechanics' Institute fairs: opening ceremonies marked with a welcome from the Institute's presi-

dent, a rousing speech by a local personality about the state of California's industry, nightly musical concerts, an elaborate award ceremony, cash prizes for research conducted on various areas of technical innovation, an all-night dance party, and a donation from the fair's proceeds to a local charity. Ultimately, there would be thirty more fairs that served both as vehicles for the promotion of locally made products and as income and publicity generators for the Institute. The profits from ticket sales supported the Institute's library, free lectures, and vocational classes until the last fair was held in 1899.

ANDREW SMITH HALLIDIE

Hallidie buttoned up his waistcoat and ran his hand through his thicket of brown curls. It was time to go. Leaving his office, he headed up Clay Street and made a left on Montgomery. As his heels thudded upon the sidewalk, Hallidie tried to quiet his mind, which was still awl from his "flying trip through the Old World,"¹² where he had visited family in London and attended the International Exposition in Paris. As he walked, his feelings turned to the wonderful things he had seen abroad. His childhood stomping grounds—the shops and manufactories, mines and quarries, railways and watercourses, churches and theaters¹³—had all matured so much in the last fifteen years the place was nearly unrecognizable. London's incredible and growing transportation network was particularly awe-inspiring as he remembered well "the crash and jam of carriages and people that used to occur every day on Fleet Street."¹⁴

Hallidie was the state's premier wire rope



Portrait of Andrew Smith Hallidie from the San Francisco Centennial Celebration, 1876. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

manufacturer and bridge builder. In a few years he would develop a technology that would transform San Francisco's own transportation network: the cable car. A force of thoughtful energy, he had been involved with the Mechanics' Institute since 1860, and began his first term on the board as a vice-president in 1864. Since then he had served on various committees, including the one that purchased the Institute's Post Street property in 1866. A regular reader of the *California Farmer*, there is no doubt that Hallidie read Warren's July call for a world's fair.¹⁵

The implications of such an event on California's growth, the Mechanics' Institute's success, and his own future as an entrepreneur surely tinged his thoughts as Hallidie made his way to meet with a contingent of Institute colleagues and a committee from the Agricultural Society on August 1, 1867.

The agenda was to discuss the parameters of the Institute's support of the upcoming state fair scheduled for that September. Hallidie and his friend Horace Dunn, who served as the corresponding secretary for the Institute, were assigned to help promote the fair in the business community of San Francisco and facilitate the exhibition of mechanical products.¹⁶

HORACE DURRIE DUNN

Dunn was a bit of a workaholic. His day job was serving as the State Commissioner of Immigration. He was, however, an expert on horticulture, and was able to indulge this interest while moonlighting as a reporter for the *San Francisco Bulletin*. His regular beat was covering the actions of the State Agricultural Society. Six months earlier, in the course of his official duties, he had become friendly with the Japanese embassy that had arrived on the *Colorado*. He arranged with the representatives from Japan an exchange of California fruit trees, vines, plants, and vegetable seeds for similar products from Japan—an act that would launch his personal import-and-export business of agricultural products to and from Asia. At the time of this meeting on August 1, he was nearly finished compiling an extensive report on the agricultural resources of California for the U.S. Commissioners of Agriculture.¹⁷ Dunn was perfectly aware of what California could do agriculturally, and through his burgeoning business relationships with foreign powers was alert to what they were interested in importing.

At that meeting it is likely that Hallidie, Dunn, and Warren first speculated about the possibility of a world's fair because a few months later, the notion was reported in the *Daily Alta California*:

"[a] grand Fair in which all the people of the Pacific would be represented has been taken up by the Mechanics' Institute. . . . Efforts will be made to give it, as far as possible, an international character. For this purpose, it is in contemplation to invite China, Japan, the Hawaiian Islands, Society Islands, Australia, and the Republics of the Pacific to send specimens of their products and manufacturers for exhibition."¹⁸



Horace Durrie Dunn, 1881. Courtesy of California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

On November 30 the *Mining and Scientific Press* also mentioned the meeting, stating that:

"In order to carry out [the international portion] of the programme, it will be necessary to secure the assistance and cooperation of both Congress and the State Legislature. . . . Some kind of official character must be given to the enterprise, or it would be in vain to look for cooperation from the ceremonial nationalities of Eastern Asia. One of the principal objects of the international character proposed, is to bring into commercial and social relations the various nationalities in this part of the world, especially those with whom we have just opened steam communication, and with whom we hope, ere long, to be in telegraphic communication as well."¹⁹

Thus encouraged, the Mechanics' Institute outlined its preliminary plans for an international fair in a meeting of the board in December of 1867, where the participants drafted a resolution stating "that we the mechanics of California acting by the authority in us invested under our corporate powers as an Institute so now take the initiative and proclaim to the world that we will hold an industrial exposition in this the Golden city of the world [in] a.d. 1871 which we most earnestly hope may become truly international in its character."²⁰ However, the Institute was more conservative when it announced plans to the public, stating that it had resolved to hold an industrial exhibition "on a much larger scale than was ever before attempted on this coast."²¹

A few months later in March, Hallidie assumed the presidency of the Mechanics' Institute and immediately sprang into action. He followed up on the media's call for State support of the world's fair venture with a plea to the Legislature to make an appropriation to the Institute: "We ask at your hands the sum of \$20,000 to be used for premiums for the two Industrial Exhibitions proposed to be held by the Mechanics' Institute during 1868 and 1869."²² Citing the successes of the past Mechanics' Institute fairs to the state's economy and the need for financial help to provide prizes other than medals and diplomas to help encourage "new enterprises of manufacture and industry and innovation,"²³ Hallidie had the support of the Institute's new slate of trustees. The request seemed impossible to deny—but it was indeed refused.

1868 FAIR'S FAILURE AS AN INTERNATIONAL FAIR

The Committee of Ways and Means of the California State Assembly was ready to recommend a grant of \$10,000, but at "the last moment . . . parties totally unauthorized by the [Mechanics' Institute] struck it out from the Appropriation Bill . . . giving [Mechanics' Institute] no opportunity to correct the misrepresentation."²⁴ With plans for funding thus dashed, the Mechanics' Institute had to scale back its plans and host its usual, locally focused fair.

THE INSTITUTE TRIES AGAIN WITH THE FAIR OF 1869

Once the 1868 fair was over, the Institute was relieved to discover that the debt they had incurred for the construction of its new fair pavilion at Union Square was largely paid off, but there were still bills to pay related to the Institute's library and headquarters on Post Street. Hallidie felt the fiscal pressure and convinced the board that it was expedient to host another fair. He felt the impending completion of the transcontinental railroad was reason enough, stating to the membership on March 4, 1869:

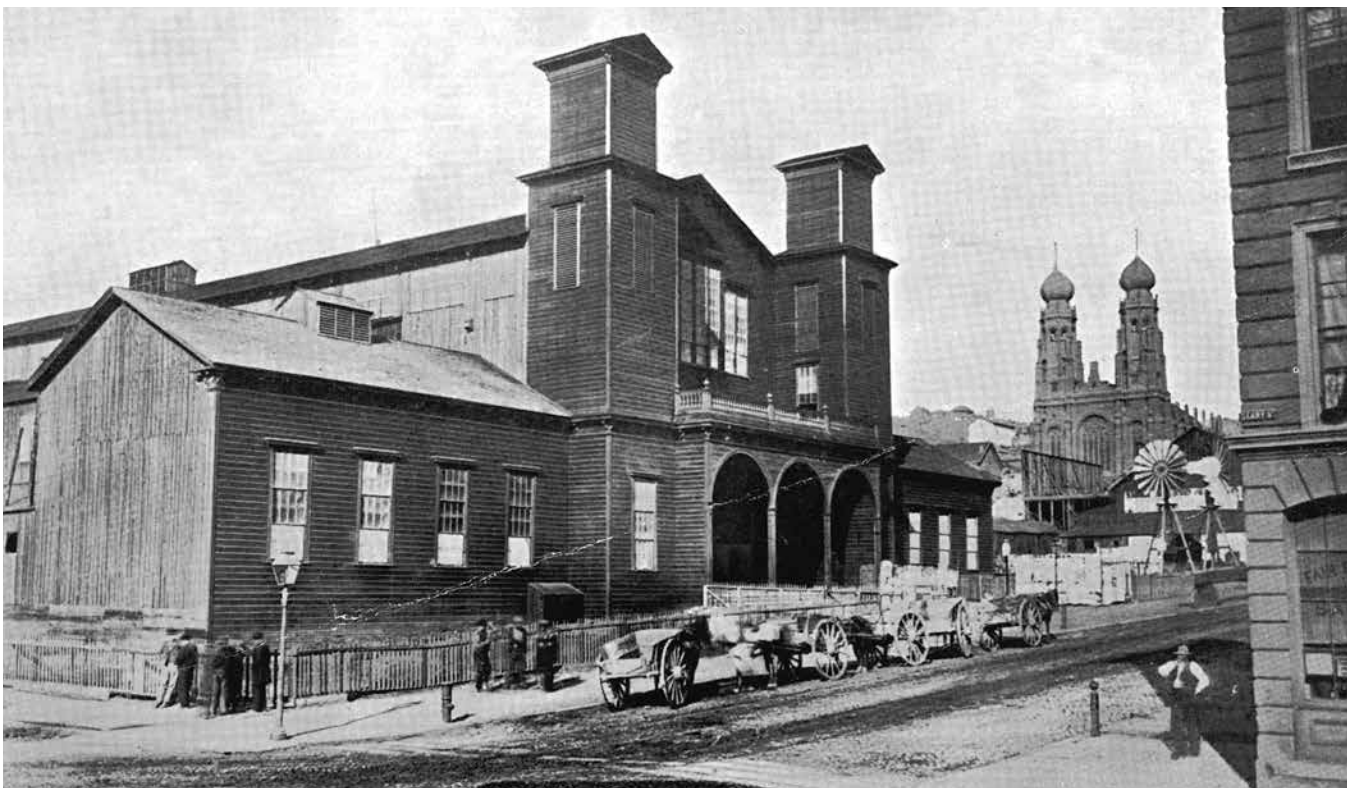
"Now that we are about to be united with our Eastern brethren by the iron bands of the Pacific Railroad, let us invite them to come and see for themselves what we are doing here on the western shore of North America, by concentrating our industries in the Pavilion of our Seventh Fair, making it also an industrial celebration of the completed Railroad."²⁵

The time was ripe to celebrate these advances in transportation, but Hallidie was not ready to

give up on the idea of inviting the world. He sent invitations to media outlets in China, Japan, British Columbia, the Hawaiian Islands, Mexico, Chile, and Peru describing the upcoming fair and encouraging participation. To sweeten the deal and remove any barriers, he mentioned that the Pacific Mail Steamship Company had offered to ship items from the countries on their route for free.

By May, encouraging news of foreign participation was coming in via the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's steamer *China*, which now regularly journeyed the Pacific between Hong Kong, Yokohama, and San Francisco. The *Shanghai News-Letter* "warmly seconded" Hallidie's views on the "effect which the completion of the Pacific Railroad will have on American Asiatic trade," and added that the forthcoming exhibition "will be of material interest to the people of China."²⁶

When opening day of the fair arrived, the ceremony on September 14 was described as "animated and brilliant."²⁷ It was marked with a welcome speech by Andrew Hallidie, who apologized for the unfinished displays; and a rousing talk by Irving Scott, the head of the Union Iron Works, full of



Union Square Pavilion at Stockton and Geary Streets, c. 1869. Used for 1868, 1869, and 1871 exhibitions.
Courtesy Mechanics' Institute Archives.



Bradley & Rulofson portrait of Anson Burlingame and the Chinese Embassy (1868) displayed at the Industrial Fair of 1869. Burlingame is seated on the right. Other men include John McLeavy Brown of Ireland; Ferdinand Auguste Emile Deschamps of France; Chinese ministers; and a handful of English, French, and Russian interpreters and scribes. Photograph courtesy of California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

“brilliant thoughts and eloquent words”²⁸ about the glory in store for California’s industry.

After Halladie’s address an earnest call was made for William Seward, who was the guest of honor due to his hand in acquiring Alaska, to rise and speak. As the audience roared with applause and leaned in to hear what he might say, Mr. Seward blanched. He was uncomfortable speaking in public due to an injury incurred from a carriage accident and knife attack four years earlier, but he managed a bow before returning to his seat. Then, much to his relief, Hallidie interceded, “We have nothing now to do but to declare the Fair opened!”²⁹ The great steam whistle then sounded, signaling to the crowd the official opening of the fair.³⁰

Many of the fair’s displays were late in being set up—particularly those from foreign lands. The foreign displays that did arrive were disappoint-

ingly small in size. Nevertheless, the resident San Francisco Chinese merchants and artists helped fill in the gaps. The mercantile firm Wan Yune Lung Kee, headquartered on Commercial Street, created an admirable display of lamps, scales, teas, Chinese flowers, ornaments, medicines, and other fancy articles;³¹ and artist Lai Yong exhibited a few painted portraits that were described by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as “tolerably good, but rather Chinese in style.”³² Other artists presented pieces on Asian themes: Thomas Houseworth exhibited several views of Japanese locales and a whole album of Chinese vistas; and the firm Bradley & Rulofson offered a photograph of the Chinese Embassy, which had visited San Francisco in March of 1868 under the escort of Anson Burlingame.³³

Aside from the foreign exhibits, the highlight of the 1869 fair was the Pullman Palace Car *Orleans* on

display in a room of its own off the main pavilion. It arrived in San Francisco via Sacramento and San José to the foot of Stockton Street and was hauled to Union Square over a temporary track to the pavilion.

On the forty-first night of a record-long fair, Andrew Hallidie mounted the steps of the raised platform constructed in the pavilion for the closing ceremonies. When the bell rang that signaled the start of the ceremonies, he beamed at the sea of people who had gathered to watch and listen. With a deep breath, he welcomed everyone and proceeded with his prepared remarks: a summary of positive statistics of San Francisco's industrial progress, sprinkled with his trademark humor. With his heart full he said, "[San Francisco] may view well with pride the productions of her children, and bring this display of their skill and industry as the best evidence of her worth. But San Francisco has many things to learn. She must pursue a just policy, tempered with liberty, to all classes, whether from Europe, Asia, or Africa."³⁴

While the coordination of the international aspects could have been better, the fair was a resounding success. Its best single day featured an

unbelievable 22,000 visitors; in total there were about 500,000 attendees.³⁵ Its receipts were handsome enough to allow the Institute to pay off half its mortgage on the Post Street property.³⁶

THE JAPANESE ARE COMING: A FAIR IN 1871

Hallidie was pleased with how the '69 fair turned out, but still stewed about how the Mechanics' Institute could best capitalize on the escalating trade network with Asia. In 1871, a juicy opportunity would arise. His friend Horace Dunn had meanwhile become assistant to the Consul of Japan, Charles Wolcott Brooks. Dunn and Brooks had a lot in common. Both were fascinated by Japan and interested in developing commercial trade.³⁷ Over the previous two years, Dunn had used the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's service to travel frequently throughout Asia and was building his network of contacts with Asian businesspeople.

As Dunn was on his way to Yokohama to meet with the U.S. Diplomatic Minister Charles De Long, Hallidie asked him to invite the Japanese



Typical fair interior. Photograph 1874 by Eadweard Muybridge. Courtesy of Mechanics' Institute Archives.

government and the region's principal merchants to participate in the upcoming fair and have them send a full exhibit of its raw and manufactured goods. Dunn was also tasked with making Japan aware of California goods available for import that could be had more cheaply than those from Europe.

Hallidie also put in a word with Dr. Daniel MacGowan, a missionary and hospital organizer in Ningpo, China, to connect with business leaders and merchants there.

MacGowan had been in and out of China and Japan since 1843.³⁸ He had returned to the United States to serve as a surgeon for the Union in the Civil War, and then spent the later 1860s traveling through China, Japan, the United States, and Europe on a mission to bring telegraphic technology to China.³⁹ As Hallidie was then the principal manufacturer of telegraph cables in the western states, it is likely the two men had a cordial relationship.

In May of 1871, Hallidie received positive news from Horace Dunn, who wrote that the Japanese government was warm to participating in a fair in 1871, and the local merchants were eager to send stock worth tens of thousands of dollars. "Judging from the quality of the wares exhibited by these parties and the anxiety to obtain information regarding the Industrial Exhibition, I judge that the display if made by them would for beauty and value far eclipse any yet made in the U.S. if not in Europe."⁴⁰ Dunn warned Hallidie that some of the merchants were sending items worth more than \$30,000 and that some of the articles were very large.⁴¹

In response, Hallidie enlarged the Union Square Pavilion by 20,000 feet; so now the building was approximately 100,000 square feet. He opened up the south wing's ceiling and roofed it over with canvas to permit the flourishing of a giant garden. The Japanese

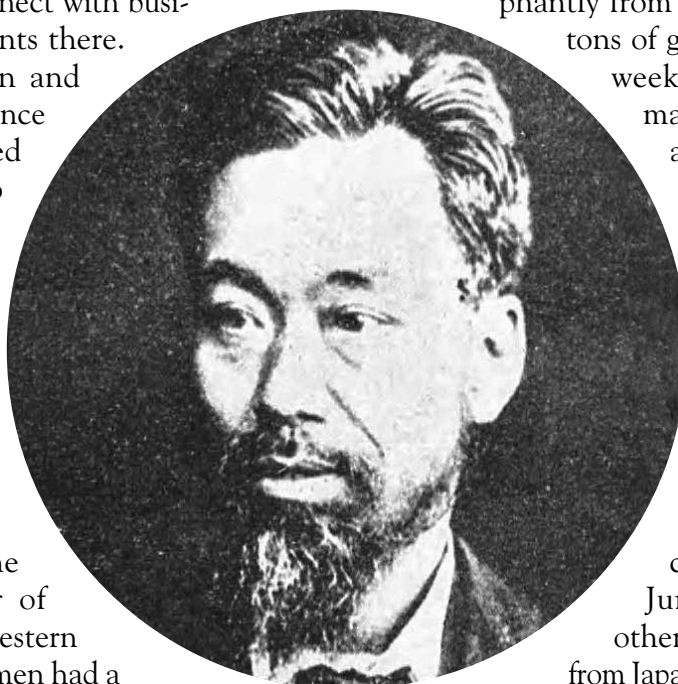
exhibit would occupy its own wing at the extreme west end of the pavilion.⁴² The Pacific Mail Steamship Company had again "liberally offered to carry the articles to be exhibited from Japan and China free of charge."⁴³ It was also hoped that the resident Japanese and Chinese merchants would "lend a helping hand" to ensure that the event was a success.⁴⁴

In mid-July, Horace Dunn returned triumphantly from Japan with more than 50 tons of goods.⁴⁵ It would take four weeks to properly arrange the material for exhibit. Dunn also brought with him nine commissioners from the Japanese Department of Agriculture, headed by Junjiro Hosokawa.

The fair opened at noon on August 8, 1871 with a festive musical performance by Schmidt & Schlott's band and a group of public school children. Afterward, with Junjiro Hosokawa and the other "Special Commissioners" from Japan by his side, Andrew Smith Hallidie delivered an impassioned speech that foretold a time when California "will not only be able to sustain herself, but able also to supply other nations with the

substantial results of her skill and manufacturing ability."⁴⁶ Pausing to spread his arms wide, Hallidie also said:

Looking around us, in this edifice filled with the suggestion of peaceful industry with the products of man's ever-restless brain, it would seem that "man's inhumanity to man" was forgotten in that higher hope of peace on earth and good will. . . . California possesses the key to the trade of the Pacific, which nothing but blind stupidity can lose to her. . . . A broad, liberal, and conscientious line of conduct, honesty of thought and action to all alike without distinction of color or race, are essential to our prosperity as a community of a people.⁴⁷



*Junjiro Hosokawa (1834–1923),
Japan's Commissioner of Agriculture.
Courtesy of Wikimedia.org.*



1869 fair interior based on a photograph by Thomas Houseworth. Note the names of famous inventors along the balcony railing.
 Reprinted in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine, November 27, 1869. From the author's collection.

THE FOREIGN EXHIBITS

The Japanese items one could see on exhibit at the 1871 fair included pictures representing life and customs, numerous types of silk, clothing, embroidered table covers, umbrellas made of oil paper, lanterns, basketwork, bronze sculptures, fancy flower vases, fancy and common dinner and serving ware, figurines, samurai swords, and bamboo window

blinds. The newspaper reporters were particularly impressed with the cabinets inlaid with gold and silver mountings, lacquer work trays and furniture, and painted scenes from a Japanese folktale that depicted the story of *Little Peachling* – a hero who was born from a peach.⁴⁸

The Chinese exhibit organized by Dr. MacGowan suffered a setback. Not only were some of the cases

late, but many of them were also damaged in transport and their contents broken. Nevertheless, fair visitors saw beautiful satins and silks, embroidery pieces that astounded, silk cocoons, enameled ware, tiger and goat skins, fireworks, fruits, ornaments made of ivory and silver, and an exquisitely carved shrine.⁴⁹

Mexico put in an appearance;⁵⁰ Australia, New Zealand, and Polynesia also provided small exhibits, including some pint tins of Australian meats provided by the Australian Meat Company in Melbourne—a pioneer in the food canning industry. There also were bottles of colonial whiskey and gin and a few casks of Tooth's Ale, No. 3 from Kent's Brewery in Sydney. The House of Representatives of New Zealand appears to have ignored the request to participate;⁵¹ however, the Thames Mechanics' Institute (Auckland) sent a three-and-a-half-by-nine-foot gilded pyramid that represented the amount of gold extracted from the Thames gold fields; the pyramid was worth some £1.5 million.⁵² Another participant displayed a personal collection of Polynesian shell jewelry and needlework.⁵³

The 1871 fair was the largest one yet hosted by the Mechanics' Institute, with more than 1,000 exhibitors. The best products in each industrial category received gold and silver medals, which came with beautifully detailed certificates that were large enough to frame. Third place winners received a wondrously illustrated "diploma," and those in fourth place were honorably mentioned. No awards appear to have been bestowed upon the foreign exhibitors. This is likely because the makers of the individual products on display were not present at the fair or even identified by name. More than \$3,000 was set aside as awards for research essays on twenty-two assigned topics related to California industry, but only five writers satisfied the judging committee's requirements and received prizes. Dr. MacGowan, though his essays were on subjects not requested, received \$200 for his five essays, one of which explained various products of China "to encourage contributions from China and Japan in the future."⁵⁴

The 1871 fair was the second known time that Japan had exhibited in a foreign land—the first

known being the Paris Exposition of 1867. The Japanese commissioners who attended the fair, led by Junjiro Hosokawa, would remain in California for the next several months to inspect the state's resources. They eventually traveled throughout the United States and sent home samples of American grains, vegetable seeds, nursery stock, and agricultural implements.

When the fair closed after its 29th day, there was an air of regret. It was the last fair that the Mechanics' Institute would be able to host for a while, as the term was up for the use of Union Square Pavilion, donated by the City of San Francisco. The pavilion was torn down due to a recent institutional reorganization that forbade the Institute from borrowing money or incurring debts for holding fairs.⁵⁵ Within weeks, the pavilion and its contents, including 694 chairs, 13 doors, 10,000 feet of water and gas pipe, 42 lamp globes, sundry tools and machinery, 12 spittoons, 16 water closets, and 7 looking glasses, were up for sale.⁵⁶

Some of the men who had traveled with the Japanese contribution to the fair decided to stay on as permanent residents and establish a mercantile firm in San Francisco. "With this object in view, they leased a store in the Masonic Temple at 1 Montgomery street [sic]." This action, the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* advised, meant that "they mean business,"⁵⁷ and "they are with progress socially and commercially. . . . it is not the first Japanese firm that has established itself in the city, but is the only one with abundant means for doing business on a large scale."⁵⁸ *The Bulletin* was pleased that the firm would not deal in knick-knacks but in "staple products of Japan, such as tea, coal, flax, wax, etc."⁵⁹

The maintenance and encouragement of relations with Asia continued to be a concern of Hallidie's, and a few months later, when the Iwakura mission arrived in San Francisco in January 1872, he was quick to invite "these distinguished gentlemen to meet some of the leading citizens representing the industrial interests of this state"⁶⁰ at the Mechanics' Institute. Had the Institute been able to afford the land to build a permanent fair pavilion, it is likely that another international fair would have been attempted.

THE LEGACY OF THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE'S INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITIONS

The Mechanics' Institute took a hiatus from fair hosting until 1874, when it leased a chunk of land on 8th Street between Mission and Market Streets from Mr. Andrew McCreery. From then on, it continued to host fairs nearly every year until 1899. In 1882, the exhibition building was moved to the block of land that now contains the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in Civic Center. This building hosted fifteen industrial fairs, as well as many civic and cultural events. It was nearly 170,000 square feet—nearly four acres—and it could hold more than 10,000 people at one time.

The new pavilion was a popular venue for large events, such as dances, political rallies, ice and roller skating, and indoor and outdoor bicycle races, until 1906. While the building survived the earthquake and was briefly used as a hospital, it burned in the subsequent fire. Almost immediately after the rubble from the disaster was cleared away, the City of San Francisco started eyeing the property, as civic leaders wished to create a “civic center” complex of buildings that would include the new City Hall and a municipal auditorium. At first, the Mechanics' Institute was against this idea because it wanted to rebuild its pavilion and host fairs again. But in June of 1909 an accord was reached and the land was leased to the city. Three years later, the city bought the land for \$700,000, and the era of the Mechanics' Institute industrial exhibitions was officially over.

The Mechanics' Institute's fairs were born during a time when most products available in California were shipped at great cost from the eastern states or imported from foreign nations. The fairs capitalized on the community's desire to encourage “Home Industry”—products made locally by resident talent and from California's natural resources—and to satisfy curiosity about breaking technologies and how they would revolutionize society at large. The fairs reflected the cosmopolitan fabric of the San Francisco Bay Area and honored craftsmanship, skill, and ingenuity. They were a manifestation of what, today, we consider to be quintessential “San Francisco” traits: optimism, creativity, and the plucky courage to innovate answers to our region's problems.

The spirit of the fairs lives on, largely unconsciously, in today's Maker Faires, and in organizations like SFMade, which help sustain the local economy by encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

The two international fairs of the Mechanics' Institute were successful as exciting ventures for the citizens of San Francisco and California at large to enjoy, but they were failures as true World's Fairs. The reasons for their failure are myriad, but boil down to California's status as a relatively new industrial presence in the United States, the lack of diplomatic and trade relations between the Mechanics' Institute and the invited countries, the lack of support from California and the federal government, and the state's location on the Pacific seaboard. Nevertheless, the attempts to engage the countries of the Pacific Rim in friendly competition, cultural exposure, and industrial exchange laid the seeds for improved international relations and trade and whetted the public's appetite for larger, multi-attraction, and international experiences like those of the Midwinter Fair in 1894, the Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915, and the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939–1940.

* * * * *

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

1. Lai Yong took out several advertisements in the *Daily Alta California*, from September through December of 1866. Evidence of his participation in the 1869 fair includes mention in: Mechanics' Institute, *Report of the Board of Managers of the Seventh Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute*, San Francisco, 1869, page 71; and an advertisement in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 24, 1869, 3.
2. *An Act to Authorize the Establishment of Ocean Mail-Steamship Service between the United States and China*, United States, Statutes at Large Thirty-Eighth Congress, Session II, Chapter 37, 430. Retrieved from Library of Congress, Feb. 26, 2019: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/38th-congress/session-2/c38s2ch37.pdf>. The Pacific Mail Steamship contract is detailed in *Sacramento Daily Union*, August 31, 1865, 2.
3. *Daily Alta California*, March 21, 1867, 1.
"Arrival of the Colorado," *Mining and Scientific Press*, March 23, 1867, 1.
4. "The Paris Exposition: A Hint to this Country," *Daily Alta California*, March 27, 1867, 2.
5. *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 27, 1867, 2.
6. Andrew Smith Hallidie, "The Universal Exposition," *Mining and Scientific Press*, 14:20 (June 29, 1867), 402.
7. The phrase, "one-man agricultural pressure group," comes from Walton E. Bean, "James Warren and the Beginnings of Agricultural Institutions in California," *Pacific Historical Review*, 13:4 (Dec. 1944), 361–375.
"The World's Fair in 1871," *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*, July 11, 1867, 4.
8. "The World's Fair in 1871," *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*, July 11, 1867, 4.
9. "Grand Agricultural and Horticultural Fair of the California State Agricultural Society," *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*, September 28, 1854, 97.
10. The Mechanics' Institute has had several locations in its 164 years. First, occupying rooms in Sam Brannan's Express Building on Montgomery Street at California, it moved a few times before purchasing the lot it currently occupies at 57 Post Street (between Montgomery and Kearny) in 1866.
11. *Report of the First Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute*, San Francisco, Franklin Office, 1858. The Mechanics' Institute kept records for most of its exhibitions in the form of published reports that detailed the finances, exhibitors, items displayed, and awards that were given within each class. These documents are not without their flaws and are best compared with newspaper coverage of the fairs.
12. Andrew Smith Hallidie, "Letter from London," *Mining and Scientific Press*, volume 14; Issue 25; June 22, 1867, 386.
13. Hallidie attended the Paris International Exposition in late spring of 1867 and wrote extensive articles about his impressions of it for *Mining and Scientific Press*.
14. Ibid.
15. *The California Farmer* was a voluble advocate of the Mechanics' Institute's endeavors. Hallidie advertised his services in the *California Farmer* and his exploits related to his business and volunteer commitments were also regularly featured.
16. "State Agricultural Fair," *San Francisco Bulletin*, August 2, 1867, 2.
17. Horace D. Dunn, "California—Her Agricultural Resources, originally written for the Commissioner of Agriculture (United States)," *Transactions of the State Agricultural Society during the Years 1866–1867*, (Sacramento, CA), 507–542.
18. *Daily Alta California*, October 19, 1867, 2.
19. *Mining and Scientific Press*, November 30, 1867, 337.
20. Draft of a resolution by the Mechanics' Institute, Henry F. Williams Papers 1848–1911, BANC MSS 73/82 c, Box 6, Folder 6, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
21. "Sixth Industrial Exhibition," *San Francisco Bulletin*, December 7, 1867, 2.
22. "The Mechanics' Institute: Appeal to the State for Aid for the Fairs of 1868 and 1869," *Daily Alta California*, March 15, 1868, 1.
23. Ibid.
24. *Report of the Board of Managers of the Sixth Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute of the City of San Francisco*; 1868; Women's Cooperative Union Print, 5–8.
25. Andrew Smith Hallidie, "Thirteenth Annual Address to the Mechanics' Institute by A. S. Hallidie, Esq., President, Delivered at Their Rooms March 4, 1869," Spaulding & Barto 1869, 3–12.
26. "China and Japan," *Daily Alta California*, 21:7002, May 21, 1869.
27. "Telegraphic special to the *Daily Appeal*: San Francisco News," *Marysville Daily Appeal*, September 16, 1869, 3.
28. "Opening of the Mechanics' Fair," *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*, September 16, 1869, 4.
29. "Mechanics' Fair Institute [sic]: Opening Day," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 15, 1869, 3.
30. "Letter from San Francisco," *Marysville Daily Appeal*, September 17, 1869, 1.

31. "Industrial Exhibition of the San Francisco Mechanics' Institute," *Sacramento Daily Union*, September 18, 1869, 5.
32. "Mechanics' Institute Fair, Ninth Day," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 24, 1869, 3.
33. *Report of the Board of Managers of the Seventh Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute of the City of San Francisco*, 1869, 75.
34. Andrew Smith Hallidie, "Remarks of President Hallidie," reprinted in "Mechanics' Institute Fair, Forty First Night, and the Last," *Weekly Alta California*, November 6, 1869, 8.
35. "A steamer just arrived . . .," *American Artisan*, July 26, 1871, 53.
36. Andrew Smith Hallidie, "Remarks of President Hallidie," reprinted in "Mechanics' Institute Fair, Forty First Night, and the Last," *Weekly Alta California*, November 6, 1869, 8.
37. Charles Wolcott Brooks would serve the Japanese government for 18 years, "six years as Commercial Agent and twelve years as Consul." Charles Lanman, *The Japanese in America*, Longmans, London, 1872. 24–25.
38. Lane R. Earns, "The American Medical Presence in Nagasaki, 1858–1922," *Crossroads: a Journal of Nagasaki History and Culture*, Autumn 1997. Available online at http://www.uwosh.edu/home_pages/faculty_staff/earns/home.html. See also Marilyn Laura Bowman, *James Legge and the Chinese Classics*, FriesenPress, 2016.
39. "Projected Lines of Telegraph in the Celestial Empire," *Daily Alta California*, July 15, 1866, 2.
40. "Japan at the Mechanics' Institute Fair," *San Francisco Bulletin*, June 9, 1871. Includes reprinted letter from Dunn to Hallidie dated May 23, 1871.
41. Ibid.
42. Mechanics' Institute, *A Visitor's Guide and a Catalogue of the Eighth Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco*, August 1871, A. Bowman & Co., 225.
43. Andrew Smith Hallidie, "President's Report for the quarter ending February 28, 1871"; Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Mechanics' Institute, Volume 3, 1869–1874, 191.
44. Ibid.
45. "The Mechanics' Fair: Fifth Evening," *Daily Alta California*, 23:7813, August 13, 1871, 1.
46. Mechanics' Institute, *Report of the Eighth Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute*, Cosmopolitan Printing Company, 1872, 24.
47. Ibid.
48. Mechanics' Institute, *A Visitor's Guide and a Catalogue of the Eighth Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute of San Francisco*, August 1871, A. Bowman & Co., 228.
49. Ibid.
50. "Opening of the Institute Fair," *Pacific Rural Press*, August 12, 1871, 88.
51. New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, First Session of the Fifth Parliament, Legislative Council and House of Representatives, Vol. 10, August 14–September 28, 1871; G. Didsbury, Government Printer, House of Representatives, Wednesday August 23, 1871, 110; question regarding New Zealand's response to the invitation to participate in the "San Francisco Exhibition" posed by Mr. Harrison. Retrieved from Google Books, November 2, 2018; *The Industrial Fair Evening Gazette*, written by reporters from the *Call*, S.F. Sutherland, and Thomas Newcomb, official daily paper of the fair, August 14, 1871, 8.
52. "The Fair," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 17, 1871, 3.
53. *The Industrial Fair Evening Gazette*, written by reporters from the *Call*, S.F. Sutherland and Thomas Newcomb, official daily paper of the fair, August 17, 1871 1.
54. Henry L. Davis and A. S. Hallidie, "Report on Cash Premiums," *Report of the Eighth Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute*, Cosmopolitan Printing Company, 1872, 148.
55. C.W. Gordon, *Report of the Board of Managers of the Ninth Industrial Exhibition of the Mechanics' Institute of the City of San Francisco*, 1874, 1.
56. Andrew Smith Hallidie, "Important to Builders, Contractors, and Others . . .," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 30, 1871, 2.
57. "Among the Debris," *San Francisco Bulletin*, September 12, 1871, 3.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Andrew Smith Hallidie to Charles Wolcott Brooks, January 27, 1872, Mechanics' Institute Archives.
61. See SFMade.org for more information about this non-profit.

THE WINTER OF OUR DREAMS

San Francisco Inaugurates a New Era of Prosperity

by Lee Bruno

A crowd of 100,000 men and women dressed in their finest bowler hats and bonnets gathered on the morning of October 26, 1893 near the Union Iron Works shipbuilding docks, where Pier 70 stands today. Despite the heavy fog that hung over the dock, there was excitement in the air.

A restless crowd of San Franciscans waited on the wharves and along the shore to witness the launch of the U.S.S. *Oregon*, the largest iron navy warship in the United States. She was dressed well for her christening. Colorful flags and banners were draped over her hull from bow to stern. She had become the Grande Dame vessel for San Franciscans and had generated conversations among business leaders, workers, and families for the previous three years, ever since Union Iron Works was awarded San Francisco's first U.S. government contract.

When the clock struck noon, Miss Daisy Ainsworth, the daughter of an Oregon steamboat magnate, christened the mighty vessel with the words, "I name thee *Oregon*." She then shattered a patriotically festooned bottle of red wine on the iron hull.

The "proudest battleship of them all," as the ship was called, broke free from her cradle and slid into the bay as red wine trickled down her bow. The 10,000 tons of stout ship, measuring 350 feet in length, nearly 70 feet in width, and 27 feet in draft, pushed a small tidal wave of water that rolled

to the other shore, where it ignited a roar of cheers from the crowd spread over a half mile of shoreline.

"Whistles shrieked and bands played till the air split open and came together with a crash," wrote a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* in October 1893. "Hurrah for the *Oregon*!" the large gathering of men and women shouted. "She took to the water as composedly as a duck to a mill pond, with never a hitch or a slip," the *Chronicle* wrote. "Happy is the bride whom the sun shines on in an omen of luck . . . never did the sun shine brighter than when the battleship glided into the embrace of her waiting Neptune."

THE PLAN FOR A WORLD'S FAIR EMERGES

The boundless optimism San Franciscans expressed that day at the jubilant launch of the U.S.S. *Oregon* made it seem that San Francisco was well on its way to becoming an industrial center of the West Coast, leaving behind its rugged pioneer past of toil and hardship. But a financial depression had been sweeping across the country since February, and San Francisco was starting to feel its effects.

Already, some business leaders were concerned that despite this promising launch, which they hoped would cement the city's status as a stable industrial power, the young city could be vulnerable to the downturn that was brewing in the eastern United States and already spreading west. These leaders had



*The U.S.S. Oregon, built by Union Iron Works in San Francisco, 1893.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

wanted to do something to ensure that San Francisco not only survived the depression, but prospered.

San Francisco's business leaders were concerned for their city's financial health and well aware that the depression could become a setback for businesses and the growing middle class. Among these business

leaders were newspaper scion Michael de Young, shipbuilding magnate Irving Scott, and merchant ship founder Charles Goodall of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company. For months, de Young and other business leaders had been scheming to counter the coming depression by hosting an event that would



*Union Iron Works at First and Mission Streets, 1880.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

put San Francisco forever on the map. De Young and others had promoted the idea that the recent fanfare of 27 million visitors they had witnessed at the Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition would create the right kind of stimulus needed to keep San Francisco doors open for business. What's more, California's mild weather allowed the City by the Bay to host a fair in the winter, starting in January of 1894.

The business leaders reasoned that a San Francisco fair could potentially attract businesses and fair attendees to the growing West Coast city and help boost its bottom line. San Franciscans were already feeling the effects of businesses closing and jobs being eliminated. But the effects of the downturn were more severe on the East Coast,

which had triggered people to move west to seek out new opportunities in the fast-growing western cities of Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake City, Denver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

San Francisco's merchants and industrialists had enjoyed a few decades of rapid growth, which by 1870 had made San Francisco the tenth-largest city in the United States. Twenty years later, San Francisco's population doubled again to 300,000. Leading up to the Midwinter Fair of 1894, San Francisco had established itself as an industrial center, no longer dependent upon the East and the railroad for the basic commodities of living.

San Francisco's economy was steadily growing and diversifying in the late 1800s. As evidence of this shift, factories in 1893 produced goods worth

\$80 million, while 2 sugar refineries contributed \$18 million and some 281 clothing factories brought in \$4 million. Seven “tinware” and can plants produced \$3 million, and around 372 cigar factories brought in \$3 million.

Union Iron Works founder Irving Scott recognized that mining booms didn’t last forever, and in the 1880s had started to shift the company’s business model toward locomotives and shipbuilding. Scott was an astute observer of the industries and economies of the West and realized the boom underway in Pacific trade would translate to the expansion of railroads and lead to the need for large-scale local shipbuilding.

Because of this, he gambled on building the first great West Coast shipyard. His gamble paid off, making him a pioneer in the design and construction of locomotives and ships and yielding him a fortune from the sale of equipment to mine owners and railroad companies.

It was a new beginning for San Francisco as a formidable industrial player building out on its trade network. Business leaders championed the Midwinter Fair and leaned into their previous years of building connections with the faraway exotic countries of China and Japan, as well as with Mexico and with Chile and Peru in South America.

The rise of the middle class was further proof of a healthy and thriving marketplace, which reflected the industrial shift that was occurring. Many of San Francisco’s new residents were families with children, not just the single male fortune hunters who dominated the population during the Gold Rush era.

“Out of its dramatic setting on the Pacific, so distant from any comparable civilization, out of its sense of itself as a city possessed of an identity intrinsically international, San Francisco called Americans to pleasure and to the enhancement of life through the enjoyment of art,” wrote Kevin Starr in his book, *America and the California Dream, 1850-1915*.

By all measures, it seemed that San Francisco was prospering. The City by the Bay was becoming not only larger, but also more urban and refined, and the Midwinter Fair would show off the city to the world.

A FINANCIAL PANIC SWEEPS THE COUNTRY

Despite efforts of local businessmen to shore up the economy, the Panic of 1893 challenged San Francisco’s newfound prosperity. The panic was triggered by several factors, including the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad overextending its credit. Railroads were overbuilding with shaky financing, which set off a series of bank failures. These rippled across the country, forcing bank closures and credit crunches that led to businesses shutting down.

By the winter of 1893, approximately 18 percent of the national workforce was without work, while those who remained employed found their wages cut by an average of nearly 10 percent. The crisis hit on May 5, 1893, when railroad and industrial stocks plummeted and several major companies went bankrupt. Throughout the nation more than 20 businesses per day failed during the month of May. The financial crisis devastated broad sectors of the economy; an unprecedented 15,252 American businesses went into receivership. The credit crunch deepened throughout 1893 after a run on the gold supply. Combined, these forces led to a depression that was the worst economic crisis to hit the nation in its young history.

“In modern life, confidence, which is only another name for credit, is an absolute essential,” a commentator wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on July 21, 1893. “As soon as it is destroyed, the machine of trade at once breaks down. Therefore, it is as unwise for merchants to neglect to stimulate confidence as it would be for the owner of a machine to fail to apply oil to bearings which were suffering from lack of lubrication.”

BREAKING GROUND FOR THE FUTURE

While the rest of the country was suffering from a depression, San Franciscans, buoyant in their recent prosperity, broke ground for the Midwinter Fair, which they believed would shore up their businesses against the coming wave of economic hardship. Planners made sure fairground workers were hired locally. Much work needed to be done in preparation for the grounds, including building the infrastructure of power, water, and sewers. In addition, street rail

lines needed to be built to support the tourists and fairgoers reaching the grounds of the underdeveloped western part of the city. On August 24, 1893, the Midwinter Fair's groundbreaking ceremony took place in Golden Gate Park and attracted more than 60,000 city residents and visitors from the surrounding areas. They gathered to witness the start of construction of buildings and grounds spread over more than 200 acres. Never before had an event in San Francisco attracted that many people.

"So it was the masses who assisted in breaking of the ground," the *Chronicle* wrote. "They came in carriages, by cars, and walked. They gave evidence that the proposition had their approval and that they realized that the fair would be in the nature of the salvation of the city."

It is estimated that 40,000 people gathered in the valley in Golden Gate Park where the buildings of the exposition were to be built. On the nearby hillsides and in the neighboring valleys many more people came, bringing the estimated attendance to more than 60,000.

Four months later, on January 4, 1894, the *Chronicle* reported that 200 unemployed men arrived at the site of the fairgrounds carrying postcards guaranteeing employment on the fairgrounds at \$1 per day. The postcard read, "The bearer is entitled to ten day's work in Golden Gate Park." It was signed by the citizen's executive committee for the Midwinter Fair.

The postcards had been handed out at the Merchants Exchange to a group of 1,500 men, most over the age of 50, who had lined up for five hours on the cold day in the back alley of the building, the *Chronicle* wrote. All were married, had families to support, and were behind on rent. They had little in the way to feed their families, according to the *Chronicle*.

The plan was to give out 250 of these postcards each day until 1,000 men were on the payroll. One of the first projects for the men was building roads to extend Citizens Road from the southwest corner of Strawberry Hill around to the speed track to connect with Ocean Boulevard.

Not all San Franciscans were happy with the Midwinter Fair being staged in Golden Gate Park. John McLaren (park superintendent since 1889) and W. W. Stow, the park commission's president,

both objected to the fact that trees would be cut down to make way for the fair.

"What is a tree?" de Young retorted. "What are a thousand trees compared to the benefits of the exposition?"

During the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Midwinter Fair, shipbuilding magnate Irving Scott gave a speech to the large, enthusiastic crowd assembled. The fair, he said, "would mark a new epoch in the history of California." The crowd of San Franciscans was eager for news that the hard times were behind them, and that the fair would bring employment for thousands, world attention to California, and a new era of prosperity for the West.

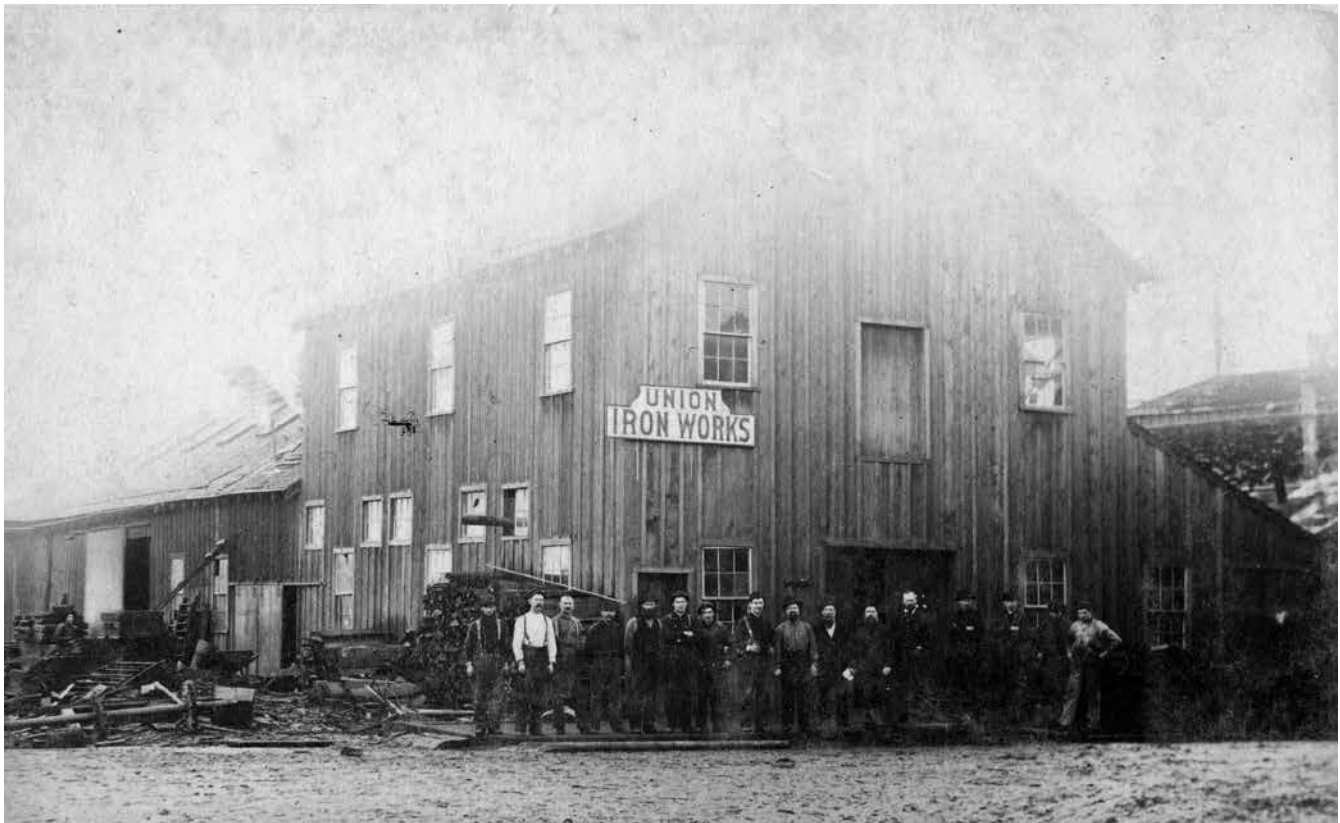
SAN FRANCISCO: FROM PROSPERITY TO MISERY

The Midwinter Fair did indeed attract 2.5 million people, but that was only a tenth of the attendance at Chicago's Columbia Exposition. So while it had been a success and contributed to the local economy, it did not stop the economic downturn, as city business leaders had hoped.

Even before the Midwinter Fair closed, Irving Scott found himself grappling with the effects of the financial depression. Just six months after the celebratory launch of the U.S.S. *Oregon*, the depression hit San Francisco. On April 1, 1894, the city's largest employer, the Union Iron Works, announced a drastic cut in wages. The men whose salaries were slashed did not have the basic resources to support their families, which even before the wage cut was barely doable. Several hundred men at work in the Union Iron Works shipyards felt the pinch.

Those employed in the shipyards had earned from \$2.75 to \$3.00 per day. The reduction cut the rate by 50 cents. Less skilled laborers were also hit hard. They had received from \$1.50 to \$1.75 per day, and their salaries were cut by 25 cents per day. The cost of living at the time could permit a family of four to barely get by with \$14 per week. The shipbuilding management said all of the cuts were necessary, due to the simple fact that Union Iron Works had been building very few ships.

"All things considered, the country is evidently worse conditioned now than ever before," Irving Scott wrote in his article "Hard Times" for the



Workers outside the Union Iron Works Building, date unknown.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Overland Monthly in 1894, which covered the economic issues surrounding the depression. “To prevent so great [a] wrong and wide-spread disaster, no equitable means in the power of the government and of the people should be left untried.”

Real estate speculators were also hit hard by the depression. The story of builder, contractor, and developer Louis Lander in May 1894 is a case in point. Two years earlier, the builder had a string of successful developments to his name and had built his net worth to \$150,000. He had developed a reputation among creditors as a good bet. But then the economy turned sour and Lander had trouble meeting his payments. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that creditors were seeking a \$17,000 repayment from Lander, but discovered the contractor had disappeared from San Francisco.

“Those who are loudest in their denunciations of Lander are, perhaps, the carpenters and mechanics in his employ,” the *Chronicle* wrote. “Many of them have waited months for a settlement and now feel that all of their labor has been literally lost.”

Troubles hit the railroad workers, too. The Panic of 1893 became the catalyst for strikes all over the country. In Chicago George Pullman increased working hours, cut wages, and cut jobs for his workers. Workers who belonged to the American Railroad Union (ARU) protested and started the Pullman Strike on May 11, when nearly 4,000 factory employees of the Pullman Company began a wildcat strike in response to the wage reductions. In California the boycott was effective in Sacramento where labor had a strong foothold but was weak in the Bay Area.

On July 4, 1894, 3,000 workers at the Sacramento Pullman Company joined the strike. The strike and boycott shut down much of the nation’s freight and passenger traffic west of Detroit. Two companies of Sacramento militia with bayonets on their rifles confronted the Sacramento workers. They faced off at the Southern Pacific passenger depot at Second and H Streets, the main entrance to the Southern Pacific shops. The battle pitted the American Railway Union (ARU) against the

Pullman Company, the main railroad companies, and the federal government of the United States.

The strikers occupied and shut down the railroad lines. The soldiers, all Sacramento residents, stared down their rifles at neighbors, friends, family, and coworkers. Their orders were to retake the union shops from the American Railway Union (ARU) strikers, by force if necessary. A third company of Sacramento militia had refused orders and remained at the armory. The unarmed strikers had only their bodies to stop the militiamen. Thirty of the workers died.

The strikers' plan was to force the railroads to bring Pullman to compromise. Eugene Debs, who founded the ARU, began the boycott on June 26, 1894. Within four days, 125,000 workers on twenty-nine railroads had "walked off" the job rather than handle Pullman cars. President Cleveland wanted the trains moving again, based on his legal, constitutional responsibility for the mails. The president's lawyers argued that the boycott violated the Sherman Antitrust Act, and represented a threat to public safety. The federal government obtained an injunction against the union, Debs, and other boycott leaders, ordering them to stop interfering with trains that carried mail cars. After the strikers refused, President Grover Cleveland ordered in the army to stop the strikers from obstructing the trains. Violence broke out in many cities, and the strike collapsed. The sixteen-day strike lasted until July 20, 1894.

In San Francisco, the effects of the strike were felt mainly by real estate men, according to a July 9 story in the *San Francisco Chronicle*:

It is in the renting department that the pressure has become evident. There is more than customary difficulty in collecting rents, particularly in the cheaper class of houses and flats. This is unquestionably due to the fact that the tenants are out of work, cannot tell how long they may be without employment, and so have asked to be 'carried.'

As a result of the 1893 panic, which eventually devastated the new real estate industry in San Francisco, thousands of San Franciscans faced unemployment and "destitute circumstances."

RISING FROM THE ASHES

San Francisco—and most of the nation—recovered from the Panic of 1893, but recovery took nearly four years. With the United States Treasury's gold reserve severely depleted, American financier and banker J. P. Morgan, along with the Rothschilds, hatched a plan to sell 3.5 million ounces of gold directly to the U.S. Treasury to restore the treasury surplus, in exchange for a thirty-year bond issue. The combination of the gold loan, bond sales, and the repeal of silver purchasing stabilized the economy, which gradually strengthened over the next four years. The discovery of gold in Alaska's Klondike in 1897 also helped lead the country out of the depression.

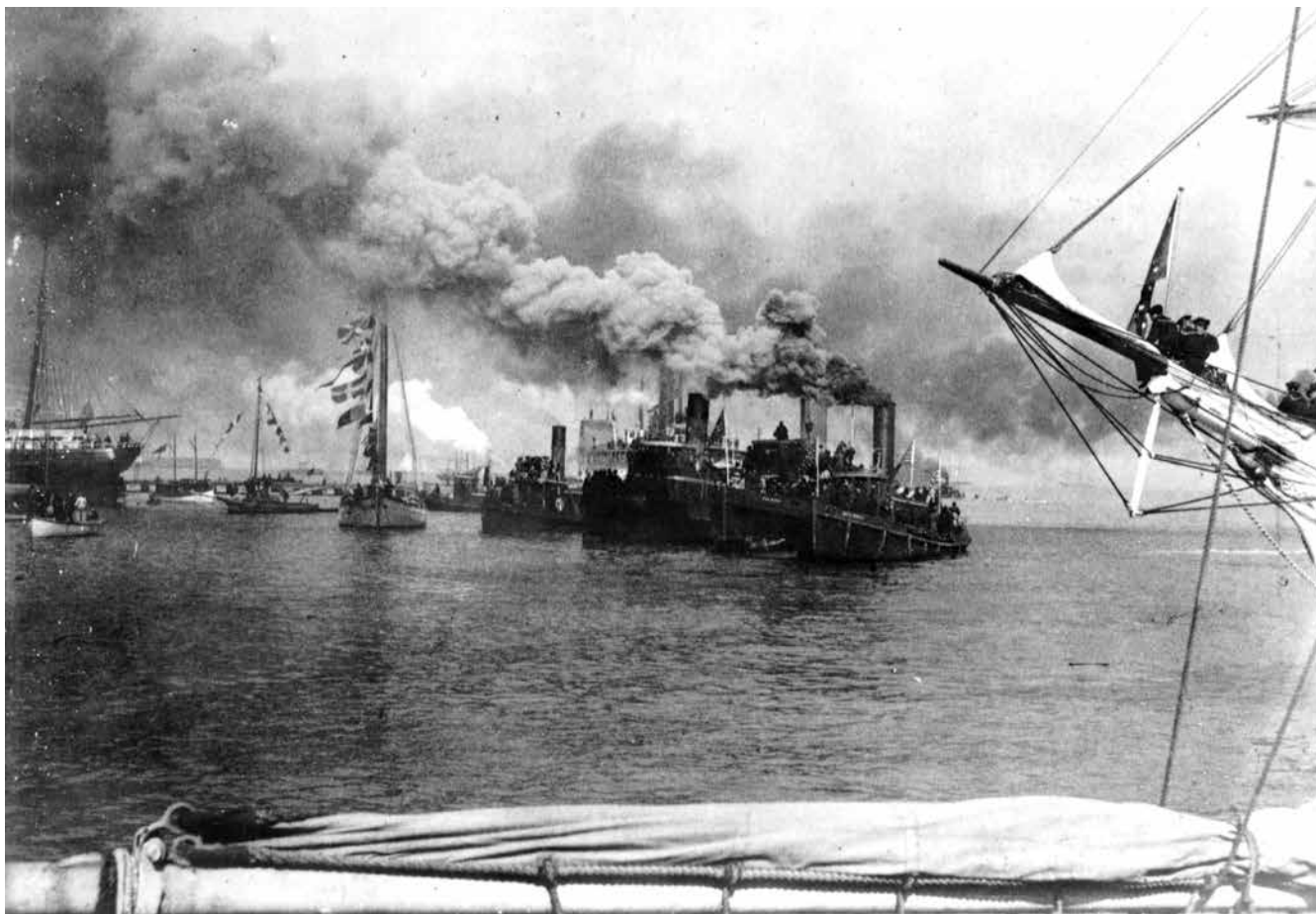
As for the California Midwinter Fair, it never provided the magic bullet protection against the effects of the depression as had been hoped. Like other cities in America, San Francisco regained its footing as businesses and employment retrenched and improved over the next few years. However, the optimism of the 1894 Midwinter Fair set the stage for the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) in 1915—San Francisco's first world's fair endorsed by the U.S. Congress. The PPIE would put the city on the map as one of the great cities of the world.

HATS OFF TO THE OREGON!

Ever since the building and launch of the U.S.S. *Oregon*, the ship became San Francisco's darling and an important symbol for this new industrial era, its know-how, undaunted character, and ambition. San Francisco became an emerging gateway city to Asia.

As for the U.S.S. *Oregon*, it established a strong reputation on the high seas. Among her notable achievements in military engagement was service in the Spanish War and the Philippine-American War, where she became noted for her speed and intimidating force. That distinction won her the nickname "Bulldog of the Navy."

In 1898, the bulldog departed in the spring and traveled from San Francisco to the Jupiter Inlet on the Florida coast, reaching it in a record-setting sixty-six days. The remarkable record-setting journey of 14,000 nautical miles served to demonstrate the need for a shorter route between the West Coast and East Coast. That shorter route would come via the Panama Canal in 1914.



*Launching of the U.S.S. Oregon from Union Iron Works.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

ON A PATH TO GRANDEUR

In the aftermath of the depression and San Francisco's recovery from its economic ills, the city was well positioned for the future of global trade. It was a time when the expansion of trade was underway with Asia. The Pacific Mail Steamship Company started its "China Line" and "Shanghai Branch Line" with monthly runs from San Francisco to Hong Kong, Yokohama, Nagasaki, and Shanghai. (Taryn Edwards, whose article appears in this issue, also writes about the regular trade routes that ships established between San Francisco and the Far East.)

The Pacific Coast Steamship was the new name assigned in 1893, taking the place of Goodall, Nelson and Perkins Steamship Company, which was

originally organized in San Francisco in 1875 when it purchased six Pacific Mail steamers. The company owned most of the coastwise liners of the day and dominated the passenger service business between San Francisco and other Pacific Coast ports in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

In the 1890s, San Francisco was suffering like other U.S. cities from machine politics and corruption. San Francisco was among the few non-machine-run cities in America in the early 1900s.* One method for raising revenue commonly employed by city government officials between 1890 and 1920 was collecting payoffs for tolerating establishments that offered gambling. But opposition to vice was rising. The time was ripe for political reform.

* "Machine politics" is a party organization headed by a single boss or small autocratic group that commands enough votes to maintain political and administrative control of a city, county, or state.

Mining and real estate magnate Adolph Sutro ran for mayor in 1894 under the auspices of the Populist Party; he was elected without campaigning. In the 1880s, Sutro had rolled his mighty profits from the Comstock Lode into real estate holdings that amounted to roughly one-tenth of San Francisco, mostly in the undeveloped sandy lands west of Twin Peaks.

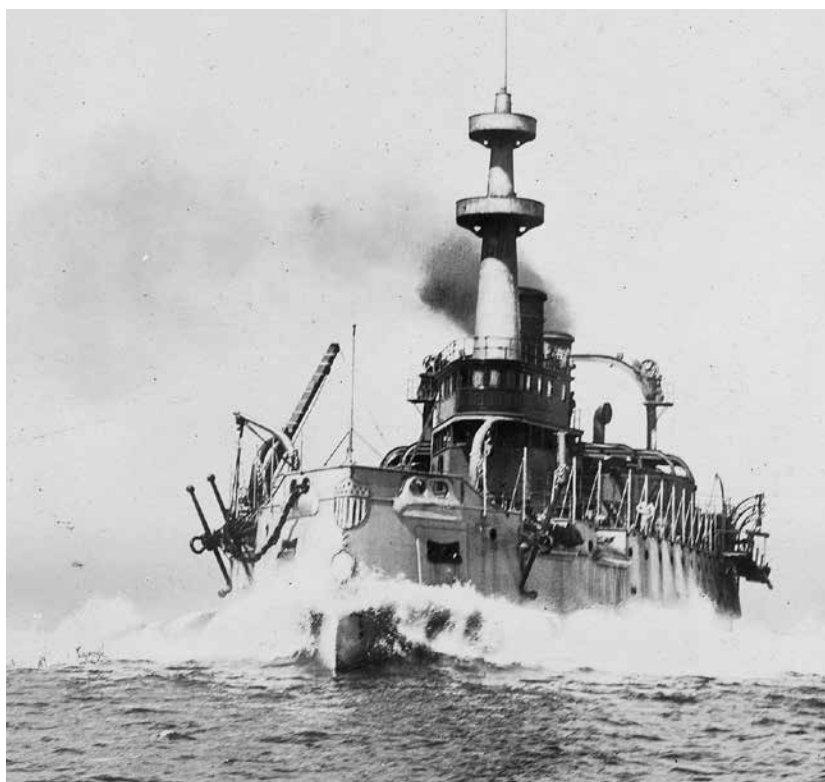
Sutro ran his campaign in opposition to the powerful political interest of Southern Pacific. His lack of political connections with the city's supervisors and his determination resulted in no significant reforms for San Francisco. His great legacy as a philanthropist included spending more than \$1 million to create Sutro Baths, a large public recreation facility next to his Cliff House; and donating the land to found the Affiliated Colleges (now University of California, San Francisco).

The torch for the progressive era of San Francisco was carried forward by the ideas of former Mayor James Phelan, who, in 1902, invited world-renowned architect and urban planner Daniel Burnham to speak to the San Francisco Art Association about city beautification plans and efforts.

Phelan entertained grand architectural ideas for transforming San Francisco from its rugged, chaotic Gold Rush landscape into a civilized Paris of the West. His goal was to stimulate civic pride and create a desirable place to live and work in the rapidly growing state.

Writer Gertrude Atherton described San Franciscans being driven by a "fever of faith." One of the manifestations of that fever was the eventual formation of several organizations to direct its growth, to beautify its physical presence, and to bring its many attractions to the notice of the rest of the world. The city invited Daniel Burnham to create an urban plan for San Francisco.

The desire to refine urban living created the City Beautiful movement, which became the foundation of Daniel Burnham's work. Burnham applied design principles to help usher in this new era of civility in



*The U.S.S. San Francisco built by Union Iron Works in San Francisco.
Photo taken September 12, 1894.*

Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

urban living. Burnham's aesthetic was based on a combination of social and spiritual order, harmony, and grandeur. His plan involved open spaces and public squares that blended the best of modern city life with the unique contours of the windswept San Francisco hills.

Nearly a decade later, Burnham's architectural vision would influence the design and primary layout scheme of San Francisco's first world's fair, the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. In particular, Burnham and his colleague Edward Bennett created a Beaux-Arts block plan for the exposition derived from Burnham's 1905 city beautification plan.

"Beauty is the conquering power of the world, and by making the city beautiful we can hold our population, attract newcomers, and add to the happiness of the daily life of myriads," San Francisco writer Rufus Steele wrote in his June 1905 *Sunset* magazine article, "Making San Francisco Beautiful."

San Francisco's 1915 world's fair was inspired by the drive, enthusiasm, and determination of the

1894 Midwinter Fair and benefited from the many years of Mechanics' Institute's Industrial Fairs (see Taryn Edwards's article in this issue) that preceded it. The Midwinter Fair also set the standard for how San Francisco would approach the financing of future fairs. It was financed entirely by donations; it did not receive any federal, state, or local bonds; loans; grants; or subsidies.

The 1894 Midwinter Fair in Golden Gate Park never attained the status of an outstanding success financially, only raising \$344,319. Although it did not generate high revenues, it did fill San Francisco's citizens and business community with a "can do" spirit that paved the way for the PPIE in 1915.

A *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter interviewed C. H. Phillips, regarded as the Napoleon of California real estate owners and agents, in December of 1893. Phillips summed up the aspirations of the Midwinter Fair this way, one month before its opening:

It does not require the spirit of an enthusiast to see that it is destined to inspire our people with new hopes and new courage for greater undertakings to achieve greater results than before. Advancement is vital to the growth of a city; there can be no standing still; a city that does not go forward must go backward.

* * * * *

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lee Bruno has been digging into San Francisco's rich history ever since discovering his great grandfather Reuben Hale's inspiring letters and speeches. Lee is the author of *Misfits, Merchants & Mayhem, Tales from San Francisco's Historic Waterfront, 1849–1934* (Cameron + Company) and *Panorama: Tales from San Francisco's 1915 Pan-Pacific International Exposition* (Cameron + Company). Lee has written about business and technology for *The Economist*, *Forbes*, *The Guardian*, *Red Herring* magazine, and *Wired*, among others. He has lived in San Francisco for more than thirty years, raising a family of four boys with his wife and enjoying long open-water swims with the eccentrics at the South End Rowing Club.

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A LOOK AT THE MIDWINTER FAIR:

Photos from the 1894 California Midwinter International Exposition

by Lorri Ungaretti

In 1893, Michael de Young, publisher of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, traveled to Chicago to attend the Chicago Columbian Exposition. At the time, San Francisco was in an economic depression; de Young hoped that a world's fair could revitalize his hometown. While in Chicago, de Young met with a group of businessmen whom he convinced to invest in a world's fair in San Francisco. He received commitments totaling \$40,000 (equal to \$1.15 million today) and convinced many of the exhibitors in Chicago to bring their exhibits to San Francisco. After he got home, more than \$300,000 in private funds was raised to finance the fair.

Fair organizers chose Golden Gate Park for the fair site, much to the dismay of Park Superintendent John McLaren and other fans of the relatively new, untamed park. McLaren worried that the fair would change the park, which he extolled as a "sylvan retreat."

Another person opposed to using the park for the fair was W. W. Stow, who said to de Young, "You come in here and destroy a tree that has been growing for twenty years. The fair will be here for several months. Trees will be here for a thousand years." De Young's answer: "What is a tree? What are a thousand trees compared to the benefits of the exposition?"¹

The Midwinter Exposition (commonly called the "Midwinter Fair") was built on a carefully graded oval shape now known as the Music Concourse. The fair started on 60 acres and eventually grew to about 200 acres.

The fair's Administration Building stood at the western end of the concourse oval, where the

Spreckels Temple of Music (commonly called the band shell) now stands. At the opposite end of the oval stood the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building, designed by Arthur Page Brown; now no building stands at this end of the concourse closest to John F. Kennedy Drive. The site of the Mechanical Arts Building, designed by Edward Swain, was later filled by the California Academy of Sciences. The Horticultural and Agricultural Building, designed by Samuel Newsom, stood on part of the site where the new de Young Museum was built in 2005. Next to the Agricultural & Horticultural Building was the Fine Arts Building, which remained after the fair and named the Memorial Museum. It was rebuilt as the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum between 1917 and 1920; a new de Young Museum was built in 2005.

The Midwinter Fair was supposed to open on January 1, but a snowstorm held up the transportation of exhibits from Chicago, delaying the opening. The fair finally opened on January 27, 1894. It featured more than 100 buildings and hosted about 2.5 million visitors. Open less than six months, the fair closed on July 4, 1894.

According to Christopher Pollock, an expert on Golden Gate Park:

The fair forever changed the park; from then on, structures would be built in the pastoral setting. The areas around the park changed as well. Michael de Young owned major parcels south of the park . . . and the fair was the beginning of the real growth of the adjacent Sunset District.²

PHOTOS FROM THE 1894 CALIFORNIA MIDWINTER EXPOSITION



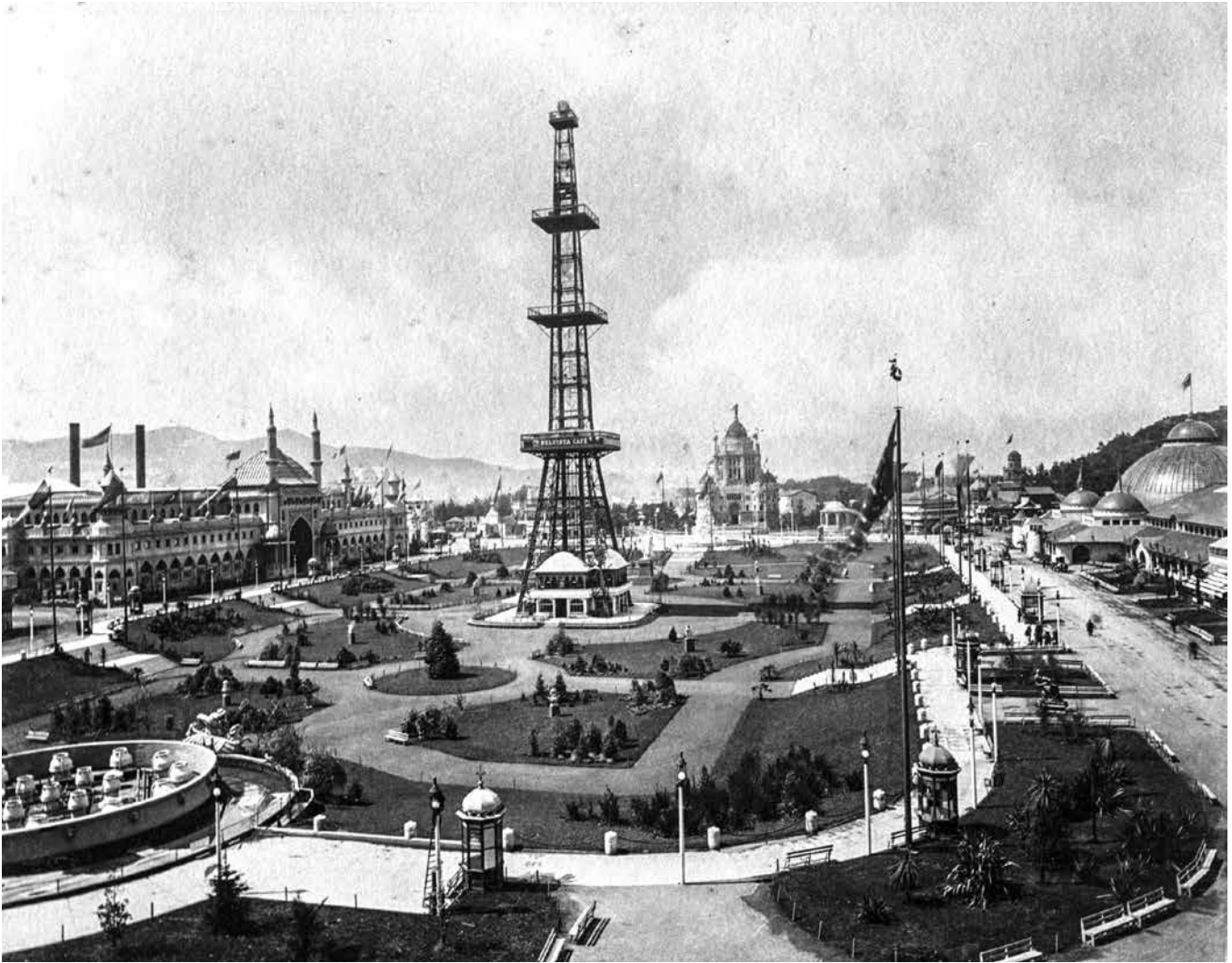
*Groundbreaking for the Midwinter Fair on August 24, 1893.
Courtesy of the Western Neighborhoods Project - wnp70.0211.*



*The site for the fair was on undeveloped land known as Concert Valley in Golden Gate Park. Photo by I. W. Taber.
Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03095, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.*



*Horses and workmen grading the land in preparation for the fair. Photo by I. W. Taber.
Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03163, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.*

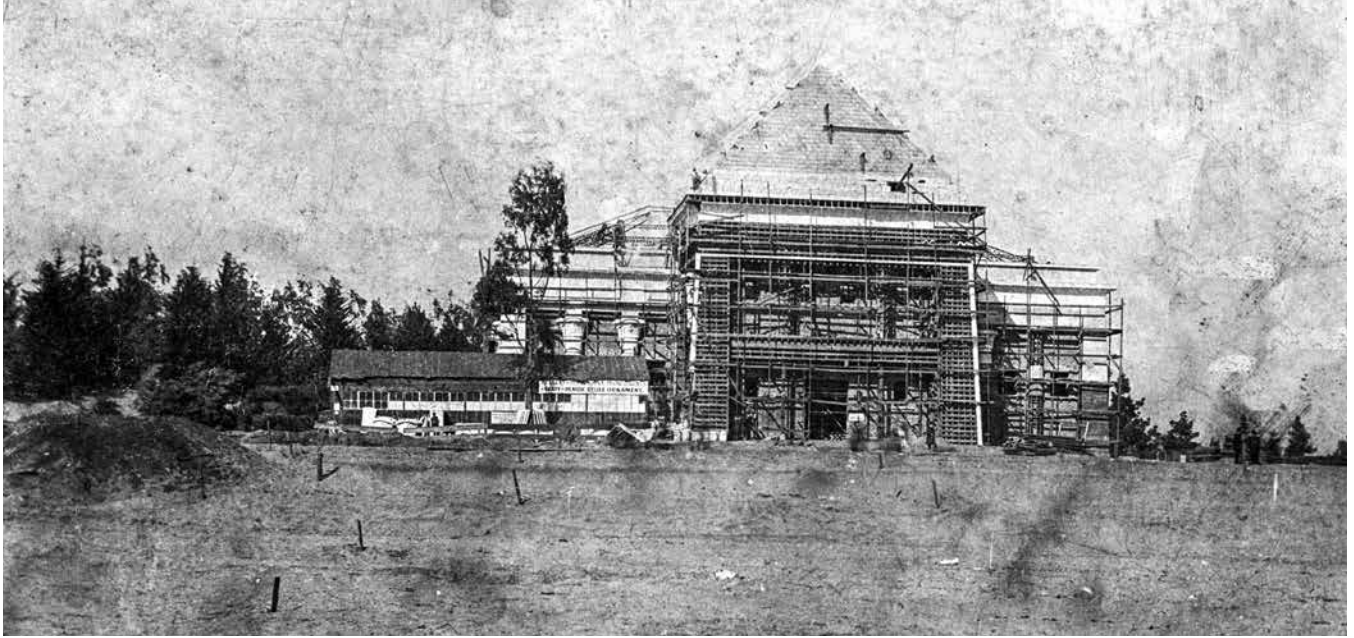


An overall view of the California Midwinter Exposition, looking southwest.

The Mechanical Arts Building is on the left; the Bonet Tower is in the middle; the Administration Building is in the distance at the opposite end from where picture was taken; and the Horticultural and Agricultural Building, with its round glass dome, is on the right. Out of the camera's view on the left is the Fine Arts Building (see next page).

Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.0321, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.

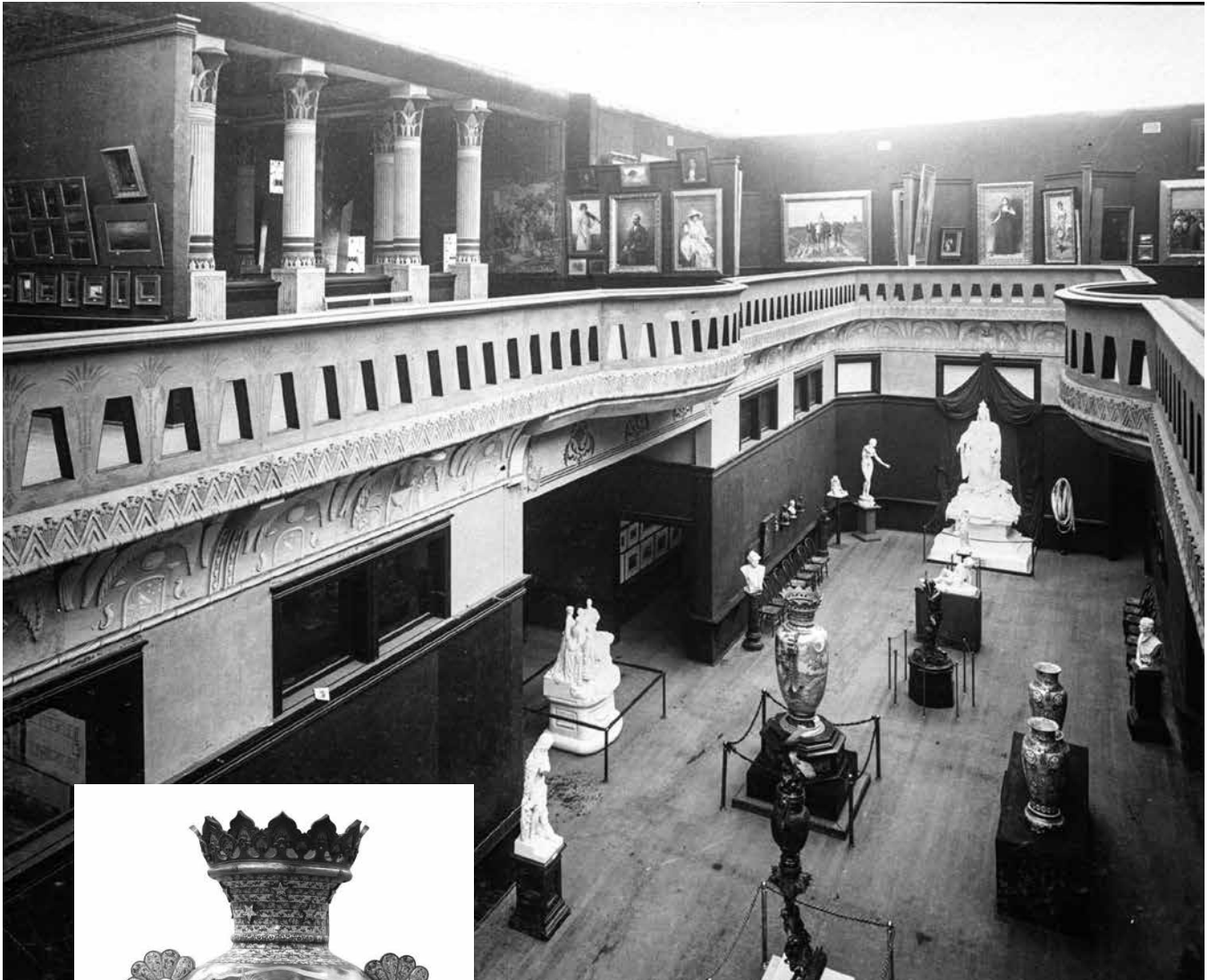
FINE ARTS BUILDING



*One of the main fair buildings, the Fine Arts Building, under construction on the Main Concourse.
Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03338, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.*

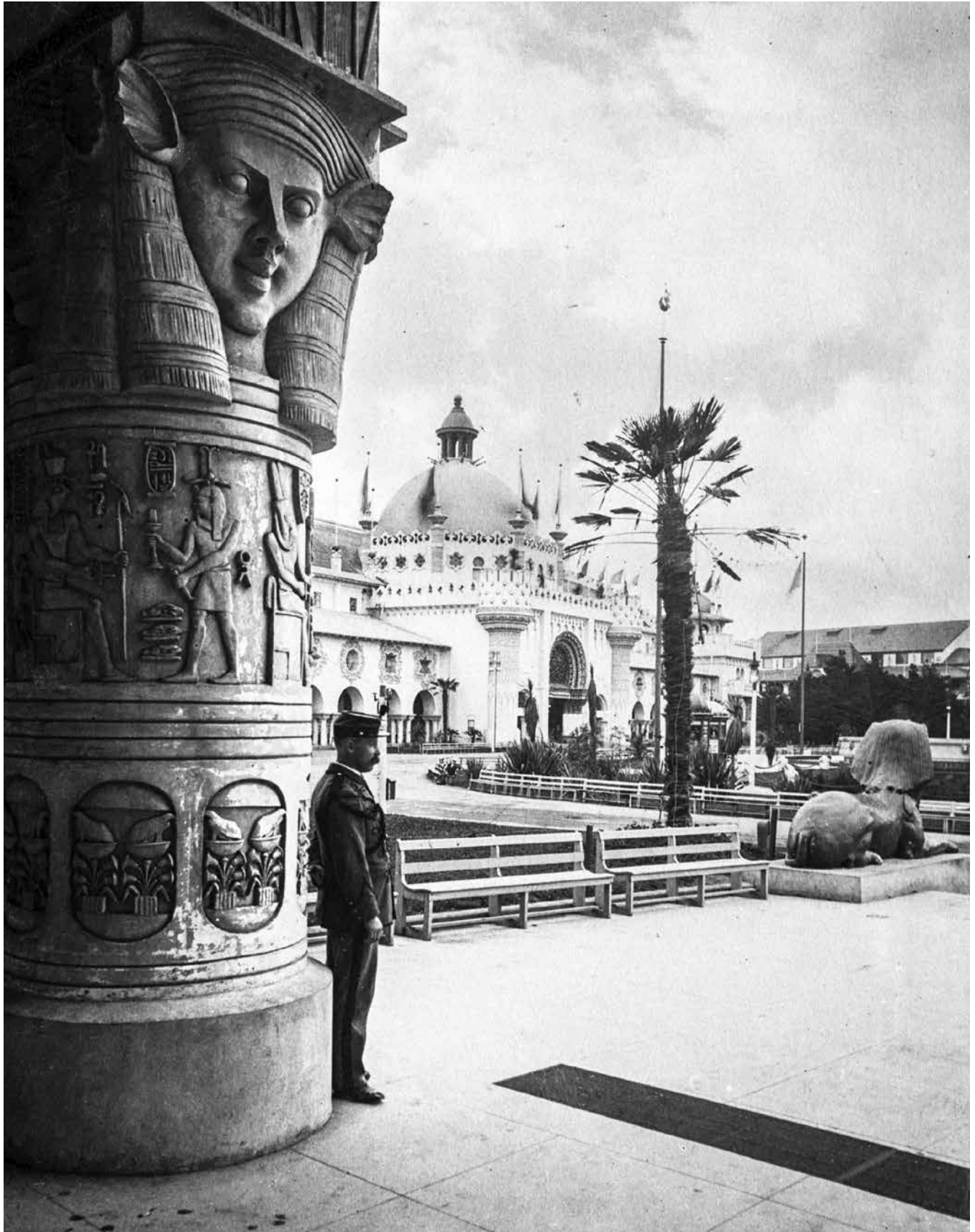


The finished Fine Arts Building, one of the few buildings that remained standing after the Midwinter Fair, became the Midwinter Memorial Museum after the fair closed. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.0321, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.



A variety of art treasures were displayed inside the Fine Arts Building. The tall Japanese dragon vase in the middle was sold at auction in 2019 for \$135,000. (See the article by Rodger Birt in this issue of The Argonaut.) Courtesy of Western Neighborhoods Project – wnp37.03205.

Closeup photo of dragon vase (left) from Clars Auction House.



This view of the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building was taken from the Fine Arts Building, whose columns were beautifully carved and decorated. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03154, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.

HORTICULTURAL AND AGRICULTURAL BUILDING



The Horticultural and Agricultural Building was easily recognized by its glass dome. A close-up of this fascinating photograph shows a man climbing up the dome during the day. Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Isaiah West Taber, photographer, Midwinter Fair, San Francisco, California. 1894 photograph.

EXHIBITS INSIDE THE HORTICULTURAL AND AGRICULTURAL BUILDING



*The Horticultural and Agricultural Building, decorated with flags for some unknown celebration during the fair.
Photographer unknown. Courtesy of OpenSF History/unp37.01670, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.*



*The Austria-Hungary exhibit featured Ludwig Moser & Sons glasswork and Philipp Fischer mosaic goods. Photo by I. W. Taber.
Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/unp37.03131, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.*

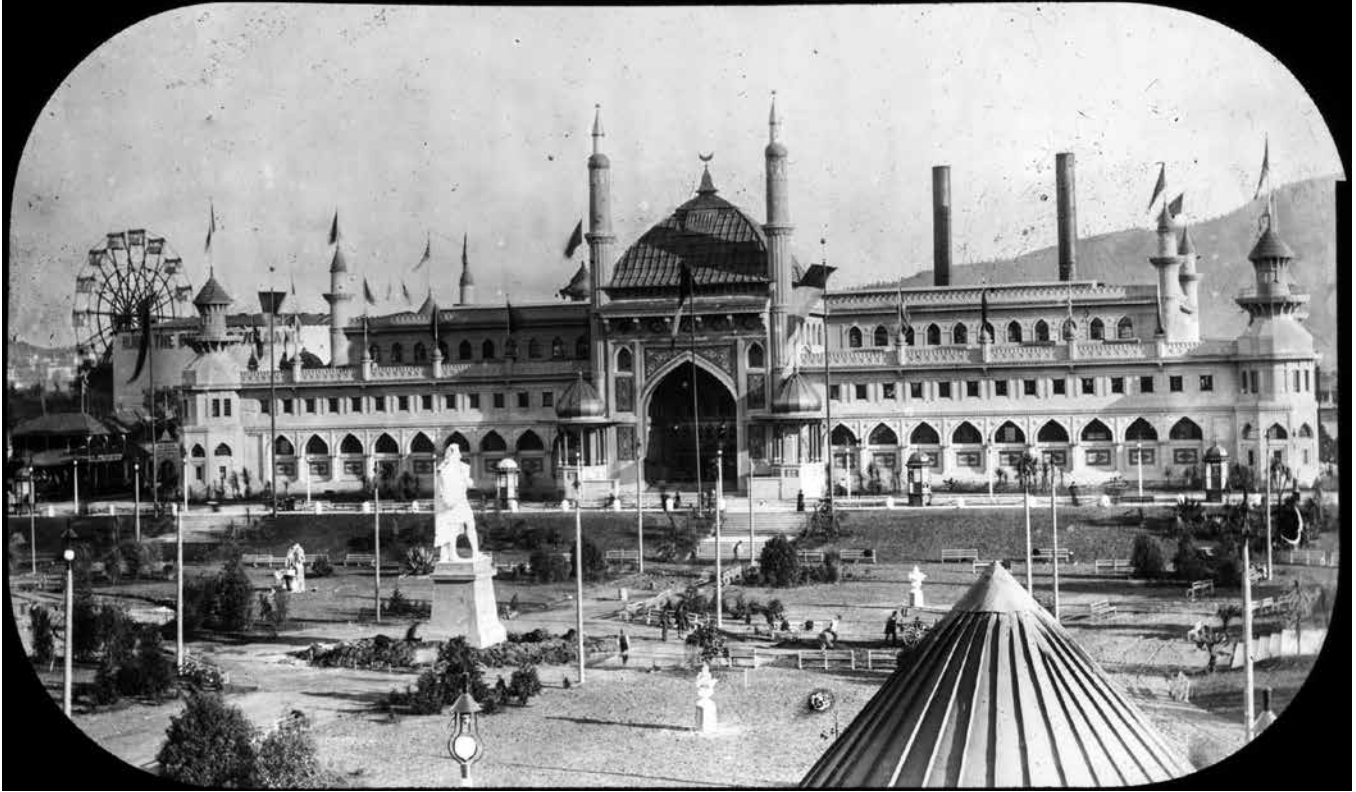


*The Ceylon Tea Coffee and Cocoa Bar. Photo by I. W. Taber.
Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03154, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.*



The British exhibits featured a glassmaker, Elton Ware pottery, Royal Worcester and Haviland china, and Thomas Harper needlework vendors. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03115, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.

MECHANICAL ARTS BUILDING



This view of the Mechanical Arts Building looks across the concourse, showing the Firth Wheel (similar to but smaller than the original Ferris Wheel) on the left, the white Columbus Statue just left of the middle, and Mount Sutro in the distance on the right.
 Courtesy of Western Neighborhoods Project – wnp59.00102.



Inside the Mechanical Arts Building, a working bakery and confection machinery exhibit by Joseph Baker & Sons of London was part of the British exhibit. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03114, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.



Juggling and balancing acts were popular in the late 1800s. With the Mechanical Arts Building in the background, Achille Phillon, a French “equilibriste,” stands on a globe as it moves along a spiral tower. His first appearance at the Midwinter Fair was on April 1, 1894. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp26.970.

THE OFFICIAL FAIR PHOTOGRAPHER



Photographer I. W. Taber. Courtesy of Wikipedia.



Isaiah West Taber was the official fair photographer. This building was his studio at the fair.
 Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp.37.00444, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.



I. W. Taber in Cloverdale, California, preparing to photograph a solar eclipse on January 1, 1889. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

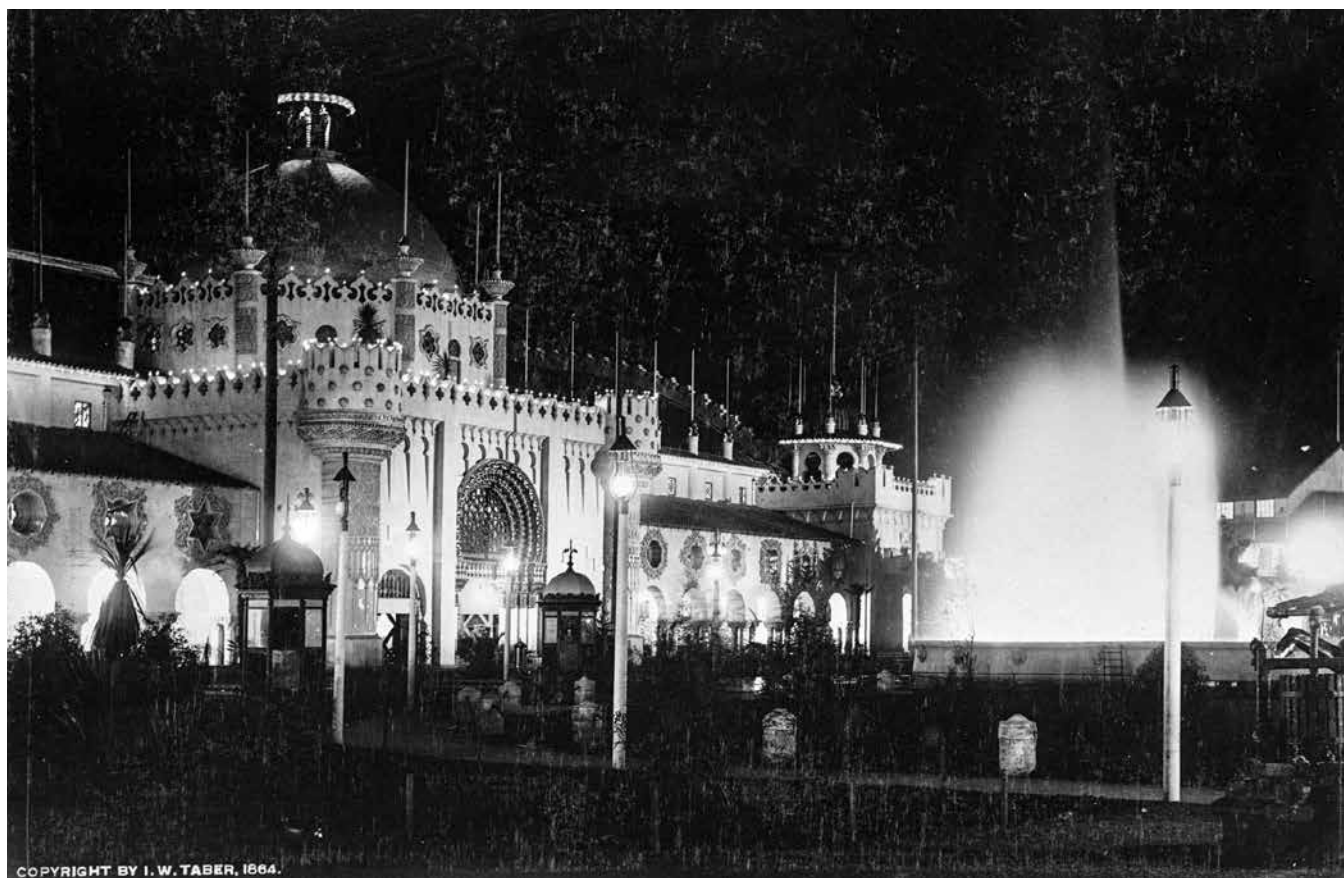


This elevated view looking west shows the Administration Building on the left. The Japanese Village stands at the right. In the distance is Strawberry Hill. Sweeny's Observatory, a popular destination with fairgoers, was built in 1891 at the top of the hill. People could see an unobstructed 360-degree view from the observatory, which was destroyed during the 1906 earthquake. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp.26.990.



A man (maybe the fair's official photographer, I. W. Taber?) stands on a ladder, preparing to take photographs of the Administration Building, designed by Arthur Page Brown. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp.26.987

MANUFACTURERS AND LIBERAL ARTS BUILDING



Night view of the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building. Electricity, a relatively new technology, was used to show off the fair. At the far right, you can see the Apple Cider Press statue, which remains on the Music Concourse. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp.37.03106, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.



This parade in front of the Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building celebrated "German Day," June 10, 1894. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp.37.00444, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.

CALIFORNIA EXHIBITS



*The Sonoma County exhibit. Photo by Benjamin West Kilburn. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.
Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/95501924/>.*



The Kern County exhibit. Photo by Benjamin West Kilburn. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/95501921/>.

The Placer County exhibit. Photo by Benjamin West Kilburn. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/95501918/>.





The Midwinter Fair even had its own movie house, the Electric Theatre and Electric Café. Two men posed for this shot, with a giant drum and cymbal. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/unp.37.03193, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.



A panoramic view looking northwest was taken from Mount Sutro in 1894.

This image, Part 1 of the panorama, shows the Marin headlands, the Golden Gate, sand dunes in the Richmond District, and the Midwinter Fair. Courtesy of the Golden Gate NRA Park Archives, Martin Behrman Negative Collection, OpenSFHistory/wnp71.1537.

THE MIDWAY AT THE FAIR



Entrance to the Midway of the fair, where visitors enjoyed entertainment, amusement rides, carnival games, and more. Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition may have been the first time the term "midway" was used at a fair to name an amusement area separate from other programs.³ This view looks west, showing the Chinese Building (second building on the left), the tall Bonet electric tower, and the Kilauea volcano diorama. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



Another view of the Midway. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory, WS7.



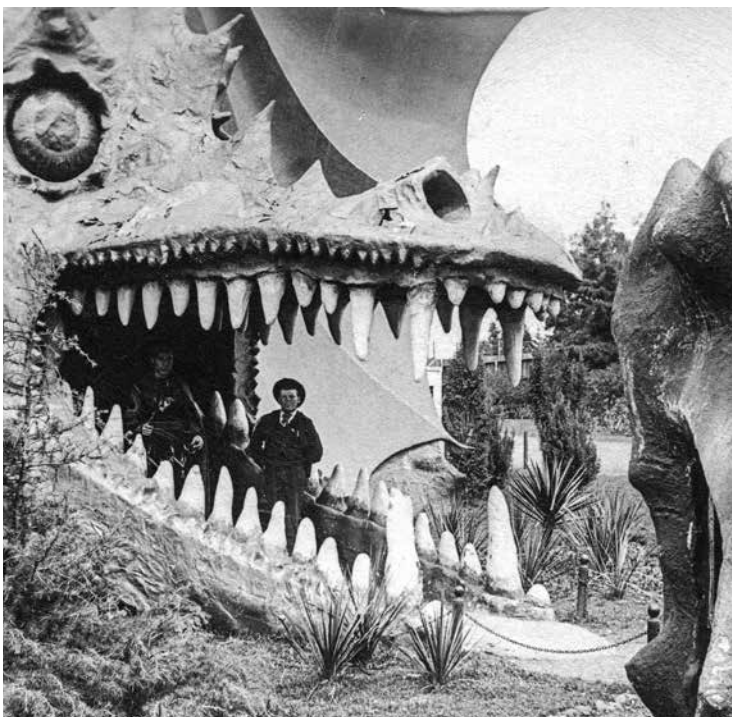
Musicians perform in front of the “Haunted Swing,” a popular—and frightening—ride. “The swing was suspended from a bar across the ceiling and could accommodate approximately 15 people. When the ride began, the swing appeared to move back and forth at an increasing pace until it seemed to complete a full rotation . . . participants [had] the sensation of hanging upside down. . . . In reality it was the walls of the make-shift room which rotated (bolted-down furniture and all) whilst the swing itself hardly moved. But the illusion was so cleverly coordinated that participants would emerge confused, dizzy, faint, and often nauseous.”⁴
 Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



A group standing in front of the Midway “Parisian Concert” building whose sign read, “The Greatest Star Belle Bara. First prize of beauty in Paris, 1889. Photo by Benjamin West Kilburn. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005677795/>.



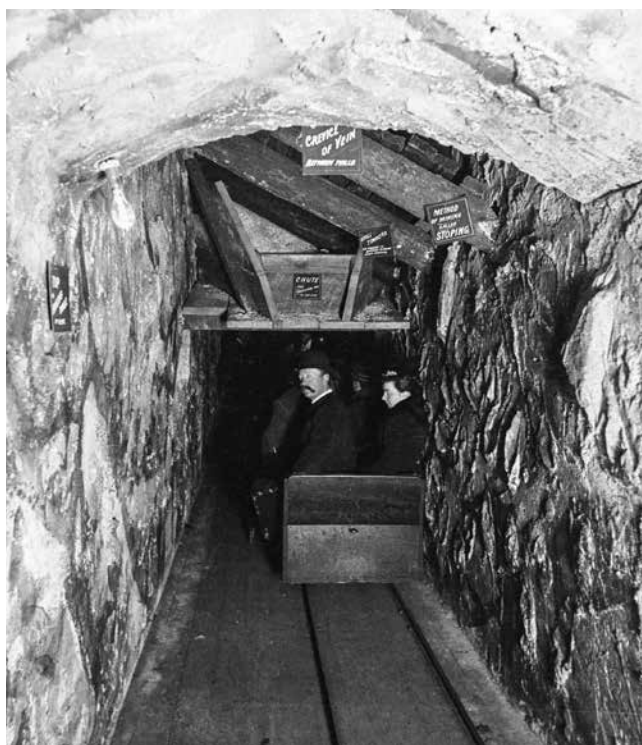
A crowd in front of another popular attraction, "Dante's Inferno." People entered the ride through the dragon's mouth.
 Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



Two people standing in the entrance to "Dante's Inferno."
 The caption to this photo said, "Into the Jaws of death we go without a thought." Inside, fair-goers saw "bottomless pits and dancing skeletons." They thought of it as a warning of what awaits in hell.⁵ Photographer unknown. Courtesy of OpenSF-History/wnp.24.368a.



The "Colorado Gold Mine" invited people to visit "A Mine in Full Operation." Photo by I. W. Taber.
 Courtesy of Western Neighborhoods Project—wnp70.0210, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.



The interior of the Colorado Gold Mine, with men in an ore cart riding through a fake cavern. Photo by I. W. Taber.
 Courtesy of Western Neighborhoods Project—wnp37.03155, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.

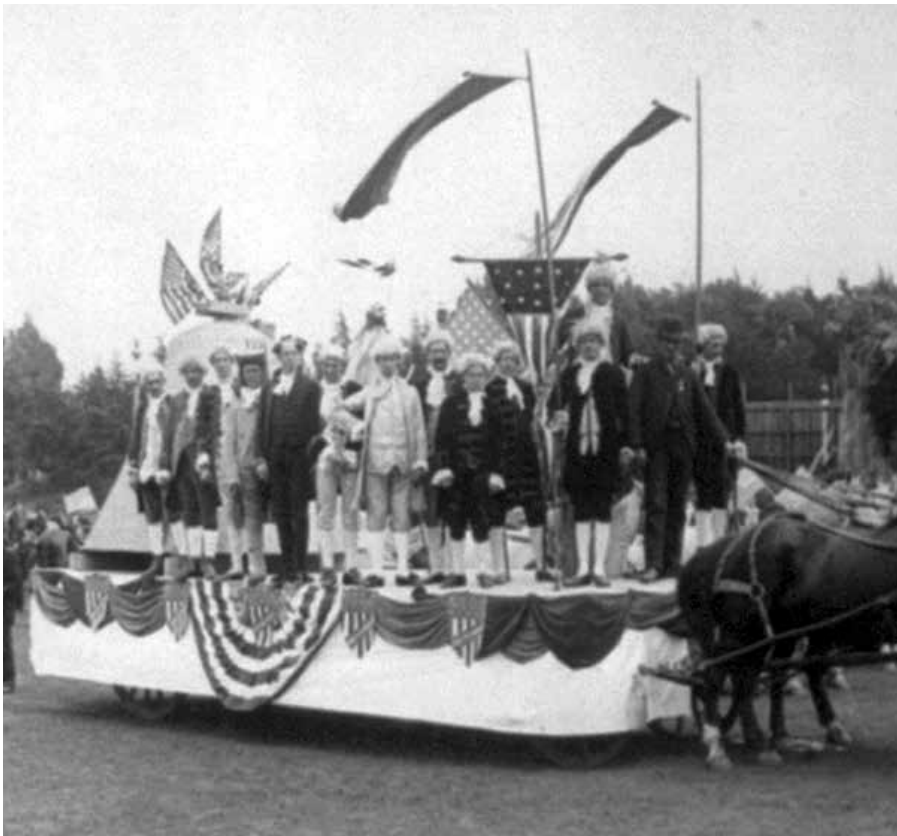


Another attraction on the Midway was the "49 Camp," which celebrated the Old West. Photo by Benjamin West Kilburn.
 Courtesy of the Library of Congress.
 Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002705703/>.

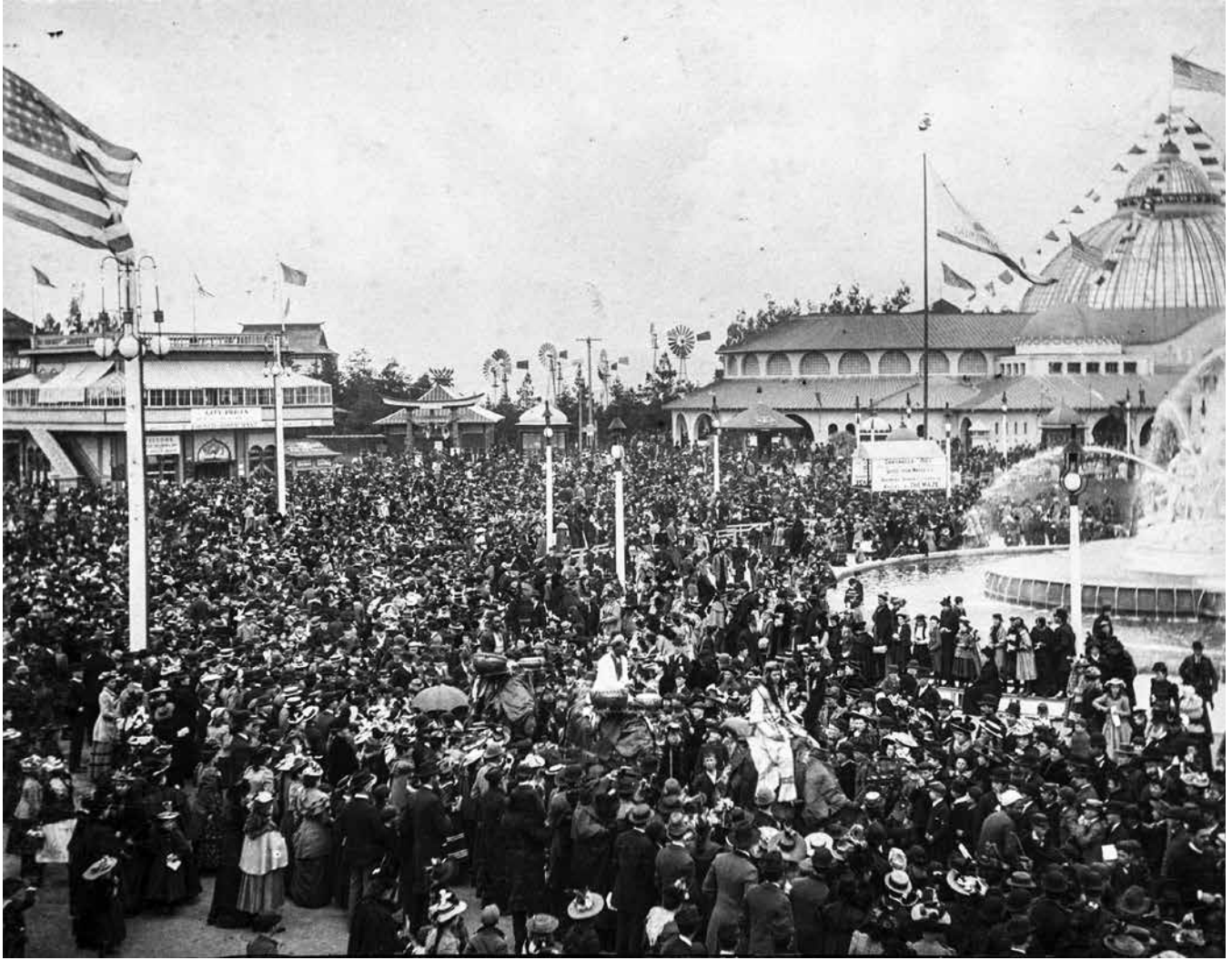
PARADE DAYS



*The fair had days dedicated to various groups. This was "All Nations Day." Photo by Benjamin West Kilburn.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016650377/>.*



This float represented the thirteen original U.S. states, as represented by "statesmen" in powdered wigs. Photo by Benjamin West Kilburn. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005677777/>.



Crowds watch a passing parade on "Chronicle Day," sponsored by the San Francisco Chronicle, the newspaper owned by Michael de Young. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03181, Marilyn Blaisdell collection.

CHINESE DAY AT THE MIDWINTER FAIR



A parade of children on "Chinese Day." Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



One of the floats on "Chinese Day." Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



*A horse-drawn float with a large boat makes its way to the Chinese Day parade. Photograph from Wyland Stanley Collection.
Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp15.101.*

JAPANESE VILLAGE



One of the attractions that remains in Golden Gate Park today is the Japanese Village and Tea Garden (now called the Japanese Tea Garden). This 1894 picture shows the village's main entrance gate (left) and "torii gate" (right). Photograph from Wyland Stanley Collection. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/[wnp15.087](#).



Another scene in the Japanese Village included the Moon Bridge, a familiar sight in the Japanese Tea Garden today. Photo by I. W. Taber. Courtesy of Western Neighborhoods Project/[wnp37.00473](#), Marilyn Blaisdell collection.

BONET TOWER



The Bonnet Tower was the centerpiece of the Midwinter Fair. Designed by Frenchman Leopold Bonet, the design was based on the Eiffel Tower in Paris, although, at 266 feet tall, the Bonnet Tower was 1/3 the size of the Eiffel Tower. During the day, visitors rode an open elevator to one of two restaurants and an observation deck. Every night, during a time when electricity was new and not widely used, the tower's 3,200 lights came on, illuminating the entire fair and providing light as bright as "350 million candles." Also at night, the tower's bright searchlight on the top illuminated the fair, the park, and areas beyond.⁶ When the fair ended, most of the exhibits were torn down, but, despite John McLaren's requests, no one took down the tower. Finally, on January 27, 1896, almost eighteen months after the Midwinter Fair had ended, John McLaren and park employees used dynamite to take down the tower. Photograph from Wyland Stanley Collection. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp15.088.

MIDWINTER FAIR AT NIGHT



*This view of the fair was taken at dusk from Strawberry Hill. Stow Lake is in the foreground.
Photograph from the Wyland Stanley Collection. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp15.082.*



The Midwinter Fair at Night. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

TWO REMAINING OBJECTS FROM THE MIDWINTER FAIR



For many years **The Apple Cider Press** (left) by American Thomas Shields Clarke was misidentified as a wine press, but now it is recognized as an apple press. The 11-foot-tall **Doré Vase** (right) was created by French artist Gustave Doré in the late 1870s. He called it *Poème de la vigne* (Poem of the Vine), extolling French winemaking. The vase featured “mythological figures associated with the rites of Bacchus” and many smaller creatures. After seeing the piece at Chicago’s Columbian Exposition, de Young had it displayed at San Francisco’s Midwinter Fair. It now stands next to the de Young Museum.⁷ *The Apple Cider Press*, photographer unknown, circa 1900, courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp15.672.jpg. *The Doré Vase*, photographer unknown, 1894, courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp14.0409.jpg.

The author thanks Christopher Pollock for his help reviewing this piece. A special thanks also goes to David Gallagher and Woody LaBounty of the Western Neighborhoods Project. Many of the photographs and their descriptions in this article came from WNP’s project, OpenSFHistory, which involves scanning and identifying 100,000 historical San Francisco photographs.

Visit outsidelands.org or opensfhistory.org.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lorri Ungaretti is a native San Franciscan who discovered her love of the city’s history about twenty years ago. She has written five books about the Sunset and Richmond Districts. She is a City Guide, leading tours in the Sunset District, and gives talks for various organizations about the history of San Francisco. She works part-time as the administrative manager of the San Francisco Historical Society.

NOTES

1. Arthur Chandler and Marvin Nathan. *The Story of the California Midwinter International Exposition, Golden Gate Park, 1894* (St. Paul, MN: Pogo Press, 1993), 5. See also *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 1, 1893, page 1.
2. Christopher Pollock, *San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park*, (Portland, OR: WestWinds Press, 2001), 56.
3. Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midway_\(fair\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midway_(fair)).
4. <https://www.amdigital.co.uk/about/blog/item/haunted-swing>.
5. Chandler and Nathan. *The Story of the California Midwinter International Exposition*.
6. Many of the details about the Bonet Tower were from the Western Neighborhoods Project blog #310: http://www.outsidelands.org/podcast/WNP310_Electric_Tower.
7. Two online sources accessed July 3, 2019: https://noehill.com/sf/landmarks/poi_apple_cider_press.asp and <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/the-dore-vase-san-francisco-california>.

A RARE MIDWINTER EXPOSITION ARTIFACT:

Lost, Found, and Lost Again

by Rodger C. Birt

With the closing gavel of a long Sunday auction at Clars Auction Gallery in Oakland, an unnamed bidder, calling from New York, secured a 172 cm (approximately 5.6 feet) tall, finely made cloisonné enamel vase and its centuries-old wooden pedestal—item 6799—the last to come to the block. Bidding began at \$15,000 and remained competitive and spirited among only three contestants, two in the room and the one caller from New York.¹ Ultimately, the New York bidder prevailed at \$110,000. With the buyer's premium of \$25,000 added to the final gavel price, item 6799 cost its new owner \$135,000. Without question, the great vase was the star of the evening. After having resided in nearby Berkeley for 125 years, where it decorated the main dining room of Spenger's Fish Grotto, the great vase was on its way to a new home. Seven months in Golden Gate Park, the long tenure in the Fish Grotto, the few weeks on consignment in the auction gallery showroom, and now on its way exactly to where no member of the audience knew.

Before its long American interlude, the vase's history had begun in Japan in 1890, when artisans began crafting the "largest pieces of cloisonné" enamel ever made in that country.² The vase's conception coincided with the growing desirability of Japanese pottery among collectors in the United States. After the formal invitation in 1890 to participate in Chicago's Columbian International

Exposition was accepted, the Meiji government commissioned several great artworks for the event, including the vase. This commission was part of the Japanese government's officially endorsed endeavor to showcase a modern Japan. Judith Snodgrass, historian of Japan and its Columbian Exposition presence, notes:

Japan's participation at the Columbian Exposition was shaped by [the] determination to exhibit the equality of its civilization, its progress and modernity—in distinctly Japanese terms—as a public relations supplement to the long term, intense diplomatic negotiations to revise [earlier] treaties.³

The Japanese government had made clear that it wanted to revisit terms of the treaties put in place in the 1850s, calling them unequal and like "treaties western powers imposed on colonial states."⁴

Marrying modern technology with traditional crafts informed the inception of the vase and its two companion pieces, a smaller censer and a second, large (172 cm) cloisonné vase.⁵ Shin Shiwoda conceived the idea for this grouping of three fine enamel vases with a specific painted iconography for each. Shirozayemon Suzuki was the supervisor of manufacturing.⁶ The empress attended the celebration to display the finished triptych. Then, they were carefully packed and shipped to Chicago. At the opening day of the Columbia Exposition, in May of



The Japanese dragon vase that was on display at the Columbian International Exposition in Chicago 1893 and at the California Midwinter Fair in Golden Gate Park in 1894. Photo from Clars Auction House.

1893, the three pieces were exhibited in a prominent place. There they would remain until Michael de Young brought one, a dragon-adorned vase, to San Francisco for the Midwinter International Exposition in January of 1894.⁷ By then, the political allegory of the dragon vase and its two companions was beginning to be excised from public discourse.

When considered together, the triptych was intended to advertise late Meiji-era Japan's vision of geopolitics in northeast Asia. The eagles (on the companion vase de Young left behind in Chicago) signify Russia, and the birds flying over the snow express Russian expansion into the Far East. The dragon vase—displaying a not too ferocious dragon—references an enervated China that cannot resist an emboldened Russia. The barnyard fowl on the censer symbolize Korea and South China Sea islands; the domesticated fowl look up to the rising sun, Japan, the new power in this part of Asia. Interestingly, the allegory prefigures actual events of the next ten years: Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5 and gained control of Korea, Japan acquired Taiwan (Formosa) and the Pescadores, and Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5).⁸ When Frank Spenger moved the dragon vase to his Spenger's Fish Grotto, the history of Northeast Asia and the Japanese interpretation of that history were lost to the crowds that moved past it—most who stopped to admire the vase glimpsed only a part of its story. Previously, in the Fine Arts Building, the dragon vase had become an expendable object, and he happily sold it to Spenger when the Midwinter Fair closed in July of 1894.

As far as I can tell, Edward Herny was the only person who understood that the dragon vase was a valuable piece of history, tied to the Bay Area since 1894, but with no certain fate. I don't know when Herny made his discovery. He shared it with me late in October of 2018. Herny is a prominent private collector of Midwinter Exposition artifacts, and we were meeting to discuss the possibility of an exhibition of parts of his collection in the San Francisco Historical Society exhibition space at Fishman's Wharf. Herny wondered if the Historical Society might endeavor to rescue the great dragon vase from its curious "hidden in plain sight" obscurity at Spenger's Fish Grotto. I needed little convincing: it

would be especially rewarding to announce the vase's provenance during 2019, the 125th anniversary year of the exposition the dragon vase had been part of. I did share Herny's story with Arthur Chandler and Marvin Nathan. They had co-authored a book about the Midwinter Fair, and I knew they could help establish the authenticity of the artifact. Less than a week later, the latter—on a Berkeley saunter with his wife, Gerri—saw three workmen loading a large crate onto a truck outside the entrance to Spenger's Fish Grotto. The fabled restaurant had closed permanently, and all of the collection acquired over more than a century of business was to be auctioned off in February of 2019. The movers, who were attempting to maneuver the crate into a secure position before strapping it down, were from Clars Auction Gallery. The man in charge of the operation was Deric Torres, Clars director of the furniture and decorative art department. During the brief conversation, Torres told Nathan that the great enamel vase, which had graced Spenger's interior, was indeed the occupant of the now safely settled crate. In turn, Nathan told Torres about my conversation with Edward Herny several weeks earlier. Torres invited Nathan to visit the gallery once the vase was ready for viewing. Nathan invited me, and we met with Torres during the first week in January of 2019 three weeks before the 125th anniversary of the Midwinter Exposition's gala opening in 1894.

When you know what you are looking for, discovering it is relatively straightforward. The dragon vase revealed itself to our eyes that morning without the gaiety of dining camaraderie and devoid of the anticipation of gustatory delight that encumbered its presence at Spenger's. Embarrassed that I had paid it scant attention during all my visits to the restaurant, I eagerly surrendered myself to its visual power and mute beauty that morning in Oakland. There was no doubt that we were in the company of the dragon vase.¹⁰ The possibilities provoked by this encounter were three-fold: 1) would it go to a private collector who would secret it away and selfishly make it her or his own? 2) Would it be taken away from the Bay Area to some distant location? or 3) Could it be won by a local institution and put on display, this time with a full acknowledgement of its genealogy and history? We all felt—as had Herny the day he and I talked about the vase—that the latter



The dragon vase, left center, on display in the Fine Arts building at the Midwinter Fair. The two smaller vases opposite the dragon vase are not its companion vases exhibited previously in Chicago. Courtesy of OpenSFHistory/wnp37.03205.

outcome—keeping the vase in the Bay Area—was the most desirable. In the meanwhile, Torres did the due diligence his position required.

In the days following our meeting Torres contacted media outlets in Chicago and the Bay Area. This led to newspaper articles and online reporting. Torres also ferreted out the valuable work of Judith Snodgrass, and this led him to the Khalili Collections galleries in Oxford, England and the location of the two other vases there.¹¹ He shared this information with the core group of interested individuals at the San Francisco Historical Society (SFHS) and the curators at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum. While an international audience was absorbing the

news of the dragon vase's impending appearance on the auction block, a concerted effort was mounted to keep it in the Bay Area. We members of SFHS were actively engaged in what turned out to be a well-intentioned but failed enterprise. No local entity was there to enter a bid the February night the dragon vase was, for about 15 minutes, anyone's to claim.

No one is especially culpable for the loss of the dragon vase. Michael de Young had the first opportunity to make San Francisco its permanent home. He did keep some Midwinter Exposition artifacts displayed in the Palace of Fine Arts, which would become the first incarnation of the

de Young Museum. However, on the opening day of the Midwinter Exposition de Young had said that bringing “capital and population” to California was the impetus behind showcasing remnants of the Columbian Exposition in Golden Gate Park.¹² Selling the vase to Frank Spenger rather than valuing it as an exquisite example of Japanese art and history was not a part of the equation de Young was factoring.

Apparently, the dragon vase held little fascination in the present era as well. There was no local media coverage of the vase’s sale or its departure to England. What once was lost, briefly found, and then lost again now requires a visit to Oxford, England.¹³ This time, the fish and chips will have to come either before or after we have enjoyed its august company.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rodger C. Birt is Professor Emeritus of Humanities and American Studies at San Francisco State University. He has been a member of the San Francisco Historical Society board of directors since 2016.

NOTES

1. The bidders in the gallery represented an “interested buyer in Asia” and a “Chicago non-profit corporation.” (The telephone bidder represented the Khalili Collections in Oxford, England.) Interview, Deric Torres, director of Furniture and Decorative Art Dept., Clars Auction Gallery, May 6, 2019. The auction date was February 17, 2019.
2. *Revised Catalogue, Department of Fine Arts, with Index of Exhibitors*, Department of Publicity and Promotion, World’s Columbian Exposition (Chicago, 1893), 392.
3. Judith Snodgrass, “Exhibiting Meiji Modernity: Japanese Art at the Columbian Exposition,” *East Asian History*, 31 (June 2006), 83. Also see Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 16–21.
4. *Ibid.*, 31.
5. *Revised Catalogue*, 375.
6. For a complete listing of all painters, artisans, and craftsmen who worked on the project, see *Revised Catalogue*, 392.
7. De Young, California commissioner to the Chicago Fair and a vice-president of the National Commission, was aware of the benefits Chicago gained from hosting an exposition. He was the force behind bringing almost half of the Chicago exhibits to San Francisco. See *Official History of the California Midwinter International Exposition*, (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker Company, 1894), 15.
8. Snodgrass, “Exhibiting Meiji Modernity,” 77–78.
9. Arthur Chandler and Marvin Nathan, *The Fantastic Fair: The Story of the California Midwinter International Exposition, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, 1894* (St. Paul, MN: Pogo Press, 1993).
10. Marvin Nathan brought to the viewing a photocopied page that showed the image of the dragon vase when it was exhibited at the Midwinter Exposition, *Official History*, 195.
11. The Khalili Collection acquired the eagle vase in “the early 1990s,” and the censer in “early 2000.” See Khalilicollections.org.
12. *Official History*, 76.
13. The dragon vase joined the censer and the eagle vase in March of 2019. The three are currently on display together in Oxford.



*The dragon vase and its two companions were displayed together at the Chicago Exposition in 1893.
Courtesy of University of California, Riverside, Museum of Art.*



The 2019 Fracchia Prize awards winners (left to right): Sofia Herron Geller (first prize), Allison Dummell (second prize), and Yanzhu Gong (third prize).

★★★★★ FRACCHIA PRIZE WINNERS ★★★★★

In fall of 2018, San Francisco Historical Society announced a new educational opportunity for San Francisco’s high school students, the Fracchia Prize. Named for SFHS founder and President Emeritus Charles Fracchia, the Fracchia Prize will be an annual event that invites students to research some aspect of the city’s history and share what they learn with us. The 2018-2019 Fracchia Prize asked students to write an essay in response to this question: “How does the history of my neighborhood affect my life today?” SFHS offered cash prizes to the top three essayists, as well as publication of their work.

Students from all parts of the city submitted essays, and selecting the top three wasn’t easy. The winners of this year’s competition are:

- FIRST PLACE: Sofia Herron Geller: “Art Activism: San Francisco’s Counterculture and Its Impact on the Mission District”
- SECOND PLACE: Allison Dummel: “Living on the Edge”
- THIRD PLACE: Yanzhu Gong: “Mission Bay”

On May 7 the three students, their history teachers, and their families joined SFHS board members for an awards ceremony hosted by Mayor London Breed at her offices in City Hall. Allison’s essay was published in the third quarter issue of *Panorama*. Yangzhu’s essay will be published in the fourth quarter issue of *Panorama*. Sofia’s essay appears on the next page.

ART ACTIVISM:

San Francisco's History of Counterculture and Its Impact on the Mission District

by Sofia Herron Geller

To quote the 4 Non Blondes, a San Francisco-originated, all-women rock group:

"I realized quickly when I knew I should

That the world was made up of this brotherhood of man."

My family's third-floor flat rises far above the traffic and shouts of 16th Street, on the northwestern edge of the Mission District. Over the years, I've seen how brotherhood, and sisterhood, truly is central to my neighborhood. In a community of such diverse heritages, backgrounds, and experiences, a sense of shared purpose and values ties us together. For those who remember the Hippies, celebrate their Aztec heritage, busk at BART, play the cajon and steel drums, and paint murals, unity comes from art. Their children, including myself, have grown up with this unity and appreciation for diversity. The distinctive arts culture of the inner Mission is rooted in San Francisco's history of counterculture movements, as local poets, musicians, and muralists continue to express dissent from mainstream society and politics, and advocate for liberal change.

San Francisco's counterculture first began in the late 1800s, with the emergence of the bohemian literary movement. With the rise of industrialization in eastern and midwestern cities, a new materialist culture developed, bringing

corruption and a powerful federal government along with it. Many artists, especially writers, were among the first to criticize American society's increasing emphasis on wealth and status, and instead chose to focus on the purposes of human existence and relationships. Many of these artists were drawn to the West, where a whole new civilization was being formed, one with greater personal freedom for women and more ethnic diversity.



*Members of an early labor union, these waitresses congregated at Mission Dolores.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*



*The Roxie Theatre, located at 16th and Mission Streets, has shown independent films since the 1970s.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

With tens of thousands of immigrants and white Americans moving to the West Coast, San Francisco developed as a major hub for culture and the arts, literary and otherwise.¹ In San Francisco, communities of free spirits, with antigovernment and anti-materialist belief systems, or “bohemians,” began to form, including groups such as the Bohemian Club. It was during this period that the northern Mission neighborhood blocks around my apartment at “Sixteenth Street and upper Valencia Street developed a bohemian flavor, with cafes, art houses, independent theaters, and bookstores.”² These bohemian meeting places were prototypes for some of today’s beloved institutions on 16th Street,

including the Roxie Theater and Manny’s Café, where locals meet to explore inequalities and relevant political movements. Many authors frequented these meeting places, and used fictionalized works to question society and satirize American involvement in imperialistic wars. Authors such as Jack London and Mark Twain wrote of a different America than the traditional American writers back East, inspired by a freer life out West. Twain himself is quoted as saying, “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect,” which accurately sums up the disillusionment that these late-19th century thinkers felt toward the increasingly industrialized and imperialistic United States.

Practices that developed in the 19th-century bohemian organizations, such as examining mainstream culture, discussing deeper meanings about humanity, and expressing these meanings through art, reemerged in the 1950s. Continuing the legacy of Twain and his contemporaries, artists of the Beat Generation promoted freedom from what they saw as a flawed American society, through their visual art and poetry. The San Francisco Beatniks, including writers Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, rejected the materialism, conservative views, and conformity of post-World War II America. Like the “bohemians” before them, the Beatniks also established organizations and locations, such as City Lights Bookstore in North Beach, where they could discuss and debate societal issues.

Throughout the 60s and 70s, San Francisco’s counterculture evolved, as free speech demonstrations and Beatnik disillusionment were replaced by protests against the Vietnam War and conservatism. These protests, sit-ins, and demonstrations inspired a mass-migration to San Francisco from around the U.S., resulting in the Hippie Era. Culminating in the 1967 Summer of Love in Golden Gate Park, more than 100,000 young Hippies flooded into San Francisco. Like the bohemians of the previous century, the Hippies “did not agree with most of the ideas of mainstream society, and through their writing, music, and clothes, expressed their new ideas.”³ Art and music were central to the spread of Hippie ideas, and musicians from Jerry Garcia to Janis Joplin wrote hit songs with lyrics promoting the



*A small child dances at a drum circle on Golden Gate Park's Hippie Hill.
Courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

free love and anti-war ideals of the Summer of Love. Today, these ideas have “evolved into ‘San Francisco values’—left-wing or rigidly liberal politics, social tolerance, gender and sexual freedom, a shared sense of community, concern about the planet’s inherent fragility, and an embrace of change.”⁴

The Hippies, Beatniks, and bohemians were centered in different locations of San Francisco, but their ideas are reflected in the Mission today, in art forms from drum circles in Dolores Park to bandas de samba to bright, beautiful murals. These creative outlets all serve to bind the community together, and can also be used to make political statements. From Clarion Alley to the Women’s Building, the “Mission tradition of public murals has expanded from individual oases of political art in the urban landscape, predominantly identified with Latino culture, to rivers of vibrant and powerful expressions of all kinds.”⁵

I live in the Mission, and these accessible and bold works of art remind me to be active in my community, to volunteer to help others, to learn about current events, and to attend public hearings and demonstrations that tackle “everything from ongoing free speech issues to environmental activism, workers’ rights, civil rights, the student loan crisis, and America’s growing income gap.”⁶ We’ve learned from the past that unity is strength, and only by taking action together can we come up with solutions.

In particular, Mona Caron’s WEEDS series (mural project) exemplifies the use of art as activism in the Mission. Throughout my life, I’d always noticed a mural of a biker at Ocean Beach, visible



One of Mona Caron’s WEED murals on Church Street. Her work is very colorful. To see her work, visit MonaCaron.com. Image used by permission of Mona Caron.

just when the J train emerges above ground, at Church and Duboce Streets. The entire back wall of Safeway portrays scenes of San Francisco and Critical Mass, and also numerous native poppies and lizards. A few weeks ago, I read an interview—in the print *SF Chronicle* that my parents still insist on getting—of the artist Mona Caron. Although I’d never heard of her before, I learned that Mona has designed and painted not only the Duboce bikeway mural, but also many of the other large, beautiful murals that I pass every day. Intrigued, I did some more research and discovered her global Weeds Project, “a series of paintings of urban weeds, created as a tribute to the resilience of all those beings who no one made room for, were not part of the plan, and yet keep coming back, pushing through and rising up.”⁷

The resilience and importance of nature that Caron advocates for in her murals of weeds, are realized in the Dearborn Community Garden. Wedged between 17th and 18th Streets on a little alley across from the Women’s Building, the garden used to be



Winter at the Dearborn Garden. Photo taken by author.

a parking lot for employees of a PepsiCo factory, before the factory closed in 1991. The plot of land was sold to “the City and County of San Francisco, which subsequently built a police station that stands there today. At the same time, PepsiCo donated the land that held its parking lot to the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG).”⁸ In 2001, the young Dearborn Garden faced having its land seized by the City, for various illegalities. In contrast with the large, multinational Pepsi Corporation,

makes Dearborn Garden a microcosm of the Mission. The bi-annual garden meetings are led by a mixture of original and newer members, and feature the most direct democracy I’ve ever seen, with all members voicing suggestions and concerns for the garden, and all members voting on the decisions. The meetings, which always culminate in a liberal or pro-union parody of some popular song, demonstrate a uniquely San Franciscan mindset, based on equality, environmental sustainability, and community.

the small, independent Dearborn Garden wasn’t generating revenue for the city, and therefore was “not part of the plan.” But SLUG stood up. That is to say, when the deed-less land donation to SLUG was challenged by the City, a handful of motivated community gardeners resisted the attempts, and decided to officially organize. They elected a board, set up dues for members of the garden, and began to pay taxes on their use of the land.

Today, Dearborn gardeners, including my family, have the opportunity to cultivate crops in the middle of urban San Francisco. Dearborn Garden was always a fun place for me to climb trees as a kid. I realize now that the garden also taught me to appreciate where our food comes from and to take time to be in nature whenever possible. In the garden, plots feature a variety of vegetables and flowers, and are recognizable by unique birdbaths, tall sunflowers, and blossoming lemon trees. But despite small variations, there is a communal element that



In the Mission District, the legacy of love is visible even on doors. Photo taken by the author.

Many of these “Hippie” ideals originated with long-time garden members who have lived in the Mission for decades. I’ve tasted the kale quiches, seen the photos of communes, and heard the ’60s protest songs enough to understand the strong influence of San Franciscan counterculture on many residents of the Mission. These family members, friends, and neighbors have become pillars of our community, loud voices calling for equality for underrepresented women, immigrants, homeless, LGBTQ people, and everyone in between.

Literary geniuses of the bohemian crowd, contemporary poets of the Beat Generation, musical groundbreakers of the Hippie era, and spray-paint wielding muralists today have all taught us the importance of activism, togetherness, and creativity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sofia Herron Geller is senior at Lowell High School and is excited to graduate soon. She plans to study sociology and environmental science at UC Davis next year. Her hobbies include listening to and playing music, reading, filmmaking, and spending time in nature. She thanks the San Francisco Historical Society and Mayor Breed for this opportunity to be published!

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3. Courtney Hopfe and Leslie Kogan, “Bohemianism and Counter-Culture: The Need to Rebel.” *Les Miz and Les Media*, Mount Holyoke College, Feb. 2001: www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/hist255-s01/boheme/hippies.htm.
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7. Mona Caron, “Weeds Series”: www.monacaron.com/weeds.
8. Tam Tran, “Dearborn Garden” *Guidelines* newsletter for SF City Guides and sponsors, San Francisco City Guides: www.sfcityguides.org/public_guidelines.html?article=1055&submitted=TRUE&srch_text=&submitted2=&topic=Neighborhoods.

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