

Chapter 14

LEGACY OF

THE 1935-1936 EXPOSITION

On a national level, critics and historians regard the San Diego Fairs of 1935-1936 as an interlude between major World's Fairs in Chicago in 1933 and in San Francisco and New York City in 1939. It generated neither the excitement, publicity nor profit of these international celebrations. The use of "international" in the title of the California-Pacific International Exposition was a hope, not a reality. 1930's architecture in the Palisade area and scattered in other places was not outstanding. The running-water motif on the exterior of the Water Building was unintentionally humorous. Architecture critics of the time (and many since) described the Ford Building as an example of Art Moderne, an art of stripped-down, delicately-honed surfaces. Its resemblance to an automobile gear laid on its side or to a giant washing machine was reminiscent of popular mimetic architecture—the Brown Derby Restaurant, shaped like a brown derby, and Tail O' the Pup, shaped like a hot-dog, in Los Angeles; Bondurant's Pharmacy, shaped like a mortar and pestle, in Lexington, Kentucky; and Longsberger Company Headquarters, shaped like a basket, in Newark, Ohio—though such amusing comparisons would have horrified Walter Dorwin Teague, who designed the Ford Building as a tribute to the mind-cleansing, labor-saving potentialities of modern industry.

Many of the San Diego Exposition's gardens evoked admiration, but except for the Alcazar Gardens and the Garden of the Café del Rey Moro, they were either ephemeral or fell into disuse. The Nudist Colony and the appearance of Sally Rand lingered long in the memory of visitors, but these novelties were also major features in the Fairs in Chicago, Fort Worth and San Francisco. The extraordinary pastel-colored lighting did much to atone for the drabness of the architecture and was remembered many years after as contributing to the fairytale gloss of the Exposition.

The educational aspects of the Fair centered in the Palaces of Science, Education and Fine Arts. Since these were continuing exhibits, their dependence on the Fair for quality or for attendance was transitory. Much of

what was special about the exhibits came from Chicago and went to Dallas, Fort Worth, Cleveland, San Francisco and New York City.

Among the unique features that survived the Exposition, the House of Pacific Relations has had a long and, for the most part, amicable history. Its story waits to be told by someone with “inside” knowledge.

As the director Frank Drugan of the Exposition put entertainment ahead of other aspects of the California-Pacific International Exposition, it is no accident that the Old Globe Theater was an exhilarating venture that attracted sizeable audiences. The idea of an Elizabethan theater was not original as there was an Old Globe at Chicago’s Century of Progress (1933-1934) the Texas Centennial at Dallas (1936) and the Cleveland Great Lakes Exposition (1936-1937) The Ashland Festival Theater, an adjunct of the University of Southern Oregon specialized in presenting Shakespeare’s plays in 1935, almost simultaneously, with the first Old Globe Theater in Balboa Park, and put up in 1958 what it said was a replica the Fortune Theater in Elizabethan London, an open-air theater that is more “authentic” than the reconverted Old Globe in San Diego.

While many State and Federal Relief work projects left tangible results in Balboa Park, others benefited the greater San Diego community. Among these the San Diego City/Country Administration Building on Pacific Highway, built between 1935 and 1937 is, perhaps, the most significant federal contribution to San Diego’s well being.(1) The full impact of State and Federal assistance to San Diego during the Depression remains to be told, but Richard Lovitt’s claim that “the impact of the New Deal in . . . [California] was considerably less than in any other part of the West,” is misleading, in so far as this claim applies to San Diego.(2) This chapter concentrates on the legacy of the 1935-1936 San Diego Expositions as it pertains to Balboa Park and not on its physical and economic contributions to the City and County of San Diego and to the State of California. If readers are not interested in this phase of the Exposition’s influence, they are advised to skip the chapter.

City Manager Robert Flack set up a Citizens' Advisory Committee, chaired by Julius Wangenheim, to tell him what to do with the buildings after the California-Pacific International Exposition.(3,) Whatever use was found for them, it had to conform with Section 55 of the City Charter which specified that city parks and cemeteries had to be used "for park, recreation

and cemetery purposes." To define what "acceptable" park purposes were, the City Council, October 29, 1936, enacted New Series Ordinance No. 1013. It said that so long as users of park buildings were "noncommercial local societies, groups and organizations engaged in civic, social, educational, cultural, recreational or philanthropic work," the Council would allow them to occupy buildings.

The Council directed Manager Flack to decide if applicants for buildings were engaged in the right kind of work, subject to final Council certification.(4) Societies, businesses and clubs with restricted memberships could operate in a dedicated public park if they provided a public service.(5) Food and souvenir stands were appropriate operations as they generated revenue and people expressed their approval by patronizing them. If this watered-down interpretation sounds like giving away the kitchen sink, this is what happened.

Wangenheim's Committee recommended demolishing the Water and Electricity Building, the Standard Oil Tower, the Palisades Cafe, the Rainbow Fountain, the Latter Day Saints Building, the Arch of the Future and reflecting lagoons, Modeltown, the Amusement Zone, and the Athletic Field. Federal, General Exhibits, California State, Entertainment, Education, Christian Science and Ford Buildings and the Ford Bowl would stay.(6) The Committee ignored the "Roads of the Pacific." Had they forgotten it was there?

Architect Louis Bodmer drew up plans to strip the fiberboard ornament from the Federal Building and to turn the building into a Civic Auditorium at a cost of about \$200,000. The use was permissible as City Charter and Ordinance No. 1013 didn't say it wasn't.(7) Ironically, Bodmer's streamlined facade provided a better match for other moderne style buildings along the Plaza de America and better articulation of detail than the pseudo-Maya mishmash Larrinaga had concocted. Inspired by this act of iconoclasm, architect Frank Hope submitted a plan to turn the Ford Building into a planetarium with a large observatory dome covering the patio.(8) These plans were much discussed, but, as Works Projects Administration funding and labor had been diverted to other projects, nothing was done to implement them.

City Manager Flack leased the 1936 Press Building (the 1915 Kansas Building) to the San Diego Floral Society, granted the Photographic Arts

Society the right to occupy the Christian Science Building, (9) gave the Civilian Conservation Corps Camp to the Camp Fire Girls, (10) and allowed the City Playgrounds and Park Department to use the Palace of Electricity.(11..)

The City Manager also approved allowing a group of educational associations, including the Parent -Teachers' Association, the Board of Education, and representatives from city and county schools and colleges to use the Palace of Education.(12) Not having received a firm application, the Manager set aside the Palace of Entertainment for joint use by the Barn Players and Medical, Dental, and Nursing Associations.(13) Unlike ambitious but underfinanced applicants, the 251st Coast Artillery moved into the California State Building in June 1937 and turned it into an armory.(14) City Manager Flack said that since the public could go into the building from time to time to see what was going on, its use as an armory did not contradict the City Charter.(15)

Buildings that had not been allocated were available for use as soon as someone came up with money to cover costs of insurance and promised to pay costs of maintenance. Even at these bargain rates, tenants were slow in coming. Some, citing Section 64 of the City Charter authorizing the City to appropriate funds to "institutions of an educational, scientific, historical and cultural character," suggested the City should pay them for occupying the buildings.(16)

After they had raised over \$10,000, the Barn Players, reorganized as the San Diego Community Players, negotiated a lease for the Old Globe Theater. Workers employed by the Works Projects Administration tore down the interior and replaced it with "a concrete shell." To make it possible to stage plays requiring scenery, they demolished the open-style Elizabethan stage and built a stage with a traditional proscenium arch.(17) Mrs. Mary Belcher Trapnell, president of the Players, said the group would be open "to everyone in the community interested in the drama," provided they paid their dues.(18)

The Old Globe has had an amazing history. Like the phoenix it literally rose from the ashes after a disastrous fire in 1978. Starting in 1937 as a stage for community players, in 1982 it went to professional actors. It has been the training ground for innumerable stage, movie and television actors. Under the direction of Craig Noel, from 1949, and Jack O'Brien,

from 1981, it has seen many of its productions go on to success on the New York stage. Along with the San Diego Zoological Gardens, it is nationally, if not internationally, famous. Through its doors, many San Diegans have become acquainted with the wonders of a multi-faceted theater. It has brought money and tourists to the City

The City Manager gave Sherman Trease, president of an association of artists, permission to occupy Spanish Village. The cottages were as flimsy as the Old Globe. They lacked windows and when blinds and shutters were down, they were dark and uncomfortable. Under terms of their lease, the Art Association could charge rents for studios and shops; even so, studios and shops were not supposed to make a profit.(19)

The American Legion resumed its tenancy of the Cafe of the World, (20) and the Women's Auditorium Association took back its management of the House of Hospitality.(21) The Natural History Museum, Fine Arts Gallery, San Diego Museum, and San Diego Zoo went back to regular schedules.

As 1936 came to an end, the Medical Science, Better Homes, Food and Beverage, Entertainment, General Exhibits, and Federal Buildings and the House of Charm were without permanent tenants. The City Manager allowed the Red Cross to use rooms in the Better Homes Building for offices, and granted appliance and electric companies yearly permission to stage an electric home show on the main floor.(22) The event became such a regular occurrence that everyone in the City began calling the building the "Electric Building."

Wangenheim's Committee hoped the Works Progress Administration would use the Food and Beverage Building for relief projects for about 400 women. On finding the building to be drafty and cold, the women moved their operation to the Federal Building. Forgetting for the moment that they held office at the City Manager's pleasure, Park Board members muttered that work projects had nothing to do with cultural activities and that the Relief Agency was using all the automobile parking spaces.(23) Showing the iron fist in its velvet-gloved hand, the Agency responded that if the City wouldn't cooperate, it would stop funding park improvements.(24)

After they asked for the same privileges that the City Manager had given the American Legion, then City Manager Rhodes assigned the

Medical Science Building to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.(25) The rival organizations faced one another across the Plaza de Panama.

Joseph W. Sefton, Jr., president of the San Diego Trust & Savings Bank and a former director of the Panama-California Exposition, spoke out against the continued use of exposition buildings. "They are hideous and ugly," he declared. "If we could have a few permanent buildings put in the park after a careful study of it, I would not have objected to that. Had we torn out the 1915 Exposition buildings and landscaped the park, we should have a beautiful place there now and not a long row of ramshackle buildings." (26)

Despite Park Board grumbling over the loss of authority, the City Manager had the power to enforce the City Charter and Ordinance No. 1013. Councilman Siebert said the Park Board has so little power, it should be eliminated.(27)

In 1939, then City Manager Fred Rhodes fired W. Allen Perry as park superintendent and replaced him with Percy J. Broell.(28) Terming the dismissal unjustified, the Civil Service Commission reinstated Perry.(29) Perry kept his post, but as the City Manager could overrule Park Board decisions, its members stopped complaining about his highhanded methods.

The U.S. Naval Hospital's occupation of El Prado and the Palisades during World War II postponed the destruction of deteriorating Exposition buildings that Sefton had advocated. Efforts to restore the buildings after the war were ineffectual because public attention had been diverted to citywide projects. The demolition of the 1915 Science and Education Building and the 1915 Home Economy Building in the 1960's to make way for the Timken Art Gallery and the west wing of the San Diego Museum of Art foreshadowed what was going to happen to the remains of the temporary Exposition Buildings. The Harland Bartholomew planners substantiated this premonition when they recommended demolishing the Commerce and Industries, Varied Industries and Food Products, and Indian Arts Buildings, originally built for the 1915 Exposition, and the Federal, California State, and Ford Buildings, and the Palaces of Education and of Varied Industries, originally built for the 1935 Exposition.(30)

To forestall the Bartholomew recommendations as they applied to El Prado, Bea Evenson and Sam Hamill organized the Committee of 100 in

1967. Through her efforts, the San Diego City Council adopted a policy requiring the use of a Spanish-Colonial Revival style on all buildings to be constructed on El Prado. Evenson canvassed donors and exerted political pressure to ensure the rebuilding of the 1915 Varied Industries and Food Products Building as the Casa del Prado in 1970-1971 and the rebuilding of the 1915 Commerce and Industries Building as the Casa de Balboa in 1981.(31) The Committee was a force behind the listing of El Prado and Palisades survivors of the 1915 and 1935 Expositions along with the 1926 San Diego Fine Arts Gallery and the 1933 San Diego Museum of Natural History as components of a National Historic Landmark in 1978.(32) The Committee continues to advocate the preservation of Exposition buildings and of the Spanish-Colonial atmosphere of El Prado, its latest successes being the rebuilding of the House of Charm (1915 Indian Arts Building) in 1996 and the House of Hospitality (1915 Foreign and Domestic Arts Building) in 1997.

If the remaining Exposition Buildings and the uses to which they are put may be regarded as the outstanding cultural legacy of the 1915-1916 and 1935-1936 Expositions, and the Spreckels Organ Pavilion may be regarded as the outstanding social legacy of the first Exposition, the outstanding social legacy of the second may be the House of Pacific Relations. Member organizations of the House make up rules and organize weekend entertainments. During these celebrations, representatives from each House sing, dance, play music and wear clothes characteristic of the countries from which they or their parents came. Despite occasional riffs, the House fulfils the aspirations of Frank Drugan, its founder:

The House of Pacific Relations aims to provide a natural healthful means of keeping the international mind from going insane under the sordid strain that world events are now putting upon it. The House of Pacific Relations invites the nations of the world to live together and play together in the spirit of good fellowship that can knit them together more closely than societies that use the form of debate to provoke not agreement but disagreement.(33)

Beginning in 1972, the Visitors' Center in St. Louis, Missouri put on a week-long festival in Forest Park that emulates the House of Pacific Relations in Balboa Park. As with the House of Pacific Relations, the sponsoring organizations do not charge admission. African, German, Czechoslovakian, Mexican, Greek, Israel, Scottish, Scandinavian, Latin

American, Hungarian and Serbian ethnic groups set up tents where they play music, show crafts, and serve foreign food.(34) The festival in St. Louis lasts one week. In Balboa Park it continues year-round.

Unlike the permissive City Charter and Ordinance No. 1013, an act passed by the California State Legislature of 1870-1871 declared that City Park (today Balboa Park) was "to be held in trust forever . . . for the purpose of a public park . . . and for no other or different purpose." Everyone owned the park; therefore, everyone was entitled to use it. The San Diego City Charter still subscribes to the notion that the park belongs to people. It is for this reason that property and buildings in the park are owned by the City and leased to organizations and groups who agree to allow unrestricted public access.

To comply with the requirement that access should always be open to everyone, museums, when they first came to Balboa Park, did not charge admission. Dues from members and disbursements from the City paid expenses. Hoping, perhaps, that no one would notice what they were doing, directors of museums began to change the free admission policy. At first, they asserted charging admission would reduce vandalism; then they claimed revenue generated by admissions would defray operating expenses and improve the quality of exhibits.(35) To appear to comply with the City Charter while collecting admission money, the museums got the free admission requirement reduced to the first Tuesday of each month.

In 1990, the Central Balboa Park Association decided to change free admission to museums on the first Tuesday of the month to admission to a different set of museums on each Tuesday of the month. Unimpressed by such liberality, the *San Diego Tribune* editorialized, "Every Tuesday should be a free day—for all the museums." (36)

The Reuben H. Fleet, Starlight and Globe Theaters do not offer free admissions. The Zoo grants residents a special low admission pass in recognition that it receives money from a property tax assessment (a total of \$3,241,801 in its fiscal year ending January 3, 1993). Availability of such low admission passes is not publicized and few know how to obtain them.

Land and buildings in Balboa Park are public property, but exhibits inside the buildings belong to the museums. There is uncertainty as to ownership of animals in the zoo as title remains vested in the City.(37)

Balboa Park is San Diego's fourth largest public park. The La Jolla Underwater Park, Mission Bay Park and Mission Trails Park are larger. It contains survivals from expositions, but, as was true during the expositions, the best show is on the outside. And it is free.

El Prado is at its finest when it is full of people, such as during the two-evening December Nights (former Christmas on El Prado) in December and Earth Day in April. Also exciting are folk shows at the House of Pacific Relations, organ recitals at the Pavilion, concerts at the Pavilion and Starlight Bowl, and patriotic exercises at the Pavilion. By bringing people of diverse backgrounds together, these gatherings remind Americans that they are citizens of the same country. There should be more free communal events and they should extend beyond El Prado to include the Palisades section created by the 1935-1936 California-Pacific International Exposition.

The Spreckels Organ Society (SOS) has taken the lead in securing funds to renovate the Organ Pavilion and organ. Under its auspices, pipes have been expanded, programming increased, and recitalists besides the city-paid civic organist secured. The Society offers its programs to the public free of charge.(38)

Besides scheduled happenings, unscheduled happenings along El Prado add color and variety to an ongoing Vanity Fair. Street entertainers do stunts and play music. They ask for donations, but contributions are voluntary. Some mimes make fun of passers-by to get laughs from their audience, but most performers are courteous. They know they can lose their public if they are unruly. A few beggars adorn streets and arcades. They get change from the sympathetic, but they are not "making a bundle."

The Plaza de Balboa, created in 1972, and the lily ponds in front of the Botanical Building draw many people to El Prado. They are crowded even when the Organ Pavilion is filled. The Plaza de Balboa can be improved by adding more trees, seats and tables. If a benefactor were to replace the tepid Bea Evenson Fountain with a showstopper like the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park or the Buckingham Fountain in Chicago, that would be bliss!

The Plaza de Balboa attracts young people. Families with babies, people coming out of buildings, and teenagers cluster around the large circular fountain. They get their hands and feet wet. Strutting male pigeons with puffed-out chests circle around susceptible hens. The wide pavement allows room for portable stands and entertainers. People on the steps of the Natural History Museum view the action.

As there is no Sproul Plaza free-speech area in the park, demonstrators and evangelists have adapted the Plaza de Balboa to that purpose.. The orators, who bear an uncanny resemblance to the barkers along the 1935 Midway, are disruptive, but they are not in the Plaza all the time. Skateboarders glide and jump over the flat surfaces and stepped levels of the Plaza, damaging curbs and threatening pedestrians. The City does little to enforce an ordinance keeping skateboarders on the west side of Cabrillo Bridge.

Conflicting uses in the Plaza de Balboa came about because expositions created a civic center in the heart of Balboa Park. Some teenagers have not learned lessons of civility that park planners, like Frederick Law Olmsted, thought they would learn by being in beautiful natural settings. What, for example, has prompted adolescent girls from Roosevelt Junior High School to deface the succulent cacti in the Cactus Garden, across from the Plaza de Balboa, with affirmations of their eternal love for boys their own age? What, for that matter, inspires the boys to spread gang graffiti (certainly not love messages) on walls of Balboa Park buildings?

Lily ponds in front of the Botanical Building exert a special magic. Water in the ponds, lilies, tiny fish, turtles, and cranes draw a sedate group of people. They sit on grass and benches or lean over rails for hours. There is some vandalism. Turtles are manhandled or stolen. (They were removed during the pond's last major renovation.) Older people at the lagoon conduct themselves well. Frederick Law Olmsted's theory that people can learn to live with one another in a beautiful public environment is working. The tranquil setting encourages subdued behavior. People do not rush away because the unruffled waters invite them to linger. The lily ponds require little adjustment as they approach perfection.

Both Plaza de Balboa and lily ponds offer free pleasure to everyone during day and evening. People watching is more important in the Plaza, but

people meeting occurs easily beside the lily ponds. Sitting beside the lily ponds and looking at the curves of the Botanical Building to the north and the framing of Spanish-Baroque towers joined by a Romanesque arcade to the south fills the inner person with a treasure-chest of serenity to draw upon during moments of turmoil and grief.

The successes of the Plaza de Balboa and lily ponds point the way for landscape architects to go if they want to make nooks, crannies and plazas in Balboa Park attractive to people. Plazas and gardens in other parts of the park need not be identical to the active Plaza de Balboa and the passive lily ponds, but they should be as hospitable and as gracious.

Confronted with a proposal to use the Ford Building for industrial and commercial shows in 1936, the *San Diego Sun* replied, "It seems highly questionable that any charge should be made for any exhibit in the park after the Exposition closes. We must never lose sight of the fact that the park belongs to ALL of the people and they should be encouraged to make the best possible use of it with a minimum of restrictions."(39)

This caution against park exploitation should be held firmly in mind by politicians, planners and citizens who determine the park's future.

NOTES

1. Rev. C. Douglas Hall, "Louis Gill: Famous but Forgotten Architect," *Journal of San Diego History*, Summer 1989,
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3. *San Diego Union*, August 28, 1936, 1.
4. *San Diego Union*, October 25, 1936, 1
5. *San Diego Union*, August 29, 1936, 1.
6. *San Diego Union*, October 23, 1936, 1.
7. *San Diego Union*, August 29, 1936, 1; September 5, 1936, 1.
8. *San Diego Union*, September 2, 1936, II, 1.
9. *San Diego Union*, March 31, 1937, 9.
10. *San Diego Union*, September 14, 1936, 8.
11. *San Diego Union*, May 22, 1938, II, 1.
12. *San Diego Union*, January 28, 1937, 3.
13. *San Diego Sun*, October 18, 1936, 1.
14. *San Diego Union*, May 30, 1937, 6.
15. *San Diego Union*, December 16, 1936, II, 12.

16. *San Diego Union*, October 30, 1936, 7; January 24, 1937, 2.
17. Beth Mohr, "The Old Globe Theater Highlights from Fifty Years," *Journal of San Diego History*, V. 31, Spring 1985, 93-94.
18. *San Diego Union*, November 6, 1936, 6; March 3, 1937, 5.
19. *San Diego Union*, March 26, 1937, 2.
20. *San Diego Union*, September 26, 1936, 1.
21. *San Diego Union*, November 8, 1935, Society-Club, 1..
22. *San Diego Union*, October 18, 1936, 1.
23. *San Diego Union*, April 22, 1938, 1.
24. *San Diego Union*, July 12, 1939, 1.
25. *San Diego Union*, April 23, 1939, B-1.
26. *San Diego Sun*, July 19, 1936, 1.
27. *San Diego Union*, January 20, 1937, II, 1.
28. *San Diego Union*, June 21, 1939, 1.
29. *San Diego Union*, July 21, 1939, 1.
30. James Britton, "How Good is the Bartholomew Report," *San Diego Magazine*, November 1959, 66-70.
31. Roger Showley, *El Prado, The Avenue of Dreams, A Diamond-Jubilee Self-Guided Tour of Balboa Park's El Prado*. (San Diego Historical Society, 1990).
32. Letters and telephone conversation, Richard W. Amero and Mr. Patty-Henry, National Historic Landmarks Survey, National Park Service, Washington, DC, February-March 1996.
33. *San Diego Union*, August 29, 1936, 1.
34. Caroline Loughlin and Catherine Anderson, *Forest Park* (St. Louis, 1986), 225.
35. *San Diego Union*, June 10, 1965, 29; July 15, 1965, A-17; April 30, 1968, B-3.
36. *San Diego Tribune*, January 4, 1990, B-8.
37. *Lease agreement between the City of San Diego and the Zoological Society of San Diego*, July 23, 1979, San Diego City Clerk's Office.
38. Kenneth Herman, *The Historic Spreckels Organ in Balboa Park, San Diego, California* (Spreckels Organ Society, San Diego, 1993).
39. *San Diego Sun*, August 30, 1936, B-2.