

CALIFORNIA  
STATE  
LIBRARY  
FOUNDATION

Number 111  
2015

# Bulletin





# Bulletin

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The *Bulletin* is included as a membership benefit to Foundation members and those individuals contributing \$40.00 or more annually to Foundation Programs. Membership rates are:

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**Illustrations / Photos:** Pages 2-19, California History Section and California State Capitol Museum; pages 20-27 San Francisco State University and California History Section; pages 28-31 California History Section; pages 32-35 California History Section, Information Technology Bureau, and Braille and Talking Book Library.

**Design:** Angela Tannehill, Tannehill Design

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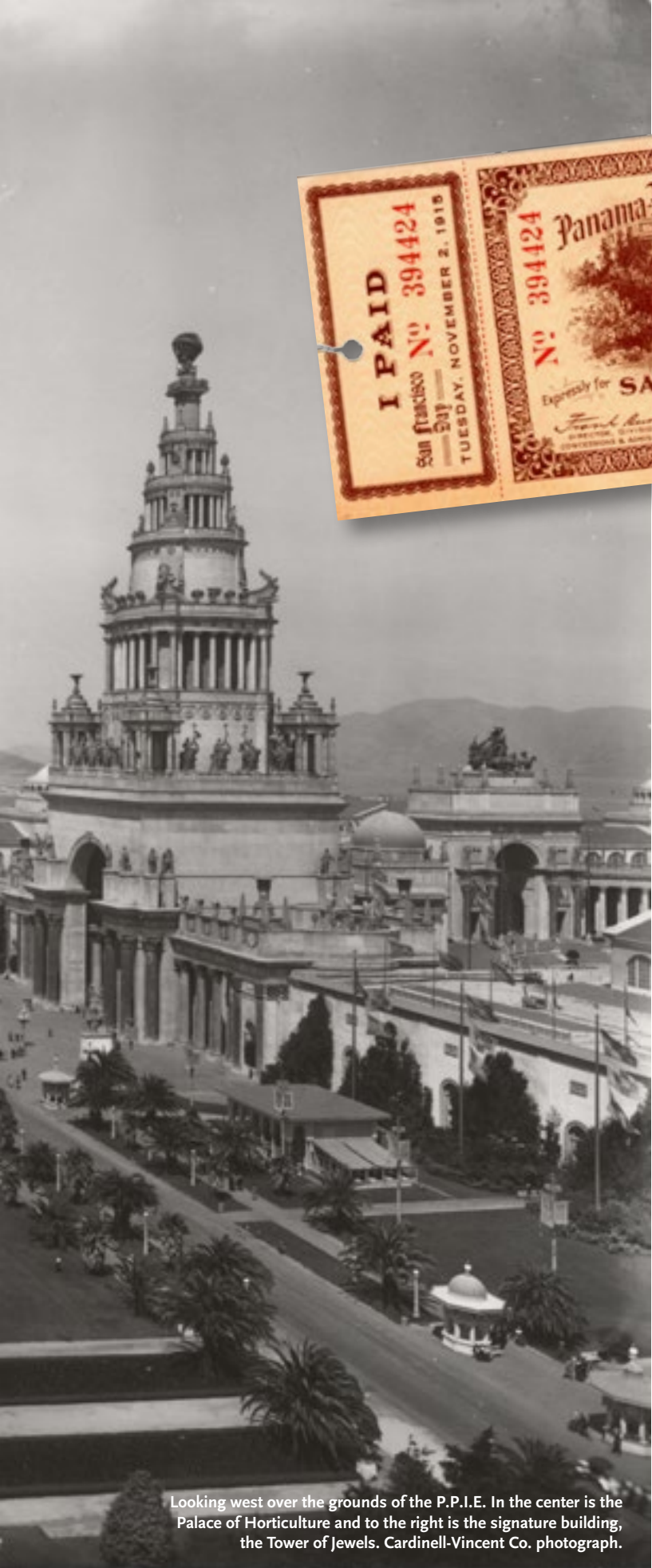
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# “California Invites the World”

The 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition

*By John E. Allen*





Looking west over the grounds of the P.P.I.E. In the center is the Palace of Horticulture and to the right is the signature building, the Tower of Jewels. Cardinell-Vincent Co. photograph.



Those who attended the exposition kept their tickets as a memento, such as this beautifully designed ticket issued for San Francisco Day November 2, 1915.

February 2015 ushered in a major milestone for California and the city of San Francisco, as the centenary of when the Golden State played host to one of the great world's fairs. When it opened on February 20, 1915, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (P.P.I.E.) would be the first world's fair to be held on the Pacific shore. This grand fair would truly live up to its official promotional slogan of *"California Invites the World."* In the ten months it operated, nearly twenty-five million people flocked from all over the world to see this wondrous creation and all the marvels it contained.

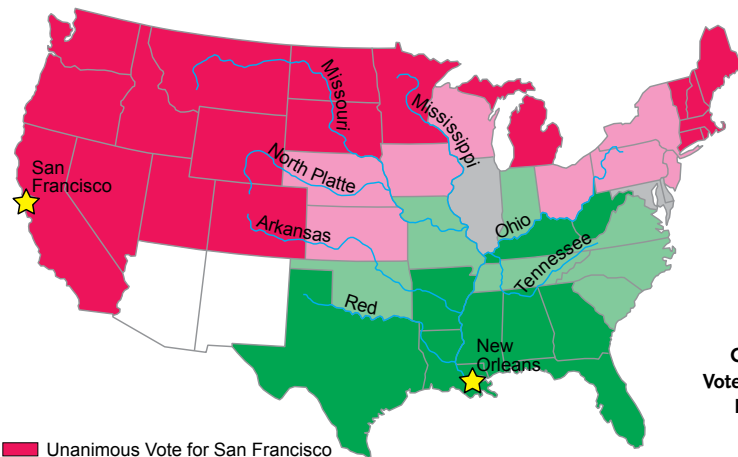
The 1915 Exposition was the greatest fair ever held in California. The San Francisco world's fair overlapped the Panama-California Exposition (P.C.E.) which was held in San Diego. Both fairs celebrated the opening of the engineering marvel of the Panama Canal a year earlier. One of the greatest engineering feats in human history, the fifty-mile Panama Canal, took ten years to construct. Completed in 1914, it shortened the distance between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans by over 8,000 miles and forty-six days.

The P.P.I.E. was also staged to bring national attention to San Francisco's recovery after the devastating earthquake and fire that leveled the city in 1906. Even before the disaster, San Franciscans called for a redesign of the city's chaotic layout along the orderly lines of the "City Beautiful" movement. Noted architect and urban designer Daniel Burnham was commissioned in 1905 to draw up plans for this major urban project. He proclaimed, "San Francisco of the future will be the most beautiful city of the continent."

In the end however, the grandiose "Burnham Plan" was abandoned as being too unrealistic. Plans for a new civic



California politicians and businesses waged a hard national campaign for San Francisco to receive the designation as the host of the exposition. The chief competition came from New Orleans.



Map of 1910 Congressional Vote produced by Eric Thomsen

- Unanimous Vote for San Francisco
- Majority Vote for San Francisco
- Unanimous Vote for New Orleans
- Majority Vote for New Orleans
- Tie Vote
- Non-Voting Territory
- Mississippi River and Its Major Tributaries

US House of Representatives' Vote on Whether to Consider San Francisco's or New Orleans' Proposal to Host the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (Vote #154, 31 January 1911)

EDITOR'S NOTE

John Allen is a historian at the State Capitol Museum and a history professor at American River College. Mr. Allen curated "California Invites the World: The 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exhibition" as well as past exhibits on the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and birds-eye views of California. The author would like to thank the California State Capitol Museum exhibit team and the wonderful staff at the State Library for making this exhibit a reality. This collaborative effort, which combines the resources of the two institutions, has made possible past exhibits. The on-going partnership will also make possible such future exhibits on California and the Second World War, the maps of California and treasures from the State Library's collection. Special thanks are also in order to private lenders, Jay Stevens and Library Foundation board member Tom Vinson who generously donated items from their own collections.

center did, however, go forward. After 1906, some believed San Francisco was the "City That Was," but others campaigned for a newer and better "City That Is." Everyone, however, understood the importance for the future of the city's recovery by hosting the P.P.I.E. Once this had been achieved, there were many competing plans put forward to have the fair constructed in Golden Gate Park or at various multiple sites across the city. Finally it was decided to develop Harbor View, a swampy coastal strip along the north shore of San Francisco as the site for the P.P.I.E.

ARGUMENT WEEK

As early as 1904, Californians began making plans for celebrating the completion of the Panama Canal. San Francisco, however, had many contenders for hosting the prestigious event, principal among them, New Orleans. San Diego, as has been mentioned, also put forward an unsuccessful bid for holding the fair. As a result of this competition, an intense lobbying of local and national politicians was required to get the support that was necessary for gaining the right to hold the exposition.

For San Francisco the final decision for determining the location of the world's fair lay in the hands of Congress. During what was known as the "argument week" (October 1910), congressmen were inundated with over two million pieces of mail petitioning them to favor one city over another. In the end, San Francisco was able to gain the votes in Congress and secure itself as the location for the P.P.I.E. President William H. Taft signed a joint resolution on February 15, 1911 designating San Francisco the "Exposition City." Before very long other California and West Coast cities were also allowed to advertise the P.P.I.E. on their postal cancellations. Over 540 million pieces of mail were sent out by the San Francisco Post Office with a special cancellation.

Presidents William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson were both instrumental in carrying forward the massive project. Taft



One of the exhibit rooms in the State Capitol Building featuring the PPIE exhibition. It featured many items reproduced from the State Library's collections. The spectacular banners decorating the walls were brilliantly designed by Renato Consolini of the Department of Parks and Recreation staff.

took part in the groundbreaking ceremony in 1911, while Wilson, who was unable to attend the fair, officially opened the P.P.I.E.

Government played a pivotal role in the exposition. Without the coordinated efforts of national, state, and local leaders, the fair would never have taken place. Between 1904 and 1915, three of California's governors took an active role in moving the project forward. The California State Legislature passed laws and resolutions to aid in the promotion and support of the P.P.I.E. Even the wording of the 1879 State Constitution was changed so as to allow for raising a special tax to help provide \$5 million for the exposition.

San Francisco's newly elected mayor and later governor of California, James Rolph, Jr., worked tirelessly to make the fair a reality. As the "World's Fair Mayor," Rolph

helped to successfully rally the voter's support for a \$5 million bond measure to support the construction of the P.P.I.E. Crucial to Mayor Rolph's plans were building up the city's infrastructure, such as water supply, street car lines, and a new civic center.

#### FOUR MILLION DOLLAR MEETING

The P.P.I.E. was both a public and private enterprise and the product of many years of planning and effort. Tens of millions of dollars were raised by state and local governments and the private sector. Because the fair did not receive any federal money, private fundraising was critical to the success of the P.P.I.E. The full participation of the business community would be essential if plans for the fair were to go forward.

On August 28, 1910, San Francisco and California boosters came together for the

"four million dollar meeting." Within less than two hours, they had pledged \$4,089,000 in support of the fair. Soon more money followed from California counties, corporations, companies, and benefactors, until more than \$20 million was raised.

The exposition was intended to be a money-making venture. This was the top priority that shaped the planning for the fair. Many well-known companies from the Golden State, some still even in business today, contributed to the funding for the P.P.I.E. Because many earlier expositions had ended in financial failure, special consultants were brought in, who made important recommendations to assure the financial success of the fair. They called for attracting enough visitors projecting ticket sales, licensing, creating exhibition