

A HISTORY OF THE HOME ECONOMY/AMERICAN LEGION BUILDING

The Home Economy Building (also known as the Pan-Pacific Building, the Cafe of the World, and the American Legion Building) existed in Balboa Park from 1915 to 1962. The names indicate the changing uses to which the building was put over the years. Since the building no longer exists, readers may wonder why it is now the subject of a research paper. The answer is that the history of the building and the decision to destroy it tell a story about the conflicting uses of Balboa Park's central mesa, the attachment that citizens have formed toward former exposition buildings, and the counter forces that work for the replacement of these buildings with more economical modern models.



Architect Carleton Monroe Winslow designed the Home Economy Building with the assistance of architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, who had originally hired him as an assistant. The building was first called the Electricity Building, but the name changed after it had been determined that it would display household goods that appealed primarily to housewives at the Panama-California Exposition following the Exposition's official opening, January 1, 1915. Winslow got his ideas for the building's design from plates of buildings in Mexico that were part of Sylvester Baxter's book *Spanish Colonial Architecture in Mexico*, which Baxter wrote with the help of Goodhue, who accompanied him on a visit to Mexico in 1899. The one exception to this borrowing, was Winslow's use of the tower of the Palace of the Count of Monterrey (1539) at Salamanca, Spain on

the southwest corner of the building. This Plateresque-style tower was well-known and had been used by Spain at the 1900 Universal Exposition, held in Paris.



Tower of Home Economy Building

While the building was like buildings in Mexico and in Spain in details, its overall design was effective, which is not always the case with buildings made from the shreds and patches of other buildings. It was not awkward or lopsided. The *San Diego Union* described the building as occupying a ground area 136 by 323 feet, with balconies projecting on the second level, a tower at the southwest corner and arcades on south and west sides. (*San Diego Union*, February 2, 1913, 8:1). Rather than the patios flanked by arcades and small rooms in Spanish and Spanish-Colonial palaces, it contained an auditorium or exhibit room and two galleries at ground level.

A lower-level arcade jutted forward from the side facing the Plaza de Panama. It was united to the main mass of the building by a projecting pavilion. This pavilion had three arches at the lower level and three rectangular openings at the upper from which blue and gold awnings hung down over balcony railings. Arcades and pavilion were repeated on the El Prado side, though here the pavilion had five arches at the lower level and five rectangular openings at the upper. It was decorated on first and second levels with baroque detail on the walls and on the faces of engaged pilasters.



Arcade and Trellises of Home Economy Building\

A recessed space to the north of the west (Plaza de Panama)-side pavilion on the upper level contained wooden trellises that supported flowering vines. Red bougainvillea covered arcades and exterior walls of the building. Roof gardens, vines and espaliered planting on the public faces of buildings are not characteristic of Moorish, Spanish or Spanish-Colonial architecture. They were, however, features of Neo-Classical architecture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

While the pavilion was derived from the Palace of the Count of Heras in Mexico City (Baxter, plate 43), its use of awnings was taken from other buildings whose photographs can be found in Baxter's book (Baxter, plates 45, 46). In Mexico, awnings are used for shade. Their secondary application as decoration was fortuitous.



Palace of the Count of Heras, Mexico City

In a thesis he wrote for the University of San Diego in 1976, Carleton Winslow, Jr., the son of the architect, called attention to the way the towers of the Home Economy and the Foreign Arts Buildings acted as pivots, turning the arcades from the Plaza de Panama into El Prado. The pivot was not only functional as the complementary massing and placement of both towers provided an intriguing counterpoint. Towers of both buildings were used as nesting places for an estimated two thousand pigeons who were trained to flutter down to the Plaza de Panama where they became a tourist attraction and the subject of innumerable photographs.

Frank P. Allen, Director of Works for the Panama-California Exposition, was in charge of construction. R. H. Schmohl did the lath cement work and stucco ornament for the building. He was assisted by modelers who used the completed floor space inside the building as a workshop. Artisans tinted the stucco covering a light gray, the same tint they used on all the temporary buildings. They chose this color supposedly because it gave the buildings an air of antiquity. Cost of construction came to \$41,719.

As striking as the Home Economy Building appeared when viewed from the Plaza de Panama and El Prado, its lack of ornament on the east side facing the Lagoon of Flowers in front of the Botanical Building helped to frame the open space and north-south axis that dropped from the Botanical Building across El Prado to the edge of a canyon. The sparsely-decorated east side of the building complemented the plain west side of the Varied Industries and Food Products Building, which it faced across the open lagoon.



Home Economy Building, East Side under Construction

Construction began in February 1913 and was completed in September of the same year, the first of the exposition buildings to be completed. Exhibits inside the building consisted of washing machines, ranges, toasters, vacuum cleaners, and other appliances that made housekeeping comfortable and economical. It was thought that the majority of visitors would be women; however no count was made of the number who visited the exhibits. Many of the exhibits were superfluous as similar displays of modern appliances were shown in the Model Farm Home, northeast of the main exposition group.

When the Exposition continued in 1916 as the Panama California International Exposition, the Exposition Corporation renamed the building the Pan-Pacific Building. The new name was necessary as the building now held exhibits from countries that bordered the Pacific Ocean. These included exhibits from Australia, New Zealand, Siam, the Philippines, Hawaii, and Alaska, many of which were shipped from the recently-closed Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Java, China and South American countries may also have sent exhibits. The reason for this tentative statement is that newspapers were good at telling what was going to happen, but bad at telling what did happen.

Exhibits were attractively arranged. Attendants from the countries represented wore native costumes and played native music. The Hawaii exhibit, consisting of tanks of tropical fish, fruit, sugar cane and natives who sang and danced, was the most interesting with the exhibit of furs, skins, ivory carvings, baskets, Eskimo needlework and minerals from Alaska running a close second. The Philippine government forwarded industrial,

forestry, agricultural and educational exhibits from the San Francisco Exposition. Theirs was the largest exhibit in the building, occupying 6000 square feet of space. Along with restaurants in the House of Hospitality across El Prado on the south and coffee shops in the Palace of International Arts, diagonally across the Plaza de Panama on the southwest, the building contained a refreshment shop run by the Philippine contingent. Some --- if not all --- the exhibitors operated concessions within the building in which they sold native products, curios and souvenirs. Managers of the Philippine concession were more blunt than other exhibitors when they announced their intention was "to make the United States in particular, and the world in general, permanent consumers of Philippine products." (*San Diego Evening Tribune*, March 10, 1916, 8:1-7).

The U.S. Navy took over the building during World War I at which time it was used at as a Y.M.C.A. Sailors trained in the park for 16 weeks before being transferred to duty at sea. The camp was capable of caring for 5000 men at one time. They found amusement on the Plaza de Panama, during breaks from training, where dances, and band concerts were held. The nearby Y.M.C.A. provided similar activities and pool and billiard tables. Finding the demand to be greater than the supply, the Y.M.C.A. opened a gymnasium in the Sacramento Valley Building and a library and study room in the Science of Man Building, buildings which, with the Home Economy Building, had their main entrances on the Plaza de Panama. A newspaper reporter estimated the number of apprentice seamen given liberty in San Diego each week as 3200 to which he added that many of the seamen preferred to stay in the park because they found it more entertaining than downtown San Diego. (*San Diego Union*, October 12, 1917, 5:2-5).

The Navy paid the Park Department to convert the building for its use, which work consisted mainly of repairing roofs and sides of the building and installing washing and sewage facilities. It is not known how much money was paid to the City by the U.S. Government at the end of the war to compensate for wear and tear.

For many years after the war, the building was unused. Its condition was exceptionally bad because of its flimsy construction and inadequate foundation. It had, after all, been put up to last the one year that the Exposition was supposed to run. Then it was to be torn down per a verbal agreement the Exposition Corporation had made with supervising architect Goodhue. In 1922, proponents of renovation, consisting of George W. Marston, Henry C. Ryan, John Forward, Jr., G. Aubrey Davidson, Hugo Klauber, and Mayor John L. Bacon, conducted a campaign to raise \$110,000 to patch up nine buildings. About \$9,573 of this sum was used to renovate the Home Economy Building. George Edward Chase, who had worked on the buildings at the time of their construction, supervised the renovation. The work consisted of replacing temporary foundations, roofs and exterior plaster with long-lasting materials. The *San Diego Union* claimed that the buildings were now "virtually permanent." (*San Diego Union*, December 16, 1923, Real Estate & Development, 9:1-2).

Meanwhile, the American Legion began asking for one of the buildings in Balboa Park for their use. They asked for the San Joaquin Building, but soon changed to a request for the Home Economy Building because it was in better shape, had more floor

space, and occupied a premium location on the Plaza de Panama. Their request presented the City with a quandary for there was no denying that the Legion's use of a public building in a public park would be for private purposes. The Legion got around this hurdle by agreeing to install a museum of World War I relics.

The American Legion Building (full name American Legion War Memorial Building) was dedicated January 6, 1924. Contralto and Grossmont-resident Schumann-Heink had agreed to sing at the dedication but canceled. To make up for her absence, she sang at a concert on June 12 to which admission was charged and at which some 2500 attended, which was 500 short of the building's capacity.

The Legion used the building for meetings, dances, concerts and lectures at which the public could attend, usually after paying a fee. In November 1925, General and Mrs. Marshall O. Terry gave the Legion a bronze memorial tablet, seven feet and ten inches long and five feet eleven inches high, bearing the names of San Diego county men who gave their lives during World War I. The tablet was unveiled on November 15 at the north end of the meeting room in the American Legion Building, where it was mounted on a background of blue velvet.

Repairs in 1922 could not stop the deterioration of the temporary buildings; therefore, it was no surprise when Oscar Knecht, the city's chief building inspector, in March 1933, condemned them, giving \$256,200 as the grand total for rehabilitation and \$20,200 as the cost for rehabilitating the American Legion Building. Mayor Harry C. Clark added fuel to the fire by saying, "None of the buildings is suitable to the purposes to which it is devoted and modern structures must soon take the place of these temporary buildings." These foreboding words went unheeded as Wayne L. Van Schaick, Colonel Ed Fletcher, George W. Marston, and Gertrude Gilbert mounted a second campaign for funds which raised about \$25,000. Architect Richard Requa estimated repairs to the Home Economy building would come to \$9,832 and repairs to all seven of the condemned buildings to \$70,490. He did not claim that the buildings would be "virtually permanent"; only that they would last from 5 to 10 years. Since various state and federal government agencies were available to supply additional money and labor, the task of renovation was not as difficult as it had been in 1922. About 210 men, culled from the unemployment rolls, did the work under the supervision of George Edward Chase. They put concrete foundations under the edges of buildings, strengthened roofs, and rebuilt crumbling facades.

At about the same time the renovations were completed, the City decided to hold the California Pacific International Exposition. The Legion, which had resumed occupancy of the former Home Economy Building, was requested to leave. During the two-year run of the Exposition, the Home Economy/American Legion Building functioned as the Cafe of the World. Architect Sam Hamill remodeled the interior for this purpose, with most of the money for the changes coming from a State Employment Relief Association allotment. It is not known who was responsible for the decoration, but supporting pillars on the dance floor, disguised to look like palm trees, gave the cavernous space a light and buoyant air. The main dining room, which seated 850, represented a Spanish courtyard.

Another smaller private dining room seated 125 while a lounge area, centered around a fountain, could seat 400. Attendants at two oval-shaped bars dispensed a variety of drinks.

The Cafe of the World was larger and more informal than the Cafe del Rey Moro, which opened in the remodeled House of Hospitality, just across El Prado on the south. Hostesses wore the holiday costumes of Italy, Switzerland, Spain and Japan. Entertainment consisted of an orchestra which played lively and popular music for listening and dancing. The manager of the Cafe booked other entertainers for one or two shows in the evenings, usually at 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., both lasting about 45 minutes. Lodges and clubs reserved spaces in the Cafe for special nights. The Cafe was generally a well-run and respectable establishment to which husbands could take their wives and single men their mothers. The most distinguished performers in 1935 were dancers Darlene Walders and the Hudson Metzger girls and Chiquita, who was called "the Mexican nightingale," and in 1936 comedians Olsen and Johnson and dancers Sally Rand and Rosita Royce. Entertainers in 1935 came from stock companies; those in 1936 had been booked by the Exposition for shows in the Palace of Entertainment and the Plaza del Pacifico.



Café of the World, Interior

After the Exposition, the American Legion resumed its tenancy of the building, the expense of conversion being borne by relief agencies. City Manager Flack had reservations about the Legion's use of the building, but he allowed it providing other agencies would be permitted to use the building. The Legion continued to occupy the building until the outbreak of World War II. In addition to war exhibits, the Legion put in a library, reception hall, lounge, memorial chapel, and an auditorium. The Legion appears to have been a good neighbor. If the rowdy parties for which some Legionnaires were notorious took place, newspapers did not mention them.

During World War II the building was used by the U.S. Navy as a commissary, becoming part of a great hospital complex in Balboa Park. The Navy paid the American Legion for furniture it took over, owned by the Legion, tore out a stage and adjacent partitions, and installed equipment for issuing supplies.

The U.S. Navy paid the City \$790,000 and gave the City 35 temporary structures ranging from plywood shacks to stucco buildings for damages incurred during its use of Balboa Park buildings. In 1947, consultant Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. recommended that the American Legion Building be demolished along with the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Electric and Food and Beverage Buildings. Olmsted also approved plans to replace the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars Buildings with new east and west wings of the Fine Arts Gallery. Building. Inspector Oscar Knecht, and City Manager Fred Rhodes added the Canadian Legion, House of Hospitality and House of Charm to the list of condemned buildings in July; however exasperated citizens objected to their demolition. Prominent among them was G. Aubrey Davidson, chairman of the Balboa Park Restoration Committee and former president of the Panama-California Exposition. Money for repairs came, however, not from annoyed citizens but from reimbursements the Navy had given the City to restore the buildings to their prewar condition, now increased to \$840,000 due to the sale of surplus wartime buildings. Repairs being cosmetic rather than substantial, they left the buildings in a state of arrested rigor mortis. Occasional doses of medicine were subsequently administered to relieve the pain.

On the whole, protests against demolition were not as vehement as those in 1922 and in 1933 because most of the original protesters had died and because people could see that the buildings were on their last legs. Joseph Dryer, vice president of the 1935 Exposition, was among those who proposed keeping the facades and tearing down the rest. Most of the buildings in the Palisades section, put up for the 1935 California-Pacific International Exposition, were spared from demolition because Leo Calland, Park and Recreation Director, wanted to use them for recreation and convention facilities.

Architect William Templeton Johnson drew up plans for a new building to replace the American Legion Building in 1947. He may have drawn up plans for a building to replace the Veterans of Foreign Wars (1935 Medical Arts, 1915 Science and Education) Building on the northwest side of El Prado. In any case, the construction cost for each of the buildings was estimated at between \$300,000 and \$400,000. The buildings were to be used as extensions of the crowded Fine Arts Gallery. Johnson wanted to replace all the buildings on El Prado with buildings of his own design. To promote this goal, he wrote a letter to the San Diego Union, April 20, 1933, suggesting that temporary buildings in Balboa Park be replaced.

Johnson's design for a new building borrowed ideas from the original building.

It had a corner tower and a truncated version of the arcades. Being L-shaped and extending 40 feet east and about 100 feet south, it was smaller than the Home Economy/American Legion Building. Ornament was similar to that on the Fine Arts Museum, which Johnson had designed in 1924. Whether it was the best design possible, given the necessity of designing a building that would match its surroundings, can be

debated. It was, on the whole, an academic performance without the zest, spontaneity, and naiveté characteristic of Mexican Spanish-Colonial architecture. Johnson's design was soon put aside, though it was always in the background as a possibility should the money arise.



By the time the City got around to the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars Buildings, it discovered the money it had received from U.S. Navy had been spent. But the Fine Arts Gallery's plan for expansion (and not Johnson's sketches) was the main reason why the buildings were not restored.

For 16 years after City Building Inspector Knecht had issued his condemnation, the vacant American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars Buildings went from bad to worse. They were left standing as "window dressing," to preserve El Prado's resemblance to a Spanish-Colonial city.

Meanwhile, a crisis occurred in the Fine Arts Gallery when Anne Putnam withdrew her paintings and instigated a conspiracy to fire Reginald Poland, the Gallery's director. Finally in 1958, the Putnam faction, working in tandem with the Timken Foundation started the process for a new building to replace the Home Economy/American Legion Building. The new building would house the Timken and Putnam collections of paintings

and the Putnam collection of icons. The Timkens in the equation were heirs of Henry H. Timken, founder of the Timken Roller Bearing Company. Putnam money came from Henry Putnam, the inventor of a wire fastener to hold corks on bottles and of Pressure jar closing devices, and owner of the Bennington Water Company and the Brooklyn Elevated Company. He was the uncle of Anne, Amy and Irene Putnam.

Various versions of the joint Timken-Putnam proposal emerged from the shadows to the light of public scrutiny. Trustees of the foundations promised that the City would "exercise control over the architectural pattern of the outside of the building." Eventually, the two foundations came out in support of a new, boxlike, honed-down building. It would be designed by San Diego architect Frank Hope and would be different from the Spanish-Colonial revival styles of surviving Exposition buildings. The proposal generated heated and fascinating discussions over the merits of the imitation Spanish-Colonial architecture which so many people in San Diego and throughout the country had admired. Two camps formed with the City Council veering toward those who supported preservation. The Harland Bartholomew Planners, who prepared a Master Plan for Balboa Park, adopted by the Council in 1960, said buildings in the Prado area should "be harmonious with Classic Spanish architecture," claiming further that the requirement was not restrictive because "there are many styles of Spanish architecture some of which utilize most simple and direct building forms." Whatever the planners meant, their words were imprecise enough to be bent in many directions.

The following comments give something of the intensity and flavor of the part intellectual, part emotional, and part opportunistic arguments. When I recall the war-torn buildings of Vienna, Austria and Nuernburg [sic], Germany, and how those citizens, who can ill afford the cost of restoration, have so painstakingly restored their revered buildings, I wonder what has happened to our civic pride and to our appreciation of our world-famous park.

Eleanor B. Edmiston

We know the temporary buildings have long outlasted their usefulness and many are a hazard to life and property. They must be renewed. Let us keep the replacements as near as possible to the originals.

Philip P. Martin

The beautiful facade of [the Fine Arts Museum] is reminiscent of that of the famous old University of Salamanca in Spain, and unless there is some undercover plot to scrape it off and change it, there can be no reasonable argument for not keeping surrounding wings and buildings in conformity.

Mrs. Hannah Coss

No famous triumph of architecture of the past or present is a copy of an older model. The Acropolis, the Alhambra, Versailles, Taj Mahal, such places are unique, and they

retain their timeless appeal because they are supreme expressions of the particular time and place in which they were built.

Jackson Woolley

Architects are generally against the dishonest, eclectic and misfit adaptation of old styles for false impression; we are equally against the designer who would create a misfit new form of structure that is not compatible to its surroundings. Somewhere between dishonest imitation of the past and stark individuality of an architect's separate monumentality [sic] lies the fine new architecture design character for Balboa Park.

Robert E. Des Lauriers, president San Diego Chapter, American Institute of Architects

After all the to and fro, the Council on September 14, 1961, by a vote of 7 to 0, decided in favor of the new building. Their decision was prompted by the fear that the City would lose the Timken-Putnam collection if the new building was not accepted. A fear that had been fanned by lawyers in charge of the Timken and Putnam Foundations and by editorials in the *San Diego Union* (*San Diego Union*, August 27, 1961, C-2: 1-2; September 9, 1961, B-2: 1-2).

In the middle of August 1963, wrecking crews demolished the Home Economy/American Legion Building, which had served the people of San Diego well during its life and would have continued to serve the people even better if a reproduction of the building had replaced the old, as citizens and architects had suggested.

It is obvious to almost everyone that Balboa Park has lost a harmonious ensemble on the Plaza de Panama. The compact asymmetrical organization of the Home Economy/American Legion Building, its delicate adjustment of open and closed spaces, and its function as a foil for the House of Hospitality on the south side of El Prado are gone forever. The contrast of design of the corner towers on both buildings can no longer be seen, commented upon, and appreciated. The vivid prose with which Clarence Stein, draftsman for Bertram Goodhue, described the charm of the shaded approaches to dramatic open spaces along El Prado no longer rings true:

We have imitated the Piazza San Marco in Venice, the squares of St. Peter's and the Capitol in Rome. But in so doing we have perhaps forgotten the charm of the approach to these big places, Their impression gains in force from the contrast with the narrow streets that give access to them, whose interest is due not to any symmetrical unity, but to the accidental variety of daily life. On the one hand, the great focal points and the main arteries speak of the dignity of government and the easy movement of commerce. But we need also the more intimate side of city planning, the byways with their little shops, the occasional drinking fountain at a street corner, the glimpse of some secluded garden through a half-open gate. (*The Architecture of the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition*, Paul Elder & Co., San Francisco, 1916, p. 11)

It was the essential friendliness of Goodhue's, Winslow's and Frank P. Allen's designs for the Exposition buildings in Balboa Park and their associations with the glamour and opulence of a vanished past that made these buildings endearing to people. The Committee of 100, organized in 1967, to continue the fight to preserve surviving Exposition buildings in Balboa Park has had great success in pursuing this goal of preservation and reconstruction. On another front, the San Diego City Council, on January 18, 1968, established a policy of putting only Spanish-Colonial Revival style buildings on El Prado and in the Plaza de Panama. The effect is to prevent the construction of additional slick sparse buildings like the west wing of the Fine Arts Museum and the Timken Gallery; however, the cow has left the barn.