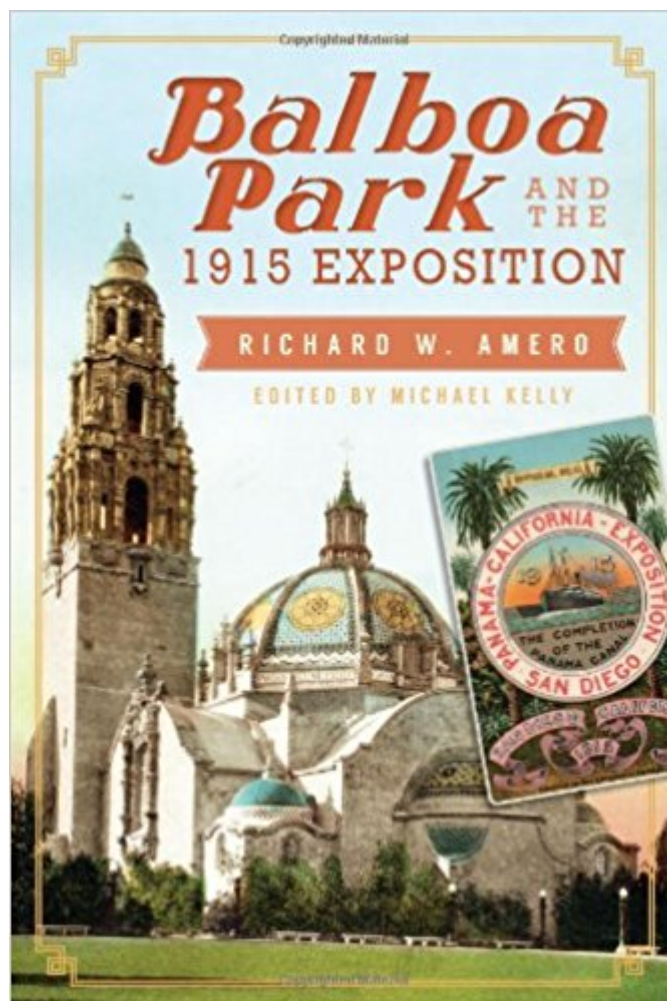


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Balboa Park And The 1915 Exposition



Synopsis

The Panama-California Exposition of 1915 established San Diego as a focal point of cultural activity in California. The Spanish Colonial Revival exposition buildings, along with those from a second exposition in Balboa, house several of the great museums of San Diego. This 1,200-acre park in the central portion of the city contains the world-famous San Diego Zoo, fifteen museums, the Old Globe Theatre, sports and recreation facilities, hiking trails and some of America's most elaborate gardens. The late Richard W. Amero, longtime Balboa Park historian, wrote extensively about the park and its two expositions. His chapters on the creation of the first exposition have been edited into this essential volume on city history by Michael Kelly, president of the Committee of One Hundred. .

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One of San Diego's pre-eminent historians, Richard W. Amero was born in Massachusetts and educated in North Carolina and New York. He adopted San Diego as his home and became dedicated to Balboa Park history, writing for the Journal of San Diego History. The voluminous Richard Amero Collection is a prized feature of the San Diego History Center. Michael Kelly is the President of the Committee of 100, which was formed in 1967 to preserve the heritage of Balboa Park's historical buildings, gardens, and open spaces. The Committee of 100 is a nonprofit organization. Welton Jones wrote about arts and entertainment for The San Diego Union and, later, the Union-Tribune from 1966 to 2001. He served nine years on the board of the American Theatre

Critics Association and represented the United States at various international meetings of theatre critics.

Nicely done about the worlds most beautiful park.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in San Diego, Balboa Park and the 1915 Exposition. It is expertly and engagingly written with excellent photographs interspersed throughout. The historical content is superb.

Very informational book. Wish I had it when visiting San Diego.

Wonderful book and pictures

Balboa Park and the 1915 Exposition By Richard W. Amero Edited by Michael Kelly Balboa Park and the 1915 Exposition delivers far more than the title promises. One result of this book's expansive reach is that it is difficult to characterize in a few words. For nearly forty years my family and I have visited Balboa Park and we have come to think we had a good feel for it and its glories. Reading this book is like discovering pages and pages of wondrous secrets about the life of a dear friend. Throughout, the written material is enhanced by wonderful pictures illustrating the text and guiding the reader through an amazing journey of exploration and discovery about our city's favorite park. Of interest, each image is captioned and its source identified, the latter in themselves providing interesting documentation of those who have carefully collected and secured the history of Balboa Park. Of special note, many of the images were provided by Michael Kelly, President of the Committee of 100, which has worked so tirelessly to preserve the structures remaining from the exposition. The same zeal must have prompted Dr. Kelly's willingness to undertake editing the complex and challenging content of this book. On the one hand, this book provides an almost journalistic description of the transformation of a largely barren and remote section of the then-small coastal city of San Diego into a stunning exposition, celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal and the wonders of the Southwestern United States. Accompanying that description, and often interwoven into it, is a remarkably scholarly history of the host of movers and shakers, visionaries and designers, and engineers and builders who created the whole new architecture style and the lush grounds that served the exposition. On the other hand, a large part of the book is devoted to the day-by-day activities of the exposition, a truly astonishing program of outstanding performances and

presentations and wondrous occasions, many dozens of which easily rivaled the number of participants and the level of revelry of present-day major events such as Earth Day and December Nights. Among the many revelations was the realization that throughout the exposition, the Organ Pavilion served as activity central for many days and many nights of entertainment, both for those including the then-new gigantic organ and those many others for which the organ was not involved, including talks by the likes of Theodor Roosevelt, William Jennings Bryan, and many other famous individuals. Some crowds were estimated at 15,000 persons, difficult to even imagine despite the impressive seating available now at the venue. And all of this took place in a city then populated by about 50,000 people. Among the surprises in this book is the wealth of information about the historical, cultural, financial, and political context of the time. For example, local planners were under pressure to scrap the whole project and to defer to San Francisco which was preparing its own exposition at the same time. For another example, political and cultural unrest along the border with Mexico raised very real dangers for citizens on both sides of the border. And for yet another, the exposition involved a great many military troops, from Navy, Army, and Marine units, many of whom provided demonstrations and combat re-enactments, as well as security for attendees. One more, of many: the Panama-California Exposition of 1915 was so successful that it was morphed into the Panama-California International Exposition. Who knew?

Sizable portions of this book are not easy reading, largely because of the density of the information and the inclusion of so many names of people, buildings, and areas, many of those changing numerous times through the course of the years leading up to the exposition, during its extended run, and afterwards. In fact, the author included fully 30 pages of notes and citations to document sources for the many details included. However, I found that once I gave up on keeping track of each detail, what I learned about the park and its history is so rich and grand that any sense of effort was well worth it. For example, while I was aware that numerous buildings erected for the exposition were meant to be temporary, I had no idea how very many such structures there were or how truly grand many of them were. Nor did I realize how many differing visions of the park, both during and after the exposition were considered during the planning process, including from those who would have razed all of the structures and return the land to vegetation and paths for quiet and meditation – a difficult picture to consider in the light of how integral to San Diego life the present configuration is. There is so much more to this book. One marvelous chapter, “First Americans Come to Balboa Park,” presents the political and cultural context of how native Americans were included in other major fairs and expositions – generally treating them as side show oddities – and describes in heart-warming detail how local planners prevailed, against pressures to the contrary, to present

these citizens respectfully and accurately. It also describes the various exhibits and activities. Among the surprises: life-sized replicas of cliff dwellings and of a pueblo. Again, who knew? This chapter could stand alone as a monograph on the evolution of understanding and incorporation of those who were here long before European immigrants into American life. In a similar vein, another chapter, "East Meets West in Balboa Park," described the competition between San Diego and San Francisco for participants from the east, with Japan building a substantial exhibit including a teahouse and magnificent garden with a traditional bridge. The various structures and their meaning are discussed in considerable detail. Indeed, throughout this chapter the author goes well beyond the descriptive, focusing also on the political and cultural influences both during the exposition and for years thereafter. One more chapter must be mentioned, "The California Building: San Diego Museum/Museum of Man." This chapter requires more sophistication in architecture than I have and the typical reader is likely to find it dense and difficult to plow through. However, I encourage anyone who uses this book to at least skim through the pages to get a feel for the exhaustive attention to the many details incorporated into the design and construction of this jewel of the park, and for the astonishing array of influences from around the world that can be found there. The author has researched major buildings through a good deal of Mexico and many parts of Europe, tracing various styles and details to their apparent sources. Also of interest here are the many uses to which the building was devoted in the years following the exposition until its final designation as the museum it is today. This is too long, and yet it only scrapes the surface of this book. My hope is that this brief overview will lead others to find out for themselves what a delight reading it is. I am grateful to the author, to the editor, and to all those who, past and present, have worked so hard to assure this wonderful park remains the civic resource we all enjoy so much. I leave you with my lingering regret that none of us can go back and directly experience the delights San Diego offered to visitors in 1915 and 1916 "and my appreciation for the glimpse into those marvels provided by this book.

The late Richard Amero was a dedicated historian of Balboa Park. His fine work is produced here with the expert editing of fellow Park historian Mike Kelly. With the 1915 centennial of San Diego's Panama-California Exposition on the horizon, this is a timely and enjoyable read. A must buy for San Diego history buffs.

So glad to see this comprehensive history of the park finally published. Richard Amero had unprecedented knowledge of Balboa Park history, and his love of the park is on every page of this

book.

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