

SAN FRANCISCO INVITES THE WORLD: THE FERRY BUILDING

1898-1915

Synopsis

This picture postcard exhibit, treated thematically, tells the story of the formative years of the iconic Ferry Building. It was an important symbol of San Francisco's hospitality during the years of tremendous growth, as well as the tragedy of the 1906 earthquake and fire, and the great celebration of the Panama Pacific International Exposition.

Treatment

The exhibit is organized chronologically, beginning with the population boom during the Gold Rush and the first Ferry Building (1875). It continues to the new Ferry Building of 1898, and the steady growth of ferry use. The story describes the Ferry Building's part in the earthquake and fire of 1906, the reconstruction of the city, and the Panama Pacific International Exposition (1915), which celebrated the city's recovery. The Ferry Building played a significant role in these major events.

This is an appropriate topic for a one frame exhibit, as it keeps the focus on the Ferry Building in an important era.

Deltiological Knowledge

In just 8 large pages, this exhibit includes postcards from their inception—Private Mailing cards (1898-1901) and undivided back (1901-1907), through 1915 (the end of the highest popularity of postcards). Deltiological description is comprehensive for all eras shown in these cards. This is my sixth exhibit dealing with San Francisco, so

I am well-versed on topics and publishers.

I have documented printing methods, and included information about publishers, beyond just the name and city. There are real photo postcards from the very beginning of their use.

Rarity and Condition

The postcards in the exhibit date from about 1900-1915. The condition of the cards varies widely:

-The very earliest postcards are scarce, as they date to the period before picture postcards were popular. These cards are in good to excellent condition.

-The postcards illustrating the earthquake are generally in poor condition. Many publishers lost their businesses in the earthquake, and were scrambling to get cards printed by others in a hurry. Paper was scarce, and thin paper was often used. These do not hold up well. The newspapers printed sheets of postcards (which people could cut apart). These are on paper almost as thin as newsprint.

-The postcards illustrating the Panama Pacific Exposition are in excellent condition, as quality work had returned.

-Real photo postcards (RPPC) were gelatin prints that were subject to deterioration. You will notice some deterioration in most. The camera for RPPC came out in 1903; some very early cards are shown in a period when not many people were taking photos.

Rarity and Condition, cont.

Compared with other San Francisco subjects, there are a relatively small number of picture postcards of the Ferry Building, and most are a view of the front of the outside. This exhibit includes a range of views, including all of the inside views, which are scarce.

Highlights

- 2 Private Mailing cards, issued 1898-1901
- 11 undivided back postcards, issued -1901-1907, before picture postcards were popular.
- 7 Real photo postcards, including 4 made in the first few years after this photography was introduced.
- Collateral material adds information and interest: Ferry ticket for January, 1901; ticket for ferry to the train; Exposition ticket; ad for Southern Pacific train trips that connected with the ferry.

References

A Guide Book of Collectible Postcards, Q. David Bowers and Mary L. Martin, Whitman Publishing, 2020. A widely available general source.

Real Photo Postcard Guide, Robert Bogdan and Todd Weseloh, Syracuse University Press, 2066. An often cited reference.

Wikipedia offers general information about the Ferry Building, 1906 Earthquake and Fire, and the Panama Pacific Exposition.

Two recent books well worth reading:

Portal—San Francisco's Ferry Building and the Reinvention of American Cities, John King, W.W. Norton and Co., 2024.

The Longest Minute—The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906, Matthew J. Davenport, St. Martin's Press, 2023.