

MUSEUM REVIEW

The Museum of San Diego History, San Diego Historical Society, Place of Promise: Stories of San Diego, permanent exhibition.

The Museum of San Diego History opened the first phase of its core exhibition, *Place of Promise: Stories of San Diego*, on July 21, 2006. It occupies two large exhibit galleries on the first floor of the San Diego Historical Society (SDHS).

The centerpiece of the exhibit is a twenty-seven-foot map of San Diego County located on the floor of the central gallery. Visitors can walk across North County, through downtown San Diego, and to the border of Mexico simply by taking a few steps. The museum offers large cards, designed to be placed on the map, that ask



Detail from “San Diego Harbor” by Charles Reiffel. San Diego Historical Society (lent by the U.S. General Services Administration).

questions such as, “Where should the new airport be located?” A personal history board asks visitors why they cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Finally, an innovative audio cell-phone guide program, *Guide by Cell*, provides visitors with information about many of the objects on display.

Two striking features of the central gallery are large-scale panels by landscape artist Charles Reiffel (1862-1942). His *San Diego Harbor* and *San Diego*

Backcountry were produced for San Diego High School in 1936 and funded through the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA). Reiffel painted with energetic brushstrokes, using abstract forms and bold lines. His paintings display a vitality rarely seen in landscapes, even those produced by other post-expressionist painters.

Other objects on display include a bathing tent from the Hotel del Coronado and a barge rowed by members of ZLAC Rowing Club founded in 1892, the oldest women’s rowing club in the world. Also on display is the thick guest register from the 1915 Panama-California Exposition in Balboa Park.

Currently on display is Streetcar 54, an electric-powered passenger streetcar that operated in San Diego in 1910. At the turn of the century, streetcars opened up real estate development in



Guest Register for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition. Accession No. 2000.125 San Diego Historical Society.



A. J. Roberts painted this fantasy in 1913 to promote the upcoming Panama-California Exposition in Balboa Park. He imagined a lake with gondolas beneath the Cabrillo Bridge. Accession No. 86.6.1. San Diego Historical Society (gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Cuchna).

University Heights, Normal Heights, Mission Beach, Ocean Beach, Pacific Beach, National City, East San Diego, and La Jolla. A typical Sunday streetcar ride took passengers up Park Boulevard to Mission Cliffs Gardens where they could picnic, take balloon rides, watch Shakespeare's *As You Like It* performed in the open-air theatre, or view magic lantern shows.

The core exhibit will develop thematic displays linked to a chronological overview of the region's history. Core themes include immigration; the shared history of San Diego and Baja California; the contributions of diverse ethnic communities to the development of the city; water resource management; outdoor recreation and tourism; and the rise of the military-industrial complex.

Historic photographs from the Society's collection illustrate the exhibit, providing visitors with a sense of change over time. In addition, oral histories collected by SDHS researchers provide first-hand accounts of how people experienced life in San Diego from the 1880s through World War II.

Place of Promise: Stories of San Diego is made possible through the generous support of members of the San Diego community, including the Heller Foundation of San Diego, the J. W. Sefton Foundation, and other local donors. For information on how to contribute to the mission of the San Diego Historical Society, please contact Executive Director David S. Watson at (619) 232-6203.