



# SAN DIEGO HISTORY CENTER



## IMPACT REPORT

2024 - 2025





“ As a proud supporter, I see firsthand how the History Center’s initiatives are not just preserving our community’s history, but actively enriching it. Their dedication to storytelling and education is a cause worthy of every investment. ”

—Bob Watkins,  
Chair, Board of Trustees

Point Loma Lighthouse, circa 1911.

# EVERYONE & EVERYTHING HAS A STORY

## AND THAT'S WHERE WE COME IN

### Welcome to the San Diego History Center.

Did you know that the San Diego History Center has been a beacon of historical preservation and education for over 96 years? This report invites you to explore our dynamic achievements and our commitment to enhance community wellbeing by offering invaluable resources, vibrant educational programs, and a profound sense of place.

As one of the leading historical organizations on the West Coast, we engage audiences of all ages in understanding how history shapes our community. We offer enriching educational programs for families and students while our Research Archives support scholarly pursuits. Our website, brimming with historical content and an extensive online photo gallery, attracts over a million visitors annually.

We invite you to explore our achievements, support our mission, and join us in weaving the diverse stories that define San Diego.



*Docent tour at The Junípero Serra Museum.*



*Demonstrating highlights of the object collections in the Research Archives to a group of adult learners.*

# IMPACT

Over 5,000 students participate in our hands-on programs each year

38 unique exhibits, programs, and educational experiences presented in 2023-2024

Our archives house over 45 million objects, photographs, and documents

Volunteers provided over 8,000 hours of support in 2024 alone

Two museums in National Register Historic Districts

Over 50 schools participated in our K-12 programs last year

In 2028 & 2029 we will celebrate our 100th anniversary

# IT IS WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM...

**T**hat we present to you a glimpse into the incredible efforts of the San Diego History Center to preserve, illuminate, and celebrate the rich history of our beloved San Diego region.

The work we undertake—bridging the past, present, and future to nurture a vibrant, healthy community—thrives because of your unwavering support. This would not be achievable without the dedication of our passionate volunteers, talented staff, and dedicated Board of Trustees. Whether you're a newcomer to San Diego or have generational roots intertwined with our shared history, your involvement is shaping the future of our community.

At our museum and archive in Balboa Park, alongside the Serra Museum in Presidio Park, we proudly highlight what makes our diverse communities unique. Through engaging exhibitions and dynamic educational and public programs, we are inspiring the next generation of leaders, dreamers, and innovators. By exploring our vast collections of images, documents, art, and objects, we uncover narratives that reveal how San Diego has evolved into the eighth largest and one of the most culturally diverse regions in the nation.

The San Diego History Center is more than a repository of objects, stories, facts, and figures. It is the living story of our community—where we've been, who we are, and, most importantly, where we are headed.

Our exploration of history constantly reshapes our perspectives and enriches our understanding. History isn't static—and neither is the San Diego History Center. We have a bold vision to create a new, world-class museum and digital archive that will excite, educate, and entertain—one that is inclusive and accessible to all.

We warmly invite you to join us on this exciting journey—in person at our museums and archives, through this report, or online.

With gratitude,



Bill Lawrence  
*President & CEO*



# ABOUT US

The San Diego History Center, founded as the San Diego Historical Society, has played a crucial role in the community since 1928. Dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of the San Diego region, the History Center is a vital hub for education and community engagement, where differing and thought-provoking perspectives are shared. With our primary museum and archives located in Balboa Park and the Junípero Serra Museum in Presidio Park, we proudly operate as a Smithsonian Affiliate and stand as one of the largest historical organizations in the western United States.

Our mission is to connect people with their shared past through preservation, education, and storytelling, nurturing a vibrant and inclusive community. Here are some of the ways we accomplish that:



*Audience at 2024 panel discussion Girls Can't Surf.*



*Group of third graders investigating artifacts in the See Yourself Here program.*



Summer 2024 intern showing Aaron Price Fellows primary source documents from the Hall of Champions collection.

## A HUB FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Learning is at the core of what we do. We provide lifelong learning opportunities for all ages through various educational, community, and experiential programs and ongoing exhibits designed to engage a diverse audience both onsite and online. Our programs include hands-on workshops, guest speaker events, and interactive exhibits that cater to different interests and age groups.



Students examining first-hand historic sports memorabilia in the History Center galleries.

## Did you know?

With funding from US Bank, the History Center Education Department created a new program **See Yourself Here**. Third through sixth grade students discover the trials and triumphs of our community leaders from San Diego's past and present through the examination and investigation of artifacts, documents, art, oral histories, and historic photographs.



With the support of Patrons of the Prado, the San Diego History Center is able to provide bus transportation to the students or their schools that otherwise might not be able to experience the History Center.

The San Diego History Center is one of the charter institutions for **School in the Park**—an innovative program of Price Philanthropies that provides an immersive experience for Title 1 students from Rosa Parks Elementary. Now in its 26th year, School in the Park has inspired multiple generations to discover the riches of Balboa Park.



## REVEALING OUR SHARED HISTORY

Both onsite and online, we present a wide array of exhibits and programs designed to engage with our community. Through thought-provoking perspectives, we invite members and newcomers alike to explore the stories that have shaped our shared history.

Our recent \$1.8 million renovation and exhibit installation at the Junípero Serra Museum in Presidio Park is one example of our commitment to present inclusive stories about our past, present, and future.

From the revelatory *Missing Pieces Project*, which uncovers new narratives in San Diego's African American history, to *Aloha Vaqueros*, which explores the cultural exchanges between early California vaqueros and Hawaii's paniolos, our exhibits offer a gateway to understanding and celebrating our collective past. Additionally, *La Neighbor* takes you on a historical journey through the Neighborhood House in Logan Heights, showcasing its pivotal role in fostering community and activism. These initiatives embody our commitment to education and engagement, ensuring that the vibrant tapestry of San Diego's history is accessible to all.



Top: Training session with Pillar Ambassadors (volunteers) as part of the Missing Pieces Project.

Middle: The Aloha Vaqueros exhibition.

Bottom: The La Neighbor exhibition.



Tower Landing Gallery exhibit at The Junípero Serra Museum.

## PRESERVING OUR PAST

Our commitment to preservation is evident through our Research Archives, where we safeguard valuable historical documents and artifacts, in perpetuity. We provide 24/7 climate-controlled environments for our collections, and invest in top collections staff to oversee the archives. Since 2022, we have made our entire catalog across all of our collecting areas accessible online to the public for browsing and research. We are continually processing and describing new items and expanding the catalog, which now holds nearly 200,000 records.

Our collections are available to the community through public research days, student classroom visits, thousands of emailed queries per year, and through our ever-growing digital portals. Because we believe history belongs to all of us, we encourage further exploration and understanding of our shared history, allowing future generations to benefit from these resources.



Historians from the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California viewing early maps of Tijuana.

## Did you know?

Since 1955, we have published the *Journal of San Diego History* which presents scholarly articles dedicated to sharing the history of our region. The entire collection of these articles can be found on our website.



For more than 12 years, the San Diego History Center has partnered with Mesa College's Fashion Program on the exhibition *Fashion Redux*. Historic clothing from the San Diego History Center's collection is the inspiration for future fashion designers.



Where does the City of San Diego turn when it needs historical original plans for one of Balboa Park's most storied performance venues, the Starlight Bowl? After an exhaustive search in city files, public libraries, and local universities, City officials turned to our archives. Nearly 90 years



after Starlight Bowl (originally Ford Bowl) was constructed, these plans are critical to current efforts to restore the iconic outdoor theatre. This is just one of thousands of examples of the value the San Diego History Center's archives brings to our community.



The History Center's Dr. Tina Zarpour with Val Handfield (left) and Jordan Z. Marks (right) from the County.

This year, the History Center was recognized by Assessor, Recorder, and County Clerk Jordan Z. Marks as a Cultural Heritage Champion for our work in preserving the county's physical public records.

# FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

The future is bright for San Diego—and the San Diego History Center. Here are just a few examples of how we are elevating and sustaining San Diego's history, art, innovation, sports, community, and culture.

## ALL-IN

Launched in January 2024, ALL-IN San Diego is an exciting new initiative by the History Center designed to illuminate the vibrant tapestry of our community. This dynamic, on-the-ground engagement program features a team of passionate Community Connectors—comprising both seasoned professionals and enthusiastic interns—who are dedicated to documenting, sharing, and disseminating the multifaceted histories of our communities through diverse platforms and formats.



## WOMEN'S MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA

The Women's Museum of California (WMC) will merge into and become a program of the History Center. This partnership unites two of San Diego's premier nonprofits and allows both organizations to continue their vital work of preserving the region's history, with a focus on highlighting women's contributions to San Diego's rich past.



## SAN DIEGO HISTORY CENTER: REIMAGINED

Prepare for a new experience in the heart of Balboa Park—one that connects San Diegans to their roots and showcases the diverse histories of our region while connecting it to our present and future.

As we look forward to our centennial anniversary in 2028, we are committed to fulfilling a bold new vision for the History Center. One that engages, educates, entertains, and makes San Diego History fun! By prioritizing accessibility, incorporating technology, diverse voices, and interactive programming, we will create a museum where visitors of all ages can come together to celebrate history, cultures, and community.

Our vision for a reimagined History Center will not just preserve history, it will bring it to life! Stay tuned for exciting updates in the months ahead!

## Did you know?

San Diego History Center is just one of three San Diego County institutions with direct ties to the Smithsonian Institution. As an Affiliate, we partner with the Smithsonian to share resources, develop educational programs and strategies, and joint research.



The iconic Jessop's Clock (below) will feature prominently in the reimagining of the History Center.





“ My child has thrived in the museum's educational programs, gaining insights and inspiration that aren't available in a traditional classroom. It's a valuable resource that nurtures our children's curiosity and teaches them to appreciate our shared heritage. ”

—Amber Contreras,  
Parent of Third Grader at Tiffany Elementary



# WHY WE MATTER

The San Diego History Center is a vital cornerstone of our community, steadfastly committed to inclusivity and the belief that history belongs to everyone. By preserving a diverse array of cultural narratives, we offer more than just a look into the past—we provide a lens for understanding today's world and shaping tomorrow's citizens.

Our exhibits and programs serve as important educational resources, fostering critical thinking and empathy through diverse historical perspectives. Our community engagement efforts, like the All-In Community Archiving Initiative, work tirelessly to uncover and preserve the multifaceted history of San Diego, ensuring untold stories are not lost to time.

By connecting people to their past and encouraging them to see themselves as active contributors to history, we develop more informed, compassionate citizens. Our dedication to bridging past and present plays a crucial role in enhancing regional identity and civic well-being, securing a legacy that empowers future generations.

## OUR MISSION IS CRITICAL BECAUSE WE:

- ✓ Provide context to who we are as a region
- ✓ Contribute to community well-being
- ✓ Preserve our shared history
- ✓ Encourage people to connect to place
- ✓ Invite people to see themselves contributing to history
- ✓ Bridge past to current and future
- ✓ Develop more engaged citizens



Above: A full-scale model of Nathan Harrison's cabin in our recent exhibit *Nathan Harrison: Born Enslaved, Died a San Diego Legend*.



Left: Student program at the Junípero Serra Museum.

Below: Welcoming public researchers to the archives.



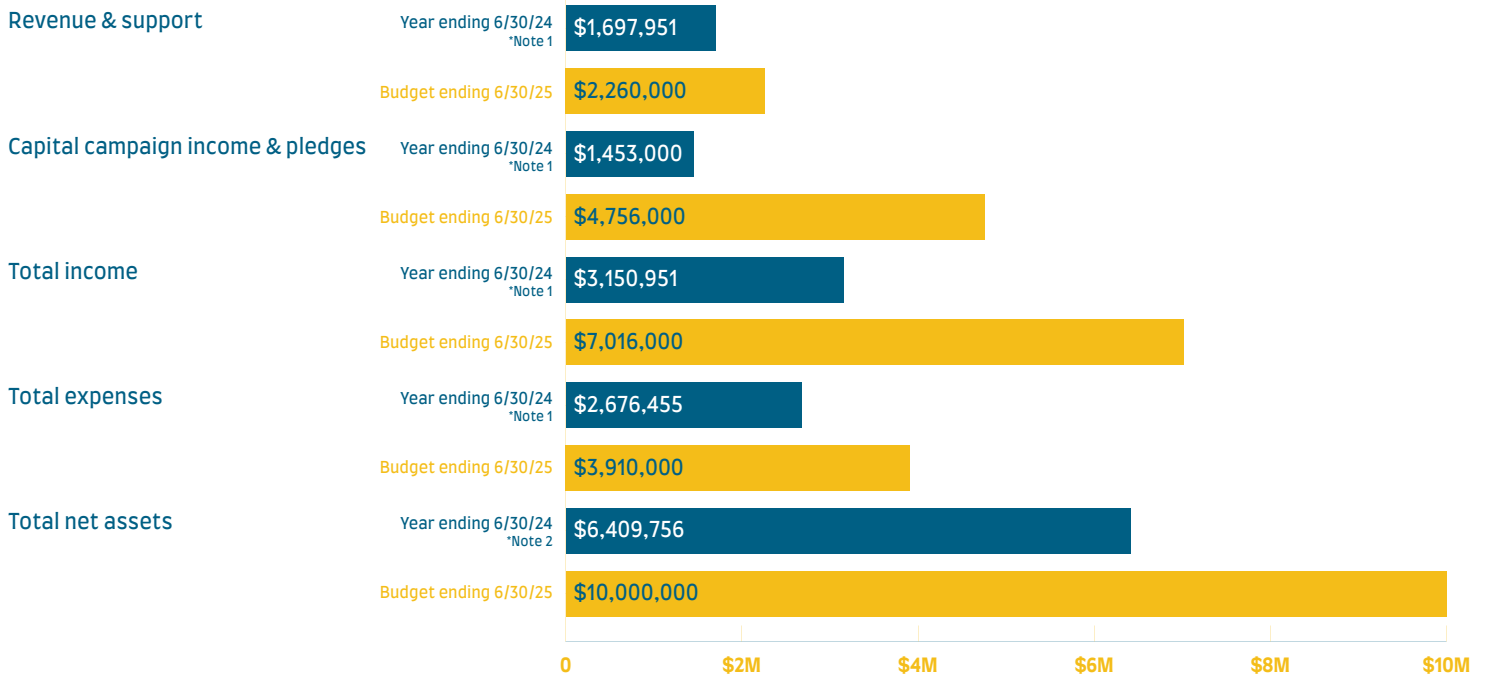
“

Visiting the museum is like stepping back in time and deeply into our community's stories. The exhibits are thoughtfully curated, offering a profound connection to our past, which is essential for understanding and shaping our future.

”

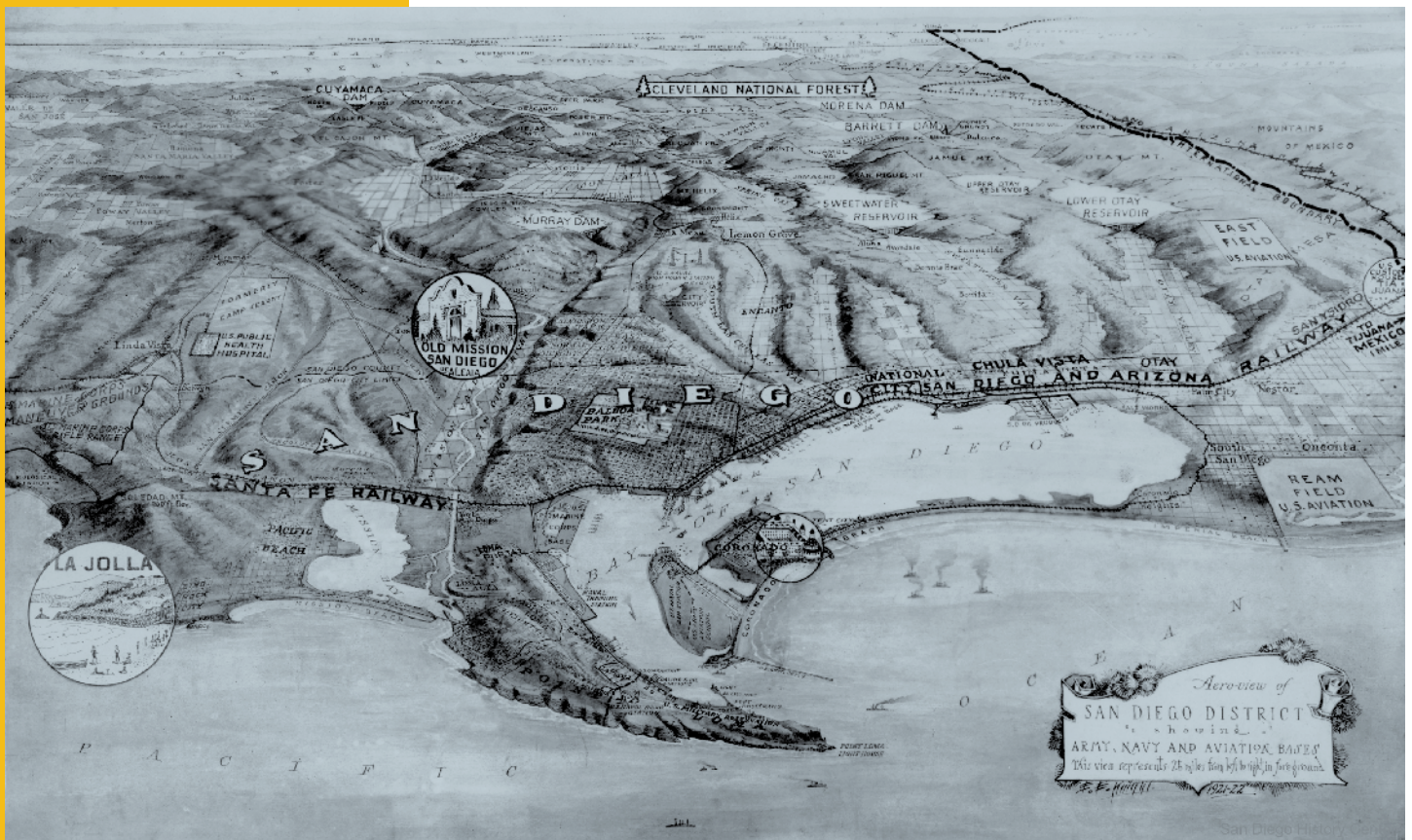
—Gregg Peterson,  
Retired Educator  
and San Diego Resident

# FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT



\*Note 1—Unaudited.

\*Note 2—Total net assets inclusive of Capital Campaign pledges pending auditor recognition of \$1.2 Million pledges.



1920 map showing San Diego aviation bases.



# DONOR SPOTLIGHT

**Julie Gildred Connolly,**  
Trustee

## Why do you support the San Diego History Center?

The San Diego History Center is a true hidden gem. It is the only repository of the entire region's history, not just the history of a specific segment of our diverse population. It is a perfect crossroads of my love of San Diego and my desire to give back. With all the museum currently offers, this gem will shine brilliantly with a bit of polish. It is incredibly rewarding to envision where the SDHC will be in a few short years: a must-see destination for everyone who lives and loves San Diego. It is an honor to volunteer and be part of the process.

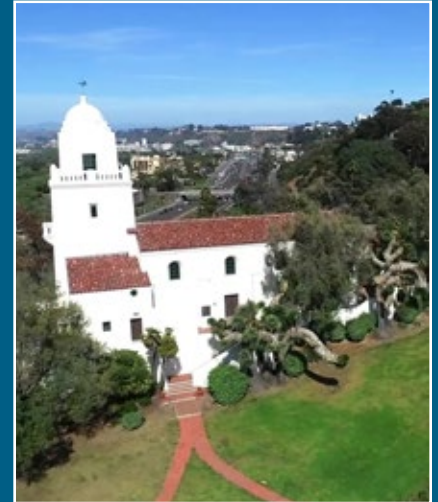
## How has the San Diego History Center made a difference for you or that of the community?

As a trustee, learning everything the San Diego History Center offers our community is fascinating. The archives are open for anyone who would like to do research, and they are vast and wide-ranging. I think the "School in the Park" is currently the most impactful program, offering classes and camps educating students of all ages about the unique history of our entire region. The oral history program is also incredibly exciting, capturing stories that would be lost without it. I think these recorded stories will be the most impactful facet of our museum going forward for future generations.

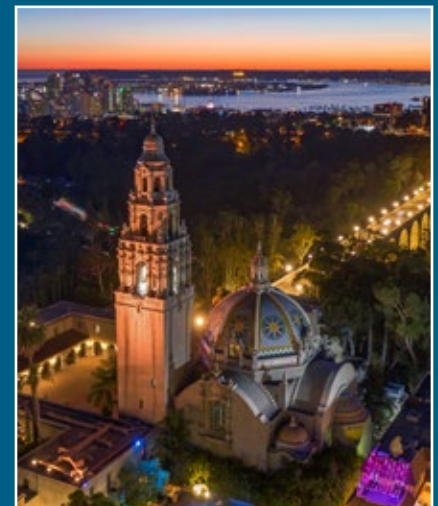
## Why should others support us?

With all the wonderful museums and destinations San Diego offers, there is no other that tells the history of our region. It is the only place a tourist or student can visit to learn about where we have been as a community and to envision where we are going. Our history spans thousands of years, yet only small snippets are currently known, primarily via books or word of mouth. Supporting the SDHC is vital for both past and future generations to help create a world-class museum we can be proud of as San Diegans, highlighting our incredibly unique story of innovation and growth.

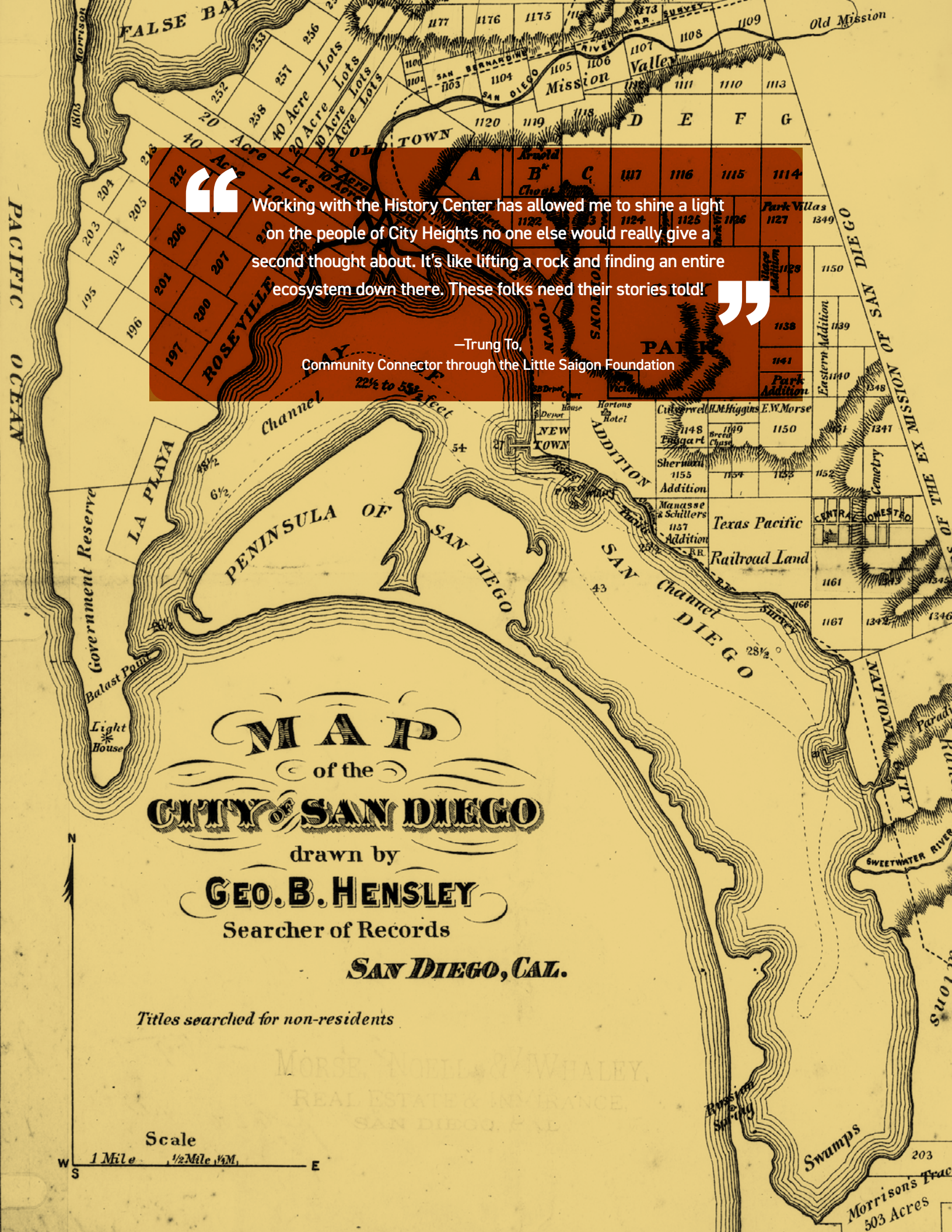
## ● Did you know?



The San Diego History Center is one of the few institutions in the nation dedicated to the preservation of the history of a major metropolitan region and its people.



As a part of the City of San Diego's Arts and Culture sector, the San Diego History Center contributes to the generating of over \$1.1 billion in total economic activity for the City of San Diego.



“ Working with the History Center has allowed me to shine a light on the people of City Heights no one else would really give a second thought about. It’s like lifting a rock and finding an entire ecosystem down there. These folks need their stories told! ”

—Trung To,  
Community Connector through the Little Saigon Foundation

**MAP**  
of the  
**CITY OF SAN DIEGO**

drawn by  
**GEO. B. HENSLEY**  
Searcher of Records

**SAN DIEGO, CAL.**

*Titles searched for non-residents*

Scale

1 Mile 1/2 Mile 1/4 M.

N S E W



1915 Panama-California Exposition poster.

## OUR MISSION

We aim to safeguard San Diego's history, connecting people with their shared past. Through preservation, education, and storytelling, we weave the narrative of our rich and diverse community. By linking our past to the present and future, we foster a vibrant, inclusive society.

Visit [SanDiegoHistory.org](https://SanDiegoHistory.org) to learn more about us or to lend your support.

