

One Hundred Years Ago

Two Days in San Francisco – 1906¹

Laurence M. Klauber

Preface by Molly McClain

Laurence Klauber, a twenty-two year old engineering student at Stanford University, awoke on the morning of April 18, 1906 to the roar of falling masonry and clouds of dust, plaster, and debris. The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake struck at 5:13 a.m. and measured 7.8 on the Richter scale. It toppled structures on the Stanford campus, twisted streets, destroyed homes and buildings, and killed thousands of people living in San Francisco and San Mateo counties. Soon afterwards, firestorms raged for three days in San Francisco, scorching 508 city blocks.²

Klauber described his experience of the earthquake and fire in a letter to his sister, Alice, written on May 1, 1906.³ She and other family members living in San Diego were impatient to know what had happened to him. Klauber explained that he had spent the evening of April 17, 1906, at the Grand Opera House in San Francisco, listening to the renowned tenor Enrico Caruso sing “Carmen.” He and his classmate Douglas Ferry caught the last train back to Palo Alto.⁴ The next morning, Klauber had returned to San Francisco to find his sister and brother-in-law, Elvira (Ella) and Gustav Wormser, and their three children.⁵ He watched from Lafayette Square as fires burned north of Market Street near the waterfront and in the poor South of Market neighborhoods. On Van Ness Avenue, wealthy San Franciscans slept on the sidewalk, “rolled up in furs and opera cloaks.”

The following morning, Klauber joined crowds of refugees fleeing the city for the east bay. He left his nieces and nephew with family friends in Oakland and went on to Berkeley to send telegrams. He then returned to the city, hauling a suitcase containing bread, cheese and bologna. He found his brother-in-law burying valuables in the backyard and preparing to leave. He saw firefighters dynamiting Chinatown and the Barbary Coast in an effort to keep the fire from spreading. He also watched as people in the warehouse district pulled charred tins of food from the ruins.



Panoramic photograph showing the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake and fire. ©SDHS #1998:40 Anne Bricknell/F. E. Patterson Photograph Collection

Klauber sent his sister a description of his first two days in San Francisco, ending his letter with the phrase, "to be continued – maybe." In fact, it would be many years before he returned to his narrative. In 1958, he pulled together notes, memories and research materials in order to produce the following memoir of his experiences at the time of the earthquake and fire.⁶

Laurence Monroe Klauber (1883-1968) was the son of Abraham and Theresa Klauber both of whom had emigrated to the United States from Bohemia, in Austria-Hungary, in the mid-nineteenth century. Abraham (1831-1911) traveled to California by way of Nicaragua, opening a retail clothing business in Sacramento before moving to San Diego in 1869. He and his partner Samuel Steiner ran a wholesale and retail store downtown, selling groceries, boots and shoes, dry goods, liquor, clothing, and mining tools. In 1897, he formed the Klauber Wangenheim Company. He and his wife raised nine children at their home on C Street.⁷ Their youngest son, Laurence, was born in San Diego on December 21, 1883. He attended Sherman Elementary School and was graduated from San Diego's Russ High School in 1903. He worked for Klauber Wangenheim in Los Angeles before attending Stanford University. He graduated in 1908 with a degree in electrical engineering. After a short stint with Westinghouse Company in Pennsylvania, he returned to San Diego in 1911 to work for San Diego Consolidated Gas & Electric Company. He married his high-school classmate, Grace Gould (1883-1988), that same year. They had two children, Alice and Philip.⁸

Klauber worked at San Diego Consolidated Gas & Electric for forty-three years, moving steadily upward in the company. He became engineer in charge of the Record Department in 1912, general superintendent in 1920, vice president in



The Klauber family, ca. 1902, taken at their house on 30th and E Streets. Upper row: Victor Hugo Klauber, Elvira (Ella) Klauber Wormser, Melville Klauber, Laura Klauber, Edgar Klauber. Middle row: Theresa Klauber, Abraham Klauber, Alice Klauber. Lower row: Laurence Klauber (seated at left), Leda Klauber and Stella Klauber. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.



Russ High School Class of 1903. Upper row: William Fay, Harry R. Comly, Laurence M. Klauber, Haldane Doig, John M. Ward. Middle row: unidentified, Adele Parker Hollingsworth and Edna Nichols. Lower row: Isabel Brooks, unidentified, Grace Gould Klauber and Lenore Price Drucker. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.

charge of operations in 1932, vice president and general manager in 1941, president in 1946, and chairman of the board and chief executive from April 1949 until retirement in January 1954.

Klauber also achieved international prominence in herpetology. In 1922, his interest in the study of reptiles led him to become San Diego Zoological Society's consulting curator of reptiles. He collected and identified 53 new species and subspecies of reptiles and amphibians and published over 85 scientific papers. His definitive two-volume work on rattlesnakes, published by the University of California Press in 1956, was republished in 1972, 1982 and 1997.⁹ In 1940, he received an honorary LL.D. from UCLA in recognition of his outstanding scientific work. He served on the Board of Trustees of the San Diego Society of Natural History and as President of the Zoological Society (1949-51). He donated both his herpetological library and 36,000 reptile and amphibian specimens to the San Diego Natural History Museum. The library consisted of 1,462 books, 19,000 pamphlets, 20 drawers of hand-written catalogue cards, 198 loose-leaf binders of scientific notes and other materials.

Klauber belonged to numerous organizations, including the American Institute of Electrical Engineering, the San Diego Electric Club, and the major professional engineering societies. Over the course of his lifetime, he served as president of four scientific societies, two trade associations, the San Diego Rotary Club, and the San Diego Public Library Commission. He held the last position from 1940 until his death in 1968.

A Renaissance man, Klauber loved books, theatre, music, and opera. He also held seven U.S. patents for his electrical inventions. He had “a finely-honed sense of humor,” according to his son Philip, and was particularly quick with double entendres and impromptu repartees. He was fascinated by poker, dealing himself 30,000 hands in order to calculate the mathematical probability of holding any winning hand.¹⁰

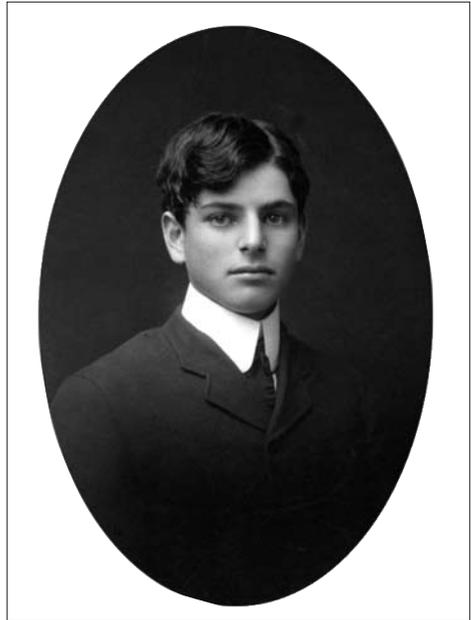
San Diego repositories hold a number of items related to the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake. The San Diego Historical Society has two albums containing photographs of San Francisco in 1906. The James S. Copley Library in La Jolla holds six letters written by Willett Smith to Freeport, New York. The University of California, San Diego, (UCSD) and San Diego State University have copies of the Report of the State Earthquake Investigation Commission (1908-10). UCSD’s Mandeville Special Collections Library also contains a number of contemporary accounts of the San Francisco earthquake and fire. In addition, San Diego Public Library’s California Room holds a portfolio collection of Bay Area newspapers covering the earthquake as well as a wide variety of related materials.

Klauber’s account of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire remains one of the only known letters written by a native San Diegan. *The Journal of San Diego History* is grateful to the Klauber family for permission to publish this first-hand account. Endnotes beginning with note 11 were added by Laurence Klauber. Material in brackets were supplied by the editor.

Introduction by Laurence M. Klauber, 1958

This letter, written May 1, 1906, assumes a general acquaintance with family and other situations, without a knowledge of which some of the statements will be quite obscure. These matters will have been forgotten a couple of posterities from now, and hence their recording seems advisable in this introduction and the several footnotes, which were supplied in 1939 and 1958, as well as a supplement, most of which was written a couple of years after the earthquake. No words in the letter itself have been changed, except one or two that have a different connotation today.

At the time of the earthquake I was rooming in the little town of College Terrace in what is now the Mayfield district of Palo Alto, the professors having deemed it advisable that I should not divert from their studies those who really wanted to work; a sort of nocturnal retirement, as it were, for the campus was only out-of-bounds at night. However, on that all-important night of April 17-18, having returned very late from the opera in San Francisco, I was in



Laurence M. Klauber in 1903, the year he graduated from Russ High School. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.

Encina Hall contrary to these personal rules and regulations.

My sister, Ella, Mrs. Gustav Wormser, 20 years older than I, was living with her family, consisting of her husband and three children, Elsie, Paul, and Dorothy, in a three-story wooden house of the typical San Franciscan style of that day at 1414 Webster Street [Pacific Heights]. It was to determine the fate of this sister and her family that I went to San Francisco on the morning of the earthquake.

Laurence M. Klauber to Alice Klauber, May 1, 1906

Dear Alice:¹¹

Since events occurred, this is the first time that I have had both the time and inclination to attempt to let you know about it. Ollie¹² and the kids can give you eye-witness stories that would make any letter look like a cotton sign at the [Mark] Hopkins; also, the S[an] F[rancisco] papers (which I presume you see), have some remarkably lucid articles; but your letters indicate such a ferocious hankering after knowledge that in order to satisfy this popular clamor I will here set things down as they seemed to one which was there. I scribe things as I remember them rather than as they occurred.¹³

Realizing from the first instant that happenings of note and events of historic interest were going forth, I attempted on the second day to start a diary, but an earthquake, fire, or like incident cut it short. Much as I desired, I was unable to hang around and be merely an eye witness. So I will trust to luck and a memory (slightly damaged by dynamite and fire) and tell you some incidents of what I have seen just as I recall having saw it.¹⁴



Elsie Wormser (Mrs. Milton) Epstein. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.

On Tuesday aft[er] (April 17th) Doug Ferry¹⁵ and I went to the city to see Carmen.¹⁶ While this has nothing to do with this tale of woe let me stop to remark that Caruso was the goods as [Don] José and [Olive] Fremstad was certainly among those present as the cigarette fiend. The toot assembly [orchestra] was also good. As I recall that jammed Opera House I seem to be glad that nothing happened then. The opera lasted long – the string of carriages blocked the cars and it was only by running all the way to the depot that Doug and I succeeded in catching the theatre train.¹⁷ We reached the University at about 1 a.m. and it being so late I decided not to go to the Terrace¹⁸; so I retired with Doug in his room, 186 Encina west end, fourth floor. We hit the couch about 2 a.m.¹⁹

In the city here the general tendency has been to forget the shake owing

to the greater calamity of the fire. But if you go to Stanford (where there was no fire) you will realize that after all there was quite a rattle. It came off promptly at 5:13 a.m., as you may know, when things were already light.²⁰

As you have heard all about it from them which was there, I will not spend much time on it. The most noticeable part was the noise of the falling buildings. They roared in an astonishing fashion. I remember dimly seeing the new library and the church spire go. They didn't fall exactly, they just settled as if they had been made of sand. Then everything was hidden by clouds of dust, plaster, and debris.²¹

I awoke to find myself standing in the middle of a room filled with sound and falling plaster. The shake was strong enough to throw a person about. However, you couldn't fall, because when you started to, you were jerked in another direction. I felt sort of bruised like a cat shaken by [our terrier] Jack D.²² Doug meanwhile was busying himself in urging me not to jump, although why I don't know. I certainly showed no such intention.

After the plaster quit falling Doug and I got the door open and went into the hall. I remember deliberating on which stairs to take and decided on the main staircase as it was more open. But when we got into the lobby we found the doors partially blocked by a big pile of wreckage brought down from all the upper stories by one of the big chimneys. There was a crowd trying to open the door but it was jammed so I started for the back. The plaster dust had cleared somewhat and on the top of the pile of wreckage I saw a fellow held by some beams across his legs. Two other men got him out and we all went out the back door.

The place was crowded by the skinny student body in an assorted array of pajamas, nighties, and less. A number were hurt by falling plaster and glass, and some from jumping out of windows. We got blankets and fixed these people up.



Dorothy Wormer August 1913. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.



Paul Wormser December 1913. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.

As no further shocks occurred we went back into the hall and hurriedly dressed. A big gang under Prof[essor] Green²³ went to work digging in the wreckage in the front. I think 7 men were buried in it. One was killed – [Junius] Hanna, '08, my partner in foundry. None of the others were seriously hurt.²⁴

At the time, of course, I didn't know that there were any students in the wreckage. I got my wheel and started for Palo Alto via the Quad. The University was a sight. You can get a fair idea of the damage from the set of DPAs [Daily Palo Altos] I sent Hugo.²⁵ Any way I won't stop on the part now. There was quite a crowd in front of the Quad, and I learned that no one had been hurt on the Row or at Roble.

At Palo Alto I found everything of brick or

stone pretty well down. There was no communication in any direction. I left a bunch of telegrams to be sent and returned to the University. They were still at work clearing the [Encina] lobby. I waited until Hanna was taken out and then returned to Palo Alto. Of all the larger structures luckily Encina stood the shock best. Had it not been for the huge ornamental chimneys there would have been no loss of life. The walls of the wings are badly cracked in places but the central part is still in good shape. (The stone work; of course the plastering is all down.) You can get a very good idea of the damage and also Stanford's plans for the future from the papers I sent Hugo. They say that Jordan²⁶ showed up remarkably well throughout the whole affair. He stopped and talked with every student he met, giving personal advice and encouragement. Wherever he encountered a group he made a speech. Some of these you will find in the DPA. They are pretty good.

Let me digress a moment here and tell you a good story. One of the first reports to reach the East was that "The buildings of the State University, valued at \$25,000,000, were entirely destroyed." (The entire value of the Berkeley buildings was 80¢ and they were untouched.) Clarence Mackey immediately telegraphed "\$100,000 to start a fund to rebuild the University." Of course as the report had stated that it was the State University which was damaged, he telegraphed the money to Wheeler. Wheeler replied thanking him for his generosity and stated that although the University was not damaged the money would come in very handy.²⁷

When I got back to Palo Alto, I found that a train had been thru from the south. They had reported everything bad, everything at San Jose and Santa Clara down and burning – no water. There was still no communication with the north but we could see the smoke of a big fire²⁸; so when another train came thru I got aboard and went north. We made good time (it seemed slow to me) to San Mateo. Most everything of brick or stone was down along the way and there were small hopes for Frisco. We proceeded slowly beyond San Mateo and stopped at San Bruno. The ground was marshy here and the embankments had slid 77 different directions.

I started walking with a bunch of several hundred – there were crowds strung along the track as far as you could see.

I think it was at the cemeteries that the first automobile passed us. He was going south at a furious rate and we held him up for news. He reported every building of any size in the city down and burning. No water except below



The Call Building at Third and Market Streets. Built in 1898, it was the tallest building in San Francisco with 12 stories. It was gutted by fire on April 18, 1906. ©SDHS #1998:40 Anne Bricknell/F. E. Patterson Photograph Collection.



Prager's Dry Goods at Jones and Market Streets. ©SDHS PA #212, Clarence James Morrison Family Photo Album.

Montgomery Street. Everything below this, he said, had slid into the bay.²⁹

From now on the automobiles went by with increasing frequency and they all reported about the same thing. Some even claimed to have seen the Call building and the St. Francis lying in the street. From here on we hit up quite a pace. It was not until we reached Colma that we hit the vanguard of the exodus – a stream of people afoot and in rigs which filled every road – the distinguishing feature of the whole affair.

At Colma two of us bought a bottle of soda and spent 10¢ of our precious coin. I had \$2.10 and my partner³⁰ had \$1.30 with which to get to Alameda. Here I found a tallyho going toward the city with 20 passengers at \$1.00 a head. I climbed aboard. We got in sight of the city at about 10, and found things to be exaggerated. We could see that most of the big buildings were standing although they were partly hidden by the smoke. I also saw the dome of the temple³¹ and felt better. Our driver stopped way out on 26th Street and refused to go farther. I started to walk in along Valencia.

At this time I counted 5 large fires. There were 3 in the Mission, a very large one in the wholesale district and one at about 8th and Market. The streets were jammed with people carrying bedding, bird cages, and trunks – also dragging anything on wheels. Throughout the Mission there were evidences of the earthquake's work – brick buildings down and even some wooden slopped over into the street. All the streets were full of bricks from chimneys.³²

At about 15th and Valencia I passed a big wooden hotel on fire. There were no fire lines and in fact nobody seemed to be paying any attention to the fire at all. They passed it by with that peculiar listless and somewhat bored expression which in the later days proved to be so characteristic. That interest which is generally present in a crowd watching a fire seemed to be absent; even at this early date they were already tired.

I went down along Mission to 5th and here I was blocked by a big fire which

seemed to join with that in the wholesale district. I crossed over to Market and noted among other things that the Call, Chronicle, Examiner, and Emporium buildings were burning. So you see it was already quite a fire. At this time there was almost no wind. I went out Market Street to 8th and here there was another big fire covering several blocks. I went around this and up Van Ness to Calif.

From this side the synagogue appeared all right but when I got around on Webster I found about half the house missing and the door swinging open as if every one had left.³³ I went in and found every one O.K. as you know. Gus³⁴ was down town watching the store burn. The spare room, dining room, and E[lsie] and D[orothy]'s rooms were the only ones smashed. Today, while digging around in the kids' room to find some hats which are not there, I uncovered 2 of the chimney stones; they measure roughly 5' x 3' x 2', so you can see what a narrow escape they had. The room was certainly a sight, as they will tell you.

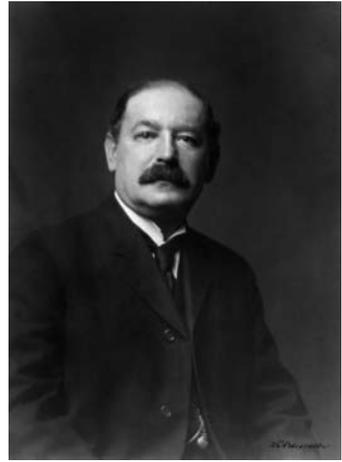
I got something to eat and then took the kids to Lafayette Square to watch the fire.

After a cold supper I took the kids to Ackermans³⁵ for the night. On the way we stopped at Alta Plaza and watched the fire. It was quite a sight. The town was extremely well lighted by it, as it was during the 3 succeeding nights, although less so on the 4th night³⁶ when it was burning itself out at North Beach.

At Ackermans things were crowded and grouchy. The Arnsteins³⁷ were there or rather arrived when we did. Also Fiesco and Gussy.³⁸



Elvira (Ella) Klauber Wormser married Gustav Wormser in 1888. They lived in a three-story Victorian-style house at 2014 Webster St. in Pacific Heights. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.



Gustav Wormser was a partner in the wholesale grocery firm of Sussman, Wormser and Company, later S & W Fine Foods. His warehouse was on Spear St., San Francisco. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.

When I got back I found Gus and Ella trying to sleep on couches downstairs in the parlor. I took a blanket and went to Lafayette Square where I could watch the fire. It was burning in a semicircle, from about California and Sansome to Golden Gate and Van Ness, and on the far side of Market pretty much all over the Mission. The park was crowded with people and their belongings – most of them rolled up in blankets and asleep. At 2 a.m. Ella came up with Marie, the upstairs lady.³⁹ It was pretty cold so we went for a walk. We went down Van Ness to Golden Gate. Here the fire had been stopped (it was started again next morning by a woman lighting a fire in a house) and this district appeared safe. All along on the far side it was burning with the help of a light N-W wind.

Walking back on Van Ness we noticed that the Flood Building was on fire and burning nicely. This was about 2:30 a.m. All Van Ness from Golden



Refugees fled west to the Western Addition and Golden Gate Park, east by ferry to Oakland, or south to San Mateo. ©SDHS 1998:40 Anne Bricknell/F. E. Patterson Photograph Collection.

Gate up was crowded with persons and their goods. They were lying around on the sidewalks and in the front gardens of all the Van Ness residences; and it was necessary to walk in the street in order to avoid stepping on Frisco's 400 as it lay asleep on the sidewalk rolled up in furs and opera cloaks.⁴⁰

In the morning the people started on their journey toward the hills accompanied by the usual lawn-mowers, bird cages, and sewing machines.

At about 8 [a.m.] as the kids⁴¹ will tell you we started for Berkeley. Went down Franklin to Broadway and thence to East St. North (water front). At this time there was a good fire burning from about Sacramento and Dupont to the City Hall in a semicircle taking in the better part of the retail district. There were also fires in the warehouse district and in the Mission. Down Broadway we made fast time in spite of the huge mob of refugees and their worldly goods also making for the ferry. This jam consisted mostly in Chinese, Japanese, and Italians of every type. At East Street⁴² we caught up with the Arnsteins under convoy of Mr. Whats his name (Elsie can tell you)⁴³ and from here on everything was plain tho' somewhat crowded sailing.⁴⁴ Leaving the kids in charge of the old gent at his house I went on to Berkeley and radiated a bunch of telegrams. Then went to the Phi Delta Theta House to let Vic⁴⁵ know that his sister was O.K. Found that Vic[tor Morgan] was in the city on guard duty. I then got a big suitcase loaded with 14 loaves of bread, \$1.00 [worth of] cheese, and the same of sausage, and lit out toward the city so I went to the Berkeley City Hall to get a permit.⁴⁶ Failing in this I went to Oakland where launches were taking people in on their own responsibility. After waiting for about an hour I succeeded in finding one which took passengers, at \$2.00, on the chance of their being able to land. I got aboard this after some roughhouse and we went across. We sneaked along the water front from Channel St. up and finally landed on a float at the foot of Howard St. Here we got ashore and mingled with the crowd.⁴⁷

It was aboard this boat that I got the first trustworthy news from the outside. It had been reported that L[os] A[ngeles] and S[an] D[iego] were badly hit. Also Chicago and New Orleans. It was generally admitted about town that Salt Lake City, being in the center, must have gotten it worst. New York, it was said, was almost untouched. Everything on the coast was supposed to be in about the same state as S.F. A huge tidal wave was reported as one of the incidents at SD.⁴⁸ On the launch was a man from LA and from him I got a pretty definite idea of the extent of the shake. This was quite a relief.

The water front was even more crowded than early in the day. Supplies were being brought off the river steamers and loaded on to trucks well guarded by soldiers. There was a depot for distributing milk to women and children; also a number of sprinkling wagons with drinking water. There was a push cart in front of the ferry building loaded with oranges and candy and there were five soldiers on guard.

I had a good view of the fire from the top of Russian Hill. They were dynamiting extensively in Chinatown and the Barbary Coast but still the fire was gaining rapidly. Three engines were at work pumping water from the sewers;⁴⁹ there was also a relay of engines bringing a single steam from the bay. Of course all this had little effect on the fire. As the dynamiting continued the soldiers gradually drove the people further and further up the hills and Russian Hill was jammed. A few people in the warehouse district were getting hot canned stuff from the ruins. On Russian Hill as I went thru, the soldiers broke in all the little grocery stores and distributed the food. They did likewise of course all over town.

There were 8 engines stalled in a semicircle around the ferry building. They were useless and could not be hauled away as the entire west side of East Street was burnt and blocked traffic. These engines came in handy on the fourth day⁵⁰ of the fire when, having burned over the hills to North Beach, it started back along the water front taking in wharves and warehouses. It was stopped I think at the foot of Lombard Street thus leaving most of the piers and the ferry building intact, although everything on the other side of the street, including the warehouses of the Belt Line, are gone.

When I got home at 2014 (about 6 p.m.) I found Gus busy burying valuables in the yard. Earlier in the day he had succeeded in getting a wagon for \$40.00 to haul the piano, some books, and canned goods to the Ackermans and 5th Avenue.⁵¹ Ella was at 5th Avenue. I worked awhile with Gus and together we buried the children's books, and the good dishes and glasses. Ella had cut the pictures out of their frames and taken them with her.

We went to Engine House 15 and registered for some kind of police committee.⁵² There was not much doing but talk so I went back, got my suitcase of grub and lit out for Ackermans. Found everything very grouchy here. I slept a few moments on the porch, unloaded half the food and lit out for 5th Avenue. The fire was now burning extensively in the Mission, in Hayes Valley, and the retail district. Also Chinatown and further north. Even as far out as Presidio Avenue it was brighter than full moon, and of course red. Was stopped a number of times on the way out by soldiers and once by a U[niversity of] C[alifornia] cadet whom I jollied about the field day.⁵³

At 5th and Lake I was stopped by a citizen guard and he wouldn't let me go up 5th, so I took him along. I knocked at the door and Ella came and explained

that it was all O.K. We got some Persian rugs of Lucy's and slept on the floor; the house being about half open with one room unencumbered with debris. Up to this time no fires were allowed in the streets and of course no lights in the houses. We hit the floor about 12 P.M. and here endeth the second day (to be continued – maybe).

Afterward

I have always regretted not having continued this letter on a subsequent day, but I presume that there was so much of interest to see, and so many things to be done that I never got around to it. Also, it is to be remembered that for many days, if not weeks, we had no artificial light at night. After an early evening walk we usually turned in and called it a day.

To continue the story, as well as memory permits, on the following morning, which was Friday the 20th, my sister Ella and I walked from 55 Fifth Avenue back to the house at 2014 Webster Street, to see whether it was still standing, and how the fire was progressing. We had a toy coaster-wagon loaded with canned goods and other food. I was very tired from the previous day's exploits, and we stopped quite frequently. We started out at seven o'clock in the morning and must have arrived about ten. My sister stood the trip better than I did. We were much pleased to find the house standing, and the fire still at quite a distance.

As far as I know, we spent that night in Lafayette Square. It was early that evening that the fire was finally stopped rather unexpectedly, as it had crossed Van Ness Avenue between Clay and Sutter; it was first thought that this crossing would be fatal to the area immediately to the west, since the wide avenue had been the best hope of stopping the fire. One of the last houses to burn, maybe the next to the last, was our old home at 1324 Sutter Street, the next house to the Franklin Street corner, where our family lived from 1884 to 1892, before we returned to San Diego.

The fact that the fire was out was announced to the crowds in the streets and parks by buglers on horseback, but what time of night that was I have no remembrance.

Altogether, I stayed in San Francisco six weeks after the fire before returning to San Diego. I went almost everywhere I desired by the use of a pass reading as follows:

“San Francisco, Cal., April 21st, '06
“The bearer of this, Mr. L. Klauber, is a member of



San Franciscans from every social class and neighborhood stood in line for daily rations doled out by the military. ©SDHS #1998:40 Anne Bricknell/F. E. Patterson Photograph Collection.

Mission, N ¼ blk, E ½ blk, N ¼ blk, E to Capp, N to within 75 ft of 18th, E 1/3 blk, N to 18th, E to Howard, N to 15th, E to Shotwell, E ½ blk, N ¼ blk, E to Folsom, N to within 50 ft of 14th, E 50 ft, N to 14th, E to Harrison; along Harrison to 11th, SE to within 75 ft of Bryant, NE to Juniper, SE to Bryant, NE to 9th and 100 ft beyond. SE ½ blk, NE to 8th, SE to pt midway bet Brannan and Townsend, NE ½ blk, SE to Townsend, NE to 2nd, NW 1/3 blk, NE 75 ft, NW 75 ft, SW to 2nd, NW to within 50 ft of corner. NE ½ blk, NW to Brannan, NE to 1st, NW to Federal. N along base of Rincon Hill to Fremont at pt midway bet Bryant and Harrison, NE to Beale, NW to Harrison, NE to Main, NW to Folsom, SW ¾ blk, NW ½ blk, NE to Main, NW to Howard, NE to Steuart, NW to Mission and 50 ft beyond, NE to East, NW to Pacific, W to Drumm, N to East, NW to Filbert, W to Battery, S ½ blk, W to S ½ blk, W to Sansome, S to Union, SW along base of Telegraph Hill to pt on Green midway bet Sansome and Montgomery, W to Montgomery, N to Union, W ¼ blk, N to Filbert, W to Kearney, N 1-1/2 blks, W 1/3 blk, N to Lombard, E to pt midway bet Kearney and Montgomery, NW to Kearney and Chestnut, E to Sansome, N to East, NW to foot of Francisco, E to the Bay.

The Russian Hill district saved:

Begin at cor. of Broadway and Taylor, W ½ blk, N to Vallejo, W to Jones, N ¾ blk, W ½ blk, S ¼ blk, W to Leavenworth, N to Green, E ½ blk, N ½ blk, E to Jones and 75 ft beyond, S to Green, E 50 ft, N ½ blk, E to Taylor, S to Vallejo, E ¼ blk, S ¼ blk, W ¼ blk, S to starting pt.

In connection with this tour around the edge, I crossed the burned zone many times and saw the gradual clearing of the wreckage from the streets to permit



Homeless San Franciscans were asked to do their cooking in the street due to the danger of fire. ©SDHS #1998:40 Anne Bricknell/F. E. Patterson Photograph Collection.

traffic. I have often wondered whether I was the first to follow and record the fire boundary in such detail.

Some of the scenes which I failed to mention in my letter that still stand out are these:

The after shocks of course were quite frequent, some of them fairly good shakes and very frightening to the high-strung populace. I remember being in a grocery store at about California and Lyon streets, when there was the usual little tremble, and the woman standing next to me fell over in a dead faint.

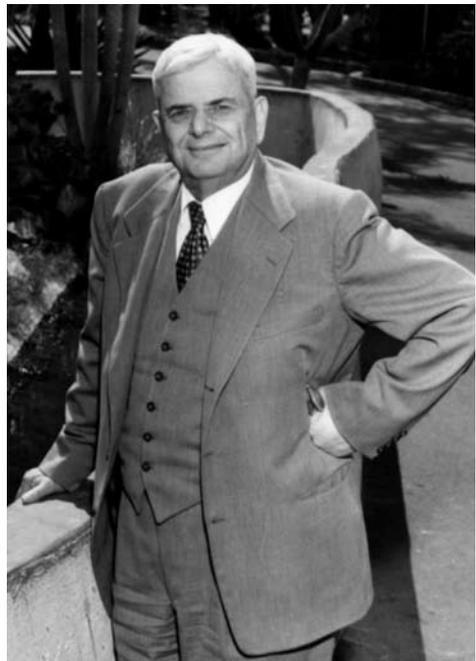
In a drug store on Fillmore Street on the first night after the earthquake, there was a woman attempting to buy a certain kind of tooth brush (a prophylactic, medium, or something as particular). It was dark, and the druggist was allowed only one candle and he couldn't find his stock. He had plenty of tooth brushes available, but not the kind upon which the woman insisted. Suddenly he became furious and pushed her out of the store, stating that everyone else wanted either whiskey or morphine, or something important, and he had no time for tooth brushes. He was complimented by a policeman who was getting supplies for a temporary hospital.

I remember standing at the corner of First Avenue and California Street, when a woman in a nearby house started a series of the most unearthly shrieks. A soldier, with fixed bayonet, rushed into the building, but what the row was about I never heard. This kind of excitement was frequent, and strange to relate, wasn't followed up.

Our relations with the constabulary were usually quite pleasant. The soldiers were parked about one to the block in our area, principally to look out for lights. We often stopped to chat with them and ask for news. I believe that some time later candles were allowed until about nine o'clock, and I was called down once for reading some detective story overtime.

Another scene – I think it was the second morning, when the children and I were walking to the ferry. We came upon a truck piled high with household effects near Franklin and California. Several of my relatives were gathered about, but I only remember the girl who married one of my cousins several years later. She was sitting on top of the pile and making a considerable squawk. I think the trouble was they had a truck all right, but no horse.

I have some remembrance of the opening of the S. and W. safe, which was quite an affair, as the sales slips of several days' business had been left inside; I think they had rescued most of the important account books before the fire reached the building. Old man



Laurence M. Klauber worked at San Diego Gas & Electric for forty-three years. He served on the Board of Trustees of the San Diego Society of Natural History and as the consulting curator of reptiles at the San Diego Zoo. Courtesy of Philip Klauber.

Sussman was in a fearful state; and as the mechanics worked on the safe he kept turning to me as an expert, and repeatedly asked me whether I thought they would be burned, or if burned whether they would be legible. I wasn't an expert and couldn't help him. The door finally swung open. The papers either burned then (from the effect of the oxygen on the partially charred material within) or they had already burned – I can't remember which. There was a great to-do; but I think the slips, with the exception of a few on top, were finally deciphered in their charred state.

Epilogue, April 18, 1958

What does one remember of actual sights and sounds more than fifty years after an experience such as that described? Very little in my case, and these memories without continuity or relevance to importance.

Vignettes: The yellow uniforms of Caruso and his fellow Spanish guards; the violent shaking of the earthquake itself, as felt on the fourth floor of a masonry building; the dogs, cats, canaries, and more exotic pets carried in boxes, cages, or held on leash – every refugee seemed to have one; the household goods along the fire boundary, dragged to safety and then abandoned; living with the sun because of the lack of artificial light.

Broader memories: The queer feeling of pride at being a witness to the greatest destruction by fire of man's handiwork that had ever been seen by man (Chicago? hm!); the rarity of evidences of acute grief or despair, but the prevalence of an all-pervading weariness for all means of transportation except one's two feet were lost, and everything to be moved must be dragged or carried on the back; the feeling that one should be doing something, without knowing what or to what end; the relief at sight of the military, not because of any fear of one's fellows, but because the soldiers constituted tangible evidence of guidance and control; the exchange of information in the bread lines – people had to know what was going on and readily accepted as truth whatever a neighbor said, even though he was known to have no more factual basis than his merest guess.

Some of these experiences were not forgotten when I headed San Diego's Civil Defense Committee during the last war. Fortunately, of course, our plans and programs never had to be put into operation under stress.

Later developments have raised questions in the mind as to the psychology and control of future refugees fleeing from danger. In San Francisco in 1906, it was only necessary to get into the open, away from any buildings, to be safe from any threat from earthquake or fire. Both of these are easily recognized, for they affect the senses. How will it be if the threat is fallout, whose danger alerts no human sense; when neither sight, sound, taste, odor, nor touch, can tell the frightened people whether the danger is present, or how serious it may be? Then will rumor really become supreme and supremely dangerous, since it will lead almost instantly to panic and the paralyzing of all automotive traffic, whether of succor or escape.

NOTES

1. Special thanks to Philip M. Klauber, Laurence Klauber Wormser; Margaret Kimball, University Archivist, Stanford University; and Patricia E. White, Department of Special Collections, Stanford.
2. According to two recent studies, the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake had a magnitude of between 7.7 and 7.9. The previous estimate of 8.3 was based on older data. See U.S. Geological Survey, Earthquake Hazards Program, <http://quake.wr.usgs.gov/info/1906/magnitude.html> (accessed 1/14/06). For more information on the earthquake and fire, see William Bronson, *The Earth Shook, The Sky Burned* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959; San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1986); Philip L. Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906: How San Francisco Nearly Destroyed Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Gladys Hansen and Emmet Condon, *Denial of Disaster* (San Francisco: Cameron and Co., 1989); Charles D. James and Susan Fatemi, *Aftershocks: Photographs of the 1906 San Francisco and 1923 Tokyo Earthquakes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Dan Kurzman, *Disaster!: The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906* (New York: William Morrow, 2001); Charles Morris, ed., *The San Francisco Calamity by Earthquake and Fire*, introduction by Roger W. Lotchin (Philadelphia: J. C. Winston Co., 1906; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Erica Y. Z. Pan, *The Impact of the 1906 Earthquake on San Francisco's Chinatown* (New York: P. Lang, 1995); Eric Saul and Don DeNevi, *The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, 1906* (Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1981); Gordon Thomas and Max M. Witts, *The San Francisco Earthquake* (New York: Stein and Day, [1971]); Dennis Smith, *San Francisco is Burning: The Untold Story of the 1906 Earthquake and Fires* (New York: Viking, 2005); Simon Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World: America and the Great California Earthquake of 1906* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005); "The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire," Bancroft Library, <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/earthquakeandfire/splash.html> (accessed 1/12/06). The 1906 Centennial Alliance provides information about activities and events being held to commemorate the anniversary of the earthquake and fire. See <http://1906centennial.org/> (accessed 1/12/06).
3. Alice E. Klauber (1871-1951) was the daughter of Abraham and Theresa Klauber. She was an accomplished artist who co-founded the San Diego Fine Arts Society (1926) and served as honorary curator of oriental art at the Fine Arts Gallery. She was instrumental in bringing many American artists to the Panama California Exposition in 1915. She also donated many valuable art works to the Fine Arts Gallery (later the San Diego Museum of Art). "Artists' Biographies," *The Journal of San Diego History (JSDH)* 47, no. 3 (2001), 236; "Alice Ellen Klauber," San Diego Biographies, San Diego Historical Society, <http://sandieghistory.org/bio/klauber/aliceklauber.htm> (accessed 1/12/06); Bruce Kamerling, "Painting Ladies: Some Early San Diego Women Artists," *JSDH* 32, no. 3 (1986): 147-191.
4. Laurence Klauber's son Philip recalled that his father "barely caught the last train to Palo Alto, by running. If he'd missed the train there'd be no speech here today, for the bed at his sister's house, where he stayed when visiting the City, was completely destroyed by a falling stone in the earthquake the next morning." Philip Klauber, "Reminiscences on L.M.K." "Laurence Klauber," San Diego Historical Society (SDHS) Biographical Files.
5. Elvira (Ella) Klauber (1863-1932) was the eldest daughter of Abraham and Theresa Klauber. She married Gustav Wormser (1857-1921), producing three children: Elsie Wormser (1891-1947), Dorothy Wormser (1894-1988) and Paul Wormser (1892-1953). Paul Wormser's grandchildren are Carolyn E. Wormser (b. 1962), Paul W. Wormser (b. 1966) and Stephen L. Wormser (b. 1968).
6. Laurence M. Klauber's *Two Days in San Francisco – 1906* (1958) was privately printed for friends and family. Copies can be found in the Bancroft Library and the San Diego Historical Society Research Archives. Klauber, interviewed in 1960, said that "I was at Stanford University at the time of the earthquake of April 18th, 1906. The university buildings were severely damaged and a student in my dormitory was killed. As I had a sister living in San Francisco I went up to the city that morning, by riding the train for a short distance and thereafter partly on a wagon and partly afoot. I stayed up there for six weeks after the earthquake and often stood in a bread line. It was a most interesting experience. Which I have recounted in a little booklet of which a copy is on file with the Historical Society." Laurence M. Klauber, interviewed by Edgar F. Hastings, May 12, 1960, "Laurence Klauber," SDHS Biographical Files.
7. Richard Muller, "Pioneer Spirit: The Klauber Wangenheim Company," *JSDH* 29, no. 1 (1983).
8. Alice Gould Klauber (b. 1913) married David Miller (1914-1993) in 1940. They had three children: Grace Louise Miller Valencia (b. 1942), Laurence Miller (b. 1944), and David Miller, Jr. (b. 1952). Philip

THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

Monroe Klauber (b. 1915) married Detty June Stevenson Conyers (1918-1992). They had four children: Jeffrey Conyers, Timothy Klauber (b. 1949), Janet Klauber Oliver (b. 1950), and Laurie Katherine Klauber Wasserman (b. 1958).

9. Laurence Monroe Klauber, *Rattlesnakes, Their Habits, Life Histories, and Influence on Mankind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

10. Iris Engstrand and Anne Bullard, *Inspired by Nature: The San Diego Natural History Museum After 125 Years* (San Diego: San Diego Natural History Museum, 1999), 80-81; Iris Engstrand and Kathleen Crawford, *Reflections: A History of the San Diego Gas and Electric Company, 1881-1991* (San Diego: San Diego Historical Society, 1991), 137; "Laurence Klauber," SDHS Biographical Files; San Diego Biographies, "Laurence K. Klauber [sic] (1883-1968)," San Diego Historical Society, <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/bio/klauber/klauber.htm> (accessed 1/1/06); "Laurence M. Klauber," San Diego Natural History Museum, <http://www.sdnhm.org/history/klauber/index.html> (accessed 1/12/06).

11. My sister Alice.

12. Olga Epstein, a cousin, who subsequently went to our home in San Diego with the Wormser children mentioned in the introduction. "Cotton sign" is obscure; probably a comparison is to be inferred between any painting at the Hopkins Art Institute and a muslin advertising banner.

13. Probably the sophomoric style may be justified by the fact that the writer was at the time a sophomore at Stanford. While actually 22 years old, his mental age was 14. In the intervening years this has advanced by two years.

14. The grammar indicates typical college humor of that day.

15. [Douglas Ferry, class of 1909, received his AB in Civil Engineering].

16. In starting my story with the grand opera of the night before, I had no idea that I was setting an important precedent. Most of the stories of the earthquake and fire which subsequently became famous, including that of Will Irwin, start with the same performance. I was in the gallery of the old Grand Opera House on Mission Street at this gala performance. The principals besides [Olive] Fremstad and [Enrico] Caruso were Bessie Abbot and [Merzell] Journet. I presume the alumni of that pre-earthquake opera performance are no longer numerous. I also had tickets for a subsequent opera, Tannhäuser, which, however, was never given. The next opera I attended was The Huguenots, Mar. 31, 1907, out at the Chutes. It was a good deal like putting on an opera in a barn. But the cast made it worthwhile – [Alice] Nielsen, [Lillian] Nordica, [Andres] de Segurola, [Florencio] Constantino *et. al.* Douglas Ferry, of San Diego, was a classmate at Stanford.

17. Actually, we caught the train as it was passing 4th and Townsend. Had I missed it I undoubtedly would have gone to my sister's for the night, and would have occupied my customary bed on the third floor, through which bed one of the stones from a chimney crashed next morning, as mentioned later. The difficulty in catching the train was caused by a fire on Third Street and hoses stretched across the trolley-car tracks at about Third and Howard.

18. Meaning College Terrace, where I roomed.

19. From the standpoint of observation a very fortunate location in the northwestern corner of the building, thus giving an unobstructed view both to the north toward the new library and gymnasium, and west toward the quad and chapel. [Encina Hall was converted to administrative use in the 1950s. It now houses several academic programs].

20. The earthquake was more severe at Stanford, and at other points in the Santa Clara Valley, for two reasons: first, they were nearer to the line of the San Andreas Fault; second, being on alluvial soil, the buildings suffered more than those on rock formations, as was the case with most of San Francisco.

21. These clouds of dust are quite characteristic of serious earthquakes. The buildings referred to were the new library and gymnasium, which were not yet occupied. The first was a large building with a central dome of structural steel, which in its vibrations knocked down the two three-story wings. Beyond this was the gymnasium, also new and unoccupied, which settled into a mass of ruins. Toward the west, the quad was badly shaken but the buildings did not fall. The church spire, however, was badly wrecked, and this I saw. A large chimney in the engineering group fell, but I do not recall having seen this. The library and gymnasium buildings were too completely wrecked to be restored.

22. Referring to a bull terrier by the name of Jack Dempsey that we once owned. This, of course, was named for the original Jack Dempsey, a middleweight of the early '90s, not the later heavyweight

champion of the same name.

23. [Rufus Lot Green, Professor of Mathematics].

24. I think Hanna was in the room either immediately to the east of us, or in that tier of rooms, but one or two stories below. The blankets mentioned were obtained from dormitory rooms on the ground floor. [Junius Robert Hanna, from Pennsylvania, was studying electrical engineering; he was the only student to die on campus during the earthquake.]

25. *The Daily Palo Alto*, the college newspaper of that day. Hugo, my brother, Stanford '98. The "Row" refers to the fraternity and sorority houses. Roble was the women's dormitory.

26. David Starr Jordan, President of the University [David Starr Jordan (1851-1931) was an American eugenicist and a leading ichthyologist, educator and peace activist. He was president of Indiana University (1885-91) and Stanford University (1891-1913).]

27. Benjamin Ide Wheeler, President of the University of California. I do not know whether this story has stood the test of time; remember this was written within 12 days of the disaster when much wilder yarns were a dime a dozen. [Benjamin Ide Wheeler (1854-1927) was a professor of Greek and comparative philology at Cornell University before serving as president of the University of California (1899-1919). The University of California, Berkeley, did not suffer major damage as a result of the earthquake. However, refugee camps were established on campus and University cadets were dispatched to maintain order in San Francisco. "Centennial of 1906," University of California, Berkeley, <http://seismo.berkeley.edu/seismo/1906/> (accessed 1/12/06)].

28. Was anyone so completely mottled as to believe this might be issuing from a brand-new volcano? Answer: Yes.

29. This was more or less typical of the kind of rumors that one heard. No rolling stone ever gathered moss as fast as rumors increased in size and intensity as they traveled through these crowds. I presume "furious rate" may have meant 30 m.p.h.

30. His name was E. J. Boyce. I remember him particularly as I had accidentally injured his eye in a boxing match in the gym some weeks before.

31. Meaning a synagogue next to my sister's house. This was Temple Sherith Israel, a domed edifice of green limestone, recently erected. The wooden house was close to the north wall of the larger building, which towered over it. By "tallyho" was meant a horse-drawn, passenger vehicle of that day. The occupants back of the driver usually sat in longitudinal seats facing each other.

32. This was a good opportunity to see the extent of the damage by earthquake before the damage intermingled with that of the subsequent fire. It was considerable in the lower areas, particularly on alluvial or filled ground.

33. A typical example of youthful understatement. I had a terrible shock as I came around the California Street corner and saw that the southern wall of my sister's house had been torn out, from roof to cellar, by several stones which fell from a chimney or coping on the north wall of the higher synagogue.

34. Gustav Wormser, my brother-in-law. He was a partner in the wholesale grocery firm of Sussman, Wormser and Co., later S. & W. Fine Foods. Their warehouse was on Spear St. [Gustav Wormser (1851-1921) married Ella Klauber in 1888.]

35. Sigmund Ackerman, a cousin, who lived farther out in the Pacific Heights district. I believe he was the manager of the Grand Opera House.

36. My chronology was evidently mixed, as the fire burned itself out on the third night; or there may have been a few stray fires along the waterfront still burning on the fourth night.

37. [Ludwig Arnstein (1852-1930), Mercedes (Mercy) Mandelbaum Arnstein (1857-1931) and their son, Laurence Arnstein (1880-1979)].

38. More cousins of divers grades.

39. The cook or maid.

40. Everyone else walking on Van Ness that night seems to have tripped over Caruso asleep in his pajamas on the sidewalk. I didn't.

41. Meaning the three Wormser children, Elsie, Paul, and Dorothy. Actually, it was nearer 9 than 8.

THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

Of course we walked.

42. East Street, now part of the Embarcadero.

43. The name was Sieleman.

44. The letter is not clear as to what we did. We crossed the Bay in a ferry to Oakland, where the children were left in charge of the Sieleman family. He was, I believe, an employee of Sussman, Wormser & Company.

45. Victor Morgan of San Diego. His sister Jeanette was at Stanford.

46. Swiss cheese. I don't know how many pounds of Swiss cheese or of bologna \$1.00 bought then, but they were mighty heavy before I reached my destination. I had evidently picked up a rumor to the effect that a permit to return to San Francisco was necessary, which caused the fruitless visit to the Berkeley City Hall.

47. We all acted like criminals, and it is entirely possible that some of us were.

48. As insane as these rumors may sound now, they were quite usual, and were believed by most people at that time, for not a single bit of authentic news was then available to any ordinary person.

49. These old-fashioned steam fire engines always had a great attraction for me. I sat on the curb and watched one for a while. I was worn out from packing that cheese and sausage up the steep hills. Every so often the engine would lose its suction from lack of water in the sewer manhole. Then the engine would race and the firemen would curse.

50. Probably this should read "third."

51. Just before the fire my brother-in-law had purchased a residence at 55 5th Avenue, which was now in process of being rebuilt. As nearly as I remember, the roof was partly retained, but most of the walls were skeletons. We buried in the yard at 2014 Webster Street, much of the silverware, crockery, and books. All of this was dug up later safely enough. Why we did not have sufficient presence of mind to cover the books with sheets, I have never been able to determine. They were considerably injured by the damp soil.

52. I can remember that my brother-in-law was fiercely impatient with this committee, which was much more busily engaged in getting organized with proper constitution, by-laws, and officers, than it was in doing anything.

53. Hap Myers, afterwards a great baseball player. The "field day" refers to a past or imminent track-and-field contest.



"...What a whirl I have been in since I left S.D. ... will have to tell you all when I get home." Postcard from "Biddy" to Mrs. J.M. Bricknell, 3rd and Date Streets, San Diego, CA, June 8, 1906. ©SDHS #1998:40 Anne Bricknell/F. E. Patterson Photograph Collection.