

Restoration of the San Diego Automotive Museum Building

Balboa Park's 1935 California State Building, now home to the San Diego Automotive Museum, was constructed for the 1935-1936 California Pacific International Exposition, also called America's Exposition.

The California State Building was designed, built and furnished with exhibits in a record three months and

opened on the first day of the Exposition, May 29, 1935.

The building was designed by Richard Requa, lead architect of the Exposition, in an Art-Deco design with pre-Columbian-influenced ornamentation.

In 1978 the sites of both the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition and the 1935-1936 California

Pacific International Exposition were granted National Landmark status. Despite this recognition the 1935 California State Building hasn't fared well. Roots from large ficus trees have invaded the building in the past, requiring significant repairs to the concrete floor. A recent leak in the roof damaged or destroyed a great deal of material in the library of the Automotive Museum. Even a 1988 restoration of the building failed to restore the long-missing ornamentation that made this building a showplace for the State of California during the 1935-1936 Exposition.

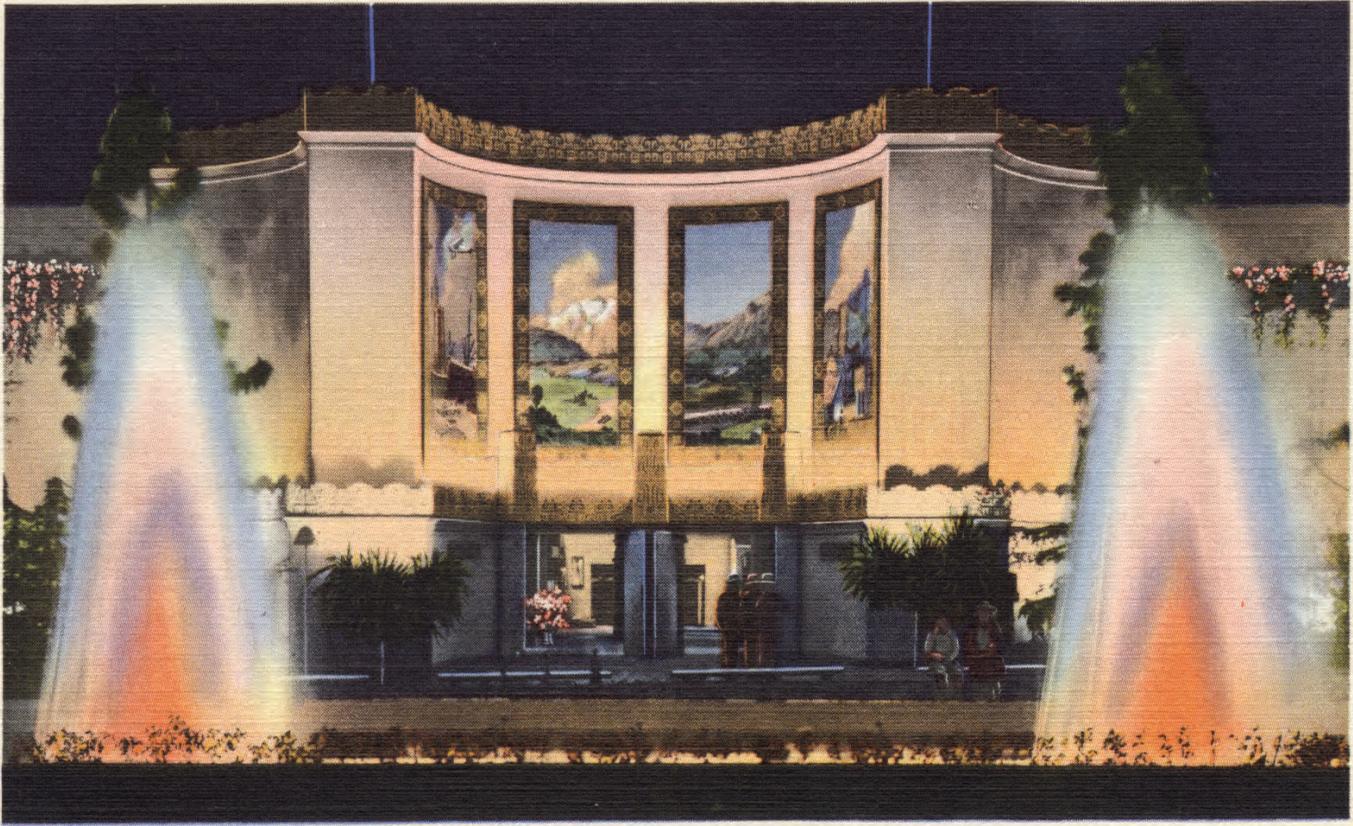
Four large murals above the California State Building's entrance were the work of Hollywood set designer and art director for the 1935 Exposition, Juan Larrinaga, and his team. The murals represented "commerce, industry, agriculture, and the scenic beauty and wonders of California." Each of the murals was 8 x 18 feet, painted on fiberboard to look like tilework.

The Committee of One Hundred and the San Diego Automotive Museum support the restoration of this building to its 1935 appearance. Missing ornamentation should be replaced using permanent materials. The four



Governor Frank Merriam at dedication of California State Building in May 1935.
Courtesy of David Marshall





AMERICA'S EXPOSITION, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

5A-H1140

1935 Postcard shows California State Building as colored by an artist.

murals could be replicated with custom-made cuerda-seca ceramic tiles depicting the same designs as the original murals. Non-historic *Ficus nitida* (Indian Laurel Fig) trees should be removed, opening up views of the building's architecture. Landscaping with more historic, drought-tolerant, plants would enhance the beauty of the restored building much as it appeared to fairgoers in 1935.

As a kickoff to the restoration campaign we plan to install four full-size banners above the building's entrance, with color images in the design of the original murals. The installation will announce restoration plans to the public, garner publicity, and expose potential donors to the advantages of restoring this and other buildings in the Palisades.

Despite an extensive search of libraries and archives, not a single color photograph of the murals has been found. There is a rather inadequate three-second segment of color film showing the murals in 1935. We are working with artists who will recreate these images in color, using only black and white photographs of the building from 1935-36. Kodachrome



Entrance to Automotive Museum as it is today.

and Agfacolor film for cameras were introduced during 1935 and 1936, the very years of the Exposition. Perhaps somebody reading this article, or seeing the banners above the entrance to the Automotive Museum, will discover a color photograph of the murals.

