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Richard W. Crawford, Editor

The Southwest on Display at the Panama-California Exposition, 1915

[By Richard W. Amero](#)

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After five years of unrelenting effort, San Diego celebrated the official opening of the Panama-California Exposition in Balboa Park on January 1, 1915. At midnight, December 31, President Woodrow Wilson, in Washington, D.C., pressed a Western Union telegraph key. The signal turned on every light on the grounds and touched off a display of fireworks. The gates to the Exposition swung open. A crush of from 31,836 to 42,486 people on the grounds cheered, waved banners, threw confetti, sang "I Love You California," and snake-danced their way to the Isthmus, or fun street.¹

Among the guests who took part in the official but sparsely attended ceremonies, beginning at 11:30 the following morning, were Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo, Commander of the U.S. Pacific fleet Rear Admiral T.B. Howard, Director-General of the Pan-American Union John Barrett, and Spanish delegate Count del Valle de Salazar.²

In his speech to the guests, wearied from the festivities of the night before, Gilbert Aubrey Davidson, president of the Panama-California Exposition Company, declared the Exposition's purpose was to build an empire extending from the back country of the Pacific slope to the west shores of the Missouri River.³ At one point Davidson said:

Here is pictured in this happy combination of splendid temples, the story of the friars, the thrilling tale of the pioneers, the orderly conquest of commerce, coupled with the hopes of an El Dorado where life can expand in this fragrant land of opportunity. It is indeed a permanent city and every building fits into the picture.

Secretary McAdoo, President Wilson's personal representative, lauded the Exposition's emphasis on Latin America for helping to bring about "a closer union of all the nations and peoples of the Americas."⁴

A gigantic automobile parade along Broadway in the afternoon called attention to a Point Loma road race to be held January 9. In spite of the competition offered by the parade, 15,120 people on the Exposition grounds had their first real chance to see what the Exposition was all about.⁵

Opening day visitors quickly rented all 200 of the small wicker motor chairs or "electricettes" available from a stand on the Isthmus and used them for whirlwind tours of the grounds. The electricettes carried two or three persons and traveled at a top speed of three and one-half miles per hour.⁶

Seven states had put up buildings for the San Diego Exposition: California, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Washington, Montana, and Kansas. Three of these states -- Washington, Montana and Kansas -- are not part of the Southwest, but Arizona, which is, declined to participate. The State of California did not put exhibits in its building. Instead, 28 out of a total of 58 California counties put exhibits in the Sacramento Valley Counties Building, the San Joaquin Valley Counties Building, the Kern and Tulare Counties Building, the Alameda and Santa Clara Counties Building, and the Southern California Counties Building.⁷

Considering that the California counties also exhibited at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, as also did 28 states and territories of the United States and 22 foreign nations, the exhibit aspects of San Diego's Exposition were not sensational.⁸

The Exposition covered 640 acres surrounded by rose-trellised fences. Entrances were on the west across the Cabrillo Bridge, on the north at the back of the Isthmus, and on the east end of the main avenue, El Prado, for passengers of the San Diego Electric Railway. Guidebooks referred to the east as the south entrance. Automobile parking was available on the payment of a fee at the north and east entrances. The west entrance, leading across Cabrillo Bridge, was used only by pedestrians, but automobiles carrying city officials were allowed in.⁹

El Prado blended semi-tropical planting with Spanish, Moorish, Mexican, Italian, and Persian architecture to create a vision seen before that time only in paintings of imaginary cities. Landscaping was more perfunctory around the state buildings on the south plateau.¹⁰

The New Mexico Building attracted attention because its plain, primitive massing was so unlike the heavily-textured fantasies along El Prado.¹¹ This building was the first of many replicas of the Mission of San Estevan at Acoma, as common in the Southwest as copies of Mount Vernon are on the East coast.¹²

The El Prado symphony of green vines and bright flowers climbing over creamy white walls, of florid ornamentation around openings of buildings, and of striped blue and orange awnings and draperies over doors and in windows captivated spectators. Red bougainvillea pranced along El Prado while purple bougainvillea cavorted in the central Plaza de Panama. A formal succession of clipped black acacias in front of the buildings introduced order amid the tumult of colors and

blooms. Roses, clematis, jasmine, and honeysuckle growing inside the grass-covered patios of the Science and Education Building, charmed passers-by. Directly opposite, in a formal, English-style garden, unaccountably called "Montezuma," red geraniums, white marguerites, and multi-colored columbines gladdened beholders.¹³

Gardeners, working at night under the direction of Paul Thiene, set out plants, trees, shrubs, vines, and roses whose growth was uniform and whose colors were complementary. For emergencies about 10,000 geraniums were kept growing in the botanical gardens so they could be set out in case some of the other flowering plants failed.¹⁴

The California Building, the Fine Arts Building and the wings connecting both, lacked the prevalent intermingling of architecture and floriculture. Their shapes and volumes were meant to be enjoyed for their own sake.¹⁵

The scale of the San Diego Exposition was small and its atmosphere friendly. Though it was likely first-day visitors were too preoccupied to enjoy them, footpaths, shaded by acacia, pepper, and eucalyptus trees, wound behind the buildings. Seats and ledges were within easy reach. Trees in Palm Canyon, near the west end of El Prado, and in Spanish Canyon, near the east end, and flowers in formal and informal gardens near the California, Fine Arts, Indian Arts, Botanical, and Southern California Counties Buildings delighted lovers of natural beauty.¹⁶ A wildflower bed running northeast from the California Building sparkled with yellow mustard, baby blue eyes, white forget-me-not, purple lupines, and wild Canterbury Bells.¹⁷

The Botanical Building, designed by Carleton M. Winslow, was dramatically recessed on the north side of El Prado and highlighted in Persian fashion by a reflecting lagoon. Bamboo, palm, aralia, and pitcher-shaped insect-eating nepenthes grew inside the front lath-enclosed section and in the back glass greenhouse.¹⁸

An ornate Japanese temple east of the Botanical Building, was used as a tea house. The house was bordered by a flowing stream with large carp swimming in it, a half-moon bridge, and a bronze crane and stone lanterns, merging from a background of cedar and wisteria.¹⁹

At night the stunning daytime colors gave way to black and white chiaroscuro. Electric lights outlined the silhouette of the Spreckels Organ Pavilion. Along the main avenue over 1,000 lamps with pear-shaped globes on stately pillars, and bracket lamps and braziers in the arcades gave the buildings a soft glow.²⁰ The haunting Churrigueresque relief of the Prado buildings was at its best at night under a full moon.

A 2,500 foot pleasure street called "The Isthmus," running from the formal gardens behind the Southern California Counties Building to the north gate, could have been called "The Cynosure," for it was the primary goal of opening-day visitors. Most of its attractions were ready. These included a China Town, with an underground opium den where effigies in wax demonstrated the horrors of addiction; a replica of a Pala gem mine; a whirring disc called "The Toadstool" which tossed people wildly about; another ride called "Climbing the Yelps," which took patrons into the interior of an erupting volcano; a Ferris wheel; a roller coaster in Anafalulu Land, nearly 6,000 ft. in length and equipped with a sound apparatus that ground out "We Don't Know Where

We're Going But We're On Our Way"; a historic display called "The Story of the Missions"; an ostrich farm in a structure modeled after an Egyptian pyramid; a motion picture plant where films of scenes along the Isthmus were made daily; a Hawaiian Village with the entrance in the shape of a volcano like Kilauea; and an aquarium presided over by King Neptune consisting of tanks of ocean-filled water in one of which a helmeted diver rescued a waxen damsel from a sunken stateroom.²¹

Concessions not ready on opening day, but ready by the end of the month, were a dance hall called "The Divided Dime," where a couple could dance for five cents; a 250-foot-long replica of the Panama Canal with ships moving up and down in the locks; and a "War of the Worlds" fantasy in which New York City in the year 2000 was destroyed by Asians and Africans who arrived in battleships and airplanes.²²

At the north end of the Isthmus, extending between the Isthmus and Alameda Streets, was a 10-acre Indian Village, Trading Post, and Painted Desert built by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. About 300 Indians from Apache, Hopi, Navajo, Supai, Taos, and Zuni tribes resided in replicas of tepees, mounds, or adobe pueblos as they did in New Mexico and Arizona. The Indians wove rugs and blankets, shaped pottery, pounded silver and copper into jewelry and ornaments; performed ceremonial dances and offered prayers to their gods from sunken kivas.²³ Ever on the alert, critic Geddes Smith noted the steamer trunks and kitchen clocks inside the Indians' primitive homes.²⁴

In addition to living demonstrations of Indians, the Exposition offered living demonstrations of 500 U.S. Marines in a tent city on the brow of a hill south of the state buildings on the lower plateau, and of four troops of the First U.S. Cavalry in a model camp on the west slope of Florida Canyon, just outside the Exposition grounds. The marines and cavalymen were getting settled on opening day and were preparing themselves for the parades, drills, and band concerts they would give throughout the year.²⁵

Some of the first-day visitors must have left their etiquettes long enough to look at the indoor exhibits. If they did so, they were amply rewarded for the 50 cents (adult) and 25 cents (children) admission they paid to get into the Exposition grounds. Displays inside the California Building, just beyond the West or Ocean Gate, documented the culture of the Maya Indians. In the central auditorium a number of huge palms provided a background for reproductions of four stelae and two monoliths from Quiriguá in Guatemala. Sculptured friezes by Jean Beman Smith and Sally James Farnham, and paintings of scenes from Maya life by Carlos Vierra looked down from walls and balconies.²⁶

The Fine Arts Building, on the south side of the Plaza de California, displayed American paintings by William Glackens, Robert Henri, George Luks, Maurice Prendergast, Joseph Sharp, and John Sloan, painters whose reputations have endured.²⁷ New York art critic Christian Brinton thought the paintings were inferior to the Indian pottery, rugs, baskets, and utensils in the other buildings.²⁸

On the lower floor of the Fine Arts Building, the Pioneer Society of San Diego exhibited an Indian raft made of tule and balsa, a large photographic view of San Diego in 1869, court records

dating from 1850, and portraits of men and women connected with the early history of San Diego.²⁹

As one entered El Prado, the Science and Education Building on the north and the Indian Arts Building on the south, beyond the Montezuma Gardens, continued the anthropological themes introduced in the California Building. Exhibits in these buildings had been selected by Dr. Edgar L. Hewett, of the Archaeological Institute of America, and Dr. Ales Hdrlicka, of the U.S. National Museum, during trips they or scientists commissioned by them made to southeastern Europe, Siberia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Africa, Peru, and Guatemala.³⁰

Ten models of precursors of present-day man by Belgian sculptor Louis Mascré in the Science and Education building illustrated "The Evolution of Man." Sets of 45 male and 45 female busts, cast from living models, portrayed man's development from birth onward in supposedly "pure" white, Indian, and black races. An exhibit of skulls from Peru showed Pre-Columbian surgery. Panels donated by child welfare organizations, advocated the prevention of infant mortality and the abolition of child labor.³¹

The Indian Arts Building, as the name implies, concentrated on displaying the products and interpreting the life of the American Indian. A series of diagrams depicted Indian symbolism, panels by Gerald Cassidy revealed the habitations and life of the Cliff Dwellers; and photographs by Roland W. Reed and Edward S. Curtiss presented ennobling views of the Indians.³²

The Plaza de Panama was the hub of the Panama-California Exposition. It extended south without interruption to the Plaza de los Estados in front of the Organ Pavilion. On special occasions, such as the opening night ceremony, a sea of humanity filled the entire area. When it was not being used by dignitaries for speeches, by the armed services for drills, by acrobats and athletes for sports; by bands for concerts; by soldiers, sailors and civilians for dances, or by exhibitors for shows, the Plaza was filled with strolling Spanish musicians, guards dressed as Spanish grenadiers, ladies with bright parasols; children and adults feeding the pigeons; and electricettes going in all directions.³³

The Sacramento Valley Building occupied the place of honor at the head of the Plaza de Panama. It was a long, symmetrical, Italian-Renaissance building with a deep alcove set above rows of steps and festooned with gay rococo ornamentation. While other buildings around the Plaza differed in style from the Sacramento Valley Building, they made good neighbors.³⁴

By the time the visitor had reached the Plaza de Panama from the west, he had passed beyond the educational exhibits. The commercial, state, and county exhibits that remained put their stress on practical matters.

The Kyosan Kai Company of Japan placed rare collections of cloissone, chinaware, cabinets, tapestries, and screens in the Foreign and Domestic Arts Building on the southeast side of the Plaza de Panama. A gigantic case of carved cherry with inlaid wood in the center, containing finely carved ivories, was valued at \$10,000. The Company also operated a Chinese exhibit in the building, featuring bronzes, silks, and paintings,³⁵ as well as the Tea Pavilion and "The Streets of Joy" concession on the Isthmus where patrons enjoyed the scenery of Old Japan,

admired women dressed in kimonos, listened to musicians play the samisen, biwa and koto, and played games of go, shogi, and shell matching.³⁶

Something was amiss in the presentation of exhibits in the Home Economy Building, just across El Prado from the Foreign and Domestic Arts building. Except for a brief mention in the guidebook, the exhibits received no acknowledgement in newspapers and magazines. In contrast to the "arts" of the Foreign and Domestic Arts Building, the exhibits in the Home Economy Building featured the latest in sinks, stoves, vacuum cleaners and refrigerators. Curiously, in a building catering principally to women, one of the biggest exhibits was entitled "Cigars."³⁷

The U.S. Navy, a major exhibitor in the Commerce and Industries Building, near the east end of El Prado, showed fieldpieces, Gatling guns, rifles, a collection of shells and machetes, diving suits, and models of the armored cruiser San Diego and the dreadnought North Dakota.³⁸ The U.S. Mint, in the same building, displayed a currency machine that turned out engraved Exposition emblems in silk, and a coin machine that turned out thousands of metal souvenir Exposition coins.³⁹

Industrial exhibits were installed in the Commerce and Industries Building and the Varied Industries and Food Products Building on opposite sides of El Prado. The Moreland Distillate Motor Truck Company, in the Commerce and Industries Building, demonstrated how the new gasifier in its trucks could ignite a spray of distillate fuel and keep the engine going.⁴⁰ In the Varied Industries and Food Products Building the Pioneer Paper Company subjected roofing paper to intense heat to illustrate its lasting qualities;⁴¹ the Globe Mills Company baked bread;⁴² the Genesee Pure Food company packed and wrapped products with the aid of machinery;⁴³ and the Towle Products Company turned out maple syrup and maple sugar inside a log cabin.⁴⁴ The exhibitors gave away free samples and sold larger quantities to those who wanted to take the products home.

New Mexico offered lectures and movies in the auditorium of its building and displayed gold ore and large blocks of meerschaum in its mineral exhibit.⁴⁵ The newly established U.S. Forestry Service took space on the second floor to show what it was doing to conserve forests.⁴⁶ A bas-relief of the state weighing five tons and a representation of an irrigation project in the Utah Building commanded attention.⁴⁷ A miniature oil well in the Kern and Tulare Counties Building showed how oil was extracted from the earth.⁴⁸ Exhibits in the other state and county buildings consisted of fruits and vegetables arranged in colorful piles and grain stored in glass-fronted bins or arched sheaves. The Southern California Counties exhibits were most like those of a country fair, with showcases of china painting, hemstitched aprons, an inlaid table made of 2,866 pieces of wood, cows made of creamery butter, and elephants made of English walnuts.⁴⁹

Citrus orchards containing about 700 orange, lemon, and grapefruit trees, a five-acre Model Farm and bungalow, a Tractor Field and building, a Lipton Tea Plantation from Ceylon and pavilion, and a five-acre International Harvester field, orchard and building were approached by way of the Alameda, a street which paralleled the Isthmus on the west. These displays of outdoor fertility and agricultural know-how attempted to win converts to the back-to-the-land movement.⁵⁰ Though it was the philosophy of the Little Landers of San Ysidro that was being promoted, the Little Landers were not represented.⁵¹

The Cafe Cristóbal at the entrance to the Alameda and the Alhambra Cafeteria at the entrance to the Isthmus were the Exposition's main restaurants.⁵² The Cristobal was the Exposition's social center where celebrities were feted and "society night" dances were held. Between courses patrons did the one-step and fox trot to the music of Professor E.C. Kammermeyer's 10-piece orchestra. Over 2,000 people tried to get reservations for the opening night New Year's Eve celebration, which created a problem as the cafe had seats for only 600.⁵³ Somehow the cafe managed to accommodate, for an early dinner, more than 1,000 beautifully gowned women, naval officers in full dress, and guests and citizens in formal attire.⁵⁴ Most of the diners left the cafe to attend the organ dedication ceremonies at the Spreckels Organ beginning at 9:00 P.M., and the ceremonies in the Plaza de Panama beginning at 11:00 P.M.

The official banquet held at the Cristóbal on the evening of January 1 was an all-male affair. Attendance was down to about 500. Simultaneously with the men's banquet, about 350 women held their own banquet at the U.S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego to entertain the wives of visiting celebrities, after it had been determined that the Alhambra Cafeteria could not be adapted for such an imposing function. Another 3,500 women, who were not invited to the banquet, crowded the hotel lobby and the street outside. The men's banquet was replete with camaraderie, toasting, long speeches, and the singing of an unauthorized version of "Tipperary" which ended: "It's a long way to San Diego but we're all right there."⁵⁵ The women, led by Mrs. Earl A. Garretson, substituted short introductions, the singing of sentimental lyrics by talented vocalists, and the dancing of five pretty girls dressed as wood nymphs.⁵⁶

The Spanish-style Alhambra Cafeteria, designed by Max E. Parker, designer of many of the concessions buildings on the Isthmus, had a seating capacity of 1,200, and catered to those who wanted their meals quickly. Diners could view a rose-covered pergola and the citrus orchards on the west and the formal gardens of the Southern California Counties on the south.⁵⁷

At first the Exposition Board of Directors was reluctant to allow women representation in the planning of the Exposition. This obstinacy led Miss Alice Klauber to form the San Diego County Women's Association and to notify the Board that if provision were not made for women during 1915, the Association would advertise the fact in every women's club in the United States.⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, the Board came around.⁵⁹

San Diego women wanted to provide rest rooms and comfort facilities for women and children, to protect single women from the perils of the city, and to receive and entertain Exposition visitors.⁶⁰ These concerns led to the development of several women-oriented rooms on the grounds. The Women's Christian Temperance Union maintained a room for women in the Science and Education Building; the Young Women's Christian Association a room in the Varied Industries Building; the Christian Science Church a room in the Commerce and Industries Building; and the Southern California Counties Committee a room in their building. Women frequently used rooms in the Model Bungalow for social gatherings.

The two rooms at the Exposition that evoked the most comment were the rooms of the Daughters of the American Revolution -- described in one newspaper as being in the upper balcony of the Arts and Crafts, or Indian Arts Building,⁶¹ and in another as being in the Fine Arts Building⁶² -- and the Official Women's Board Headquarters Rooms on the west side and upper balcony of the

California Quadrangle. Being in a Spanish-Mission style building did not deter the DAR from converting their room into an American colonial sitting room. Under the supervision of regent Mrs. Horace B. Day, chapter members made seats, rugs, and curtains and supplied the rare antiques that made the room look as if it belonged in Colonial Williamsburg. Members hoped their room would become the official reception room for visitors.⁶³

The DAR was doomed to disappointment for the most striking interior in the entire Exposition was in the room occupied by the Women's Official Board, sequel to Alice Klauber's Association. The success of this room was due to Miss Klauber. Using the colors of an old Indian rug, she painted the walls in shades of gray and black and used a persimmon red dye on the hangings and cushions. She employed real persimmons, ripe pumpkins, and French marigolds as motifs. A rosewood piano case in the room that had been converted into a handsome desk inspired a reporter to write: "It is safe to say that by the time the exposition is over, there won't be an old piano left in the west, they will all be writing desks."⁶⁴

Under the direction of Mrs. George M. McKenzie, head of the social committee, two San Diego women acted as hostesses in the "Persimmon Room" every day of the year, including opening day when the Women's Official Board extended its hospitality to Mrs. William G. McAddoo, wife of the Secretary of the Treasury and daughter of President Woodrow Wilson.⁶⁵ The Women's Board also maintained a silence room on the lower floor of their headquarters where a nurse in charge watched over women resting on cots.⁶⁶

The women of San Diego who gave their labor, talent, and time to the Exposition did much to make it an endearing experience. Men made the buildings, but women decorated them and set up the gatherings that occurred within them.

One of the most distinctive features of an Exposition rich in distinctive features was the organ and pavilion at the southern end of the Plaza de Panama. The complex was donated to the people of San Diego by the brothers John D. and Adolph B. Spreckels. The gift recalls the gift by Claus Spreckels, father of John and Adolph, of an outdoor Music Temple to the people of San Francisco that was installed in Golden Gate Park in 1900.⁶⁷ John D. Spreckels also hired Dr. Humphrey J. Stewart, a distinguished organist and composer, to give daily concerts throughout 1915.⁶⁸ These concerts continued, at the expense of the Spreckels interest, until September 1, 1929.⁶⁹

Speaking to a reporter as he listened to the opening strains of "Adeste Fideles" during a practice session before the official 7 p.m. Exposition opening, December 31, 1914, John D. Spreckels said his gift of the organ to San Diego was the finest achievement of his life.⁷⁰

The people who entered the grounds on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1914, and opening day, January 1, 1915, had every reason to be proud. San Diego's Panama-California Exposition of 1915 was not the world's fair planned in 1909; yet it had not become so diminished that its original idea was lost. The determined and imaginative men and women who planned and participated in the San Diego Exposition -- the financiers who raised the money, the architects who designed and the workers who constructed the buildings, the landscapers and gardeners who planted the grounds, the people from the counties, states, and businesses who put up exhibits, the

concessionaires on the Isthmus who provided fast-paced hilarity, and the people of San Diego and of the Southwest who joined in the Exposition's day-to-day events -- transformed San Diego's Exposition from a regional and transitory fair into an event that has outlived the memory of many larger and wealthier expositions, and that has left a lasting mark on the Southwest.⁷¹

Notes

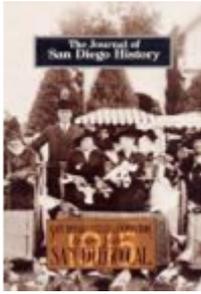
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Page 188. Utah Building



Page 188. Washington State Building



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Page 190. Products in the Sacramento Valley Building



Page 190. Exhibit in San Joaquin Valley Counties Building



Page 191. Plaza de Panama



Page 192. Los Jardines de Montezuma, site of present day Alcazar [Garden]



Page 192. Arbor in Los Jardines de Montezuma



Page 193. Gardens in the rear of the Southern California Building



Page 194. The Japanese Tea Garden



Page 195. The Isthmus



Page 195. The Isthmus



Page 196. Ground Plan Map



Page 197. The Gem Mine



Page 197. "Toadstool"



Page 197. Hawaiian Village Dancers



Page 198. Cawston Ostrich Farm Exhibit



Page 198. Temple of Mirth



Page 199. Chinatown



Page 199. "Yelps" Mountain



Page 200. The ten acre Indian Village



Page 201. Wooden model of the Temple of the Plumed Serpent, Chichen-Itza, in the California Building (photo courtesy of the Museum of Man).



Page 202. A prehistoric stone quarry exhibit from the Indian Arts Building (photo courtesy of the Museum of Man).



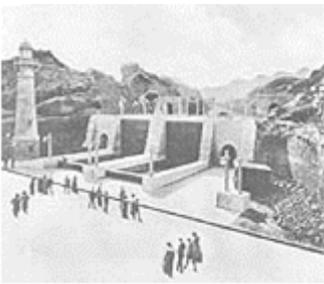
Page 203. An exhibit of busts and masks for "racial variation series" in the Science and Education Building (photo courtesy of the Museum of Man).



Page 204. Crowd in Plaza de Panama for ceremony



Page 204. Boy Scouts at Organ Pavilion



Page 205. Panama Canal Exhibit



Page 205. Formal Gardens



Page 206. Japanese exhibit in the Foreign and domestic Arts Building



Page 207. Moreland Trucks in the Commerce and Industries Building



Page 208. The Model Citrus Grove and the Lipton Tea Plantation (foreground)



Page 208. Map of the five-acre Model Farm



Page 209. Cristóbal Cafe



Page 210. The Alhambra Cafeteria at the entrance to the Isthmus



Page 210. Balboa Park gardens and Alhambra Cafeteria



Page 212. The Persimmon Room



Page 213. A view of roses and dahlia gardens from the terrace of the Organ Pavilion



Page 214. [Parade and crowd near Organ Pavilion]



Page 219. Pergola south of Montezuma Garden



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