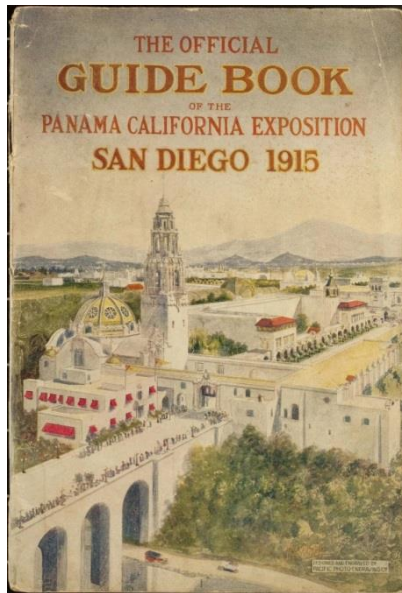


**American Society of Civil Engineers, San Diego Section**  
**Historic Civil Engineering Landmark**  
**BALBOA PARK AND CABRILLO BRIDGE**



*Story and Photos by Phil Kern*



Originally known as “City Park”, the core of what is today known as Balboa Park was developed for the Panama-California Exposition of 1915. A veritable Who’s Who of San Diego forefathers participated in the early planning for the Exposition: Ulysses S. Grant Jr., John D. Spreckels, Joseph Sefton Jr., and George W. Marston were just a few of the notables involved. The planning effort from 1909-15 was not without its drama and intrigue, including the resignation of more than one exposition president and the complete turnover of the board, as well as snubs of the event from both State and Federal officials.

The architectural style of the Exposition buildings was selected as Mission Revival, and architect Bertram G. Goodhue took considerable license in the design. Domes, minarets, elaborate arches, reflecting pools, pergolas and arcades created a fantasy Spanish-style village intended to lift the spirits.

As originally planned, constructed for the as permanent included the Fine Arts Building, Botanical Pavilion. All the other were intended to be demolished after the theme of the progress, and some exhibits included exhibits, working aviary and an exhibit which provided the Diego Zoo.



very few of the buildings Exposition were to remain structures. These Building, the California Buildings and the Organ structures and exhibits temporary and were to be Exposition was over. The exhibition was human of the more notable operational manufacturing agricultural displays, an featuring exotic animals foundation for the San

The landscaping of the park for the Exposition was no less remarkable than the architecture. Starting in 1904 more than 50,000 trees were planted, meandering paths were constructed, and by 1910 a 23 acre plant propagating yard was in place.



Balboa Park was also the venue for the California Pacific Exposition in 1934-1935. Many of the “temporary” buildings were retained and reused, and many new structures were added to the park including the Ford Building, constructed in the shape of their iconic “V8” logo. Ford also had a test track for their automobiles constructed south and east of the building. This second exposition was so popular that it was held over for a second year.

The Cabrillo Bridge was designed by Frank P. Allen, Jr. and engineered by Thomas B. Hunter, and was envisioned as the grand entry to the exposition from the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Laurel Street. During the Exposition it was open only to pedestrians, and

dignitaries were the few people allowed to motor across with the inaugural car trip including Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the Exposition Committee G. Aubrey Davidson and Mayor Charles F. O’Neill. The bridge structure consisted of seven self-supporting cantilevered arches constructed of steel T-frames and reinforced concrete using redwood forms. The redwood was left in place in many locations and was to become a concern many years later when it provided fuel for difficult-to-extinguish fires within the structure. An earlier, more dramatic design by Bertram Goodhue featuring three massive arches spanning Pound Canyon (now renamed Cabrillo Canyon), but was shelved due to cost concerns. Cabrillo Freeway did not yet exist, but the bridge did span West Park Boulevard as well as a reflecting pool that was built as part of the Exposition to enhance the view of the bridge. The bridge is 40 feet wide and up to 120 feet high with a total length of 450 feet. Construction of the bridge required 450 tons of reinforcing steel and 7,700 cubic yards of concrete, and was completed at a total cost of \$225,154.89, more than \$75,000 over the original estimate.

In the retrofit of the City redwood spalled to shear the exterior appearance of the structure.



preparation for its centennial, Cabrillo Bridge has recently undergone a \$38 seismic retrofit by Caltrans, under a cooperative agreement with the City of San Diego. The remaining redwood forms have been removed, concrete repaired and seismic strengthening has been added to improve displacement and capacity, all without altering

*The Cabrillo Bridge was recognized as a local Historic Civil Engineering Landmark in 1986 by the San Diego Section of ASCE. Balboa Park is a City of San Diego Historic Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.*