

STATE CAPITOL

In March of 1860, a bill approved by both houses of the legislature was laid on Governor Downey's desk. This bill permitted the City of Sacramento to acquire approximately four blocks of land and present it to the state as the future site of the new capitol. The legislature also appropriated \$500,000 as a construction fund, and appointed a commissioner to superintend the erection of a capitol building. The commissioner received seven plans in response to advertisements, chose those submitted by M.F. Butler, and appointed Reuben Clark as superintending architect. Detailed drawings and working plans were prepared by Clark as the work progressed.

On September 24, 1860, ground was broken for the foundations. The cornerstone, quarried at Folsom, was laid in the presence of a crowd which the Sacramento Union estimated to be in excess of 3000 persons. The cornerstone formed part of a foundation

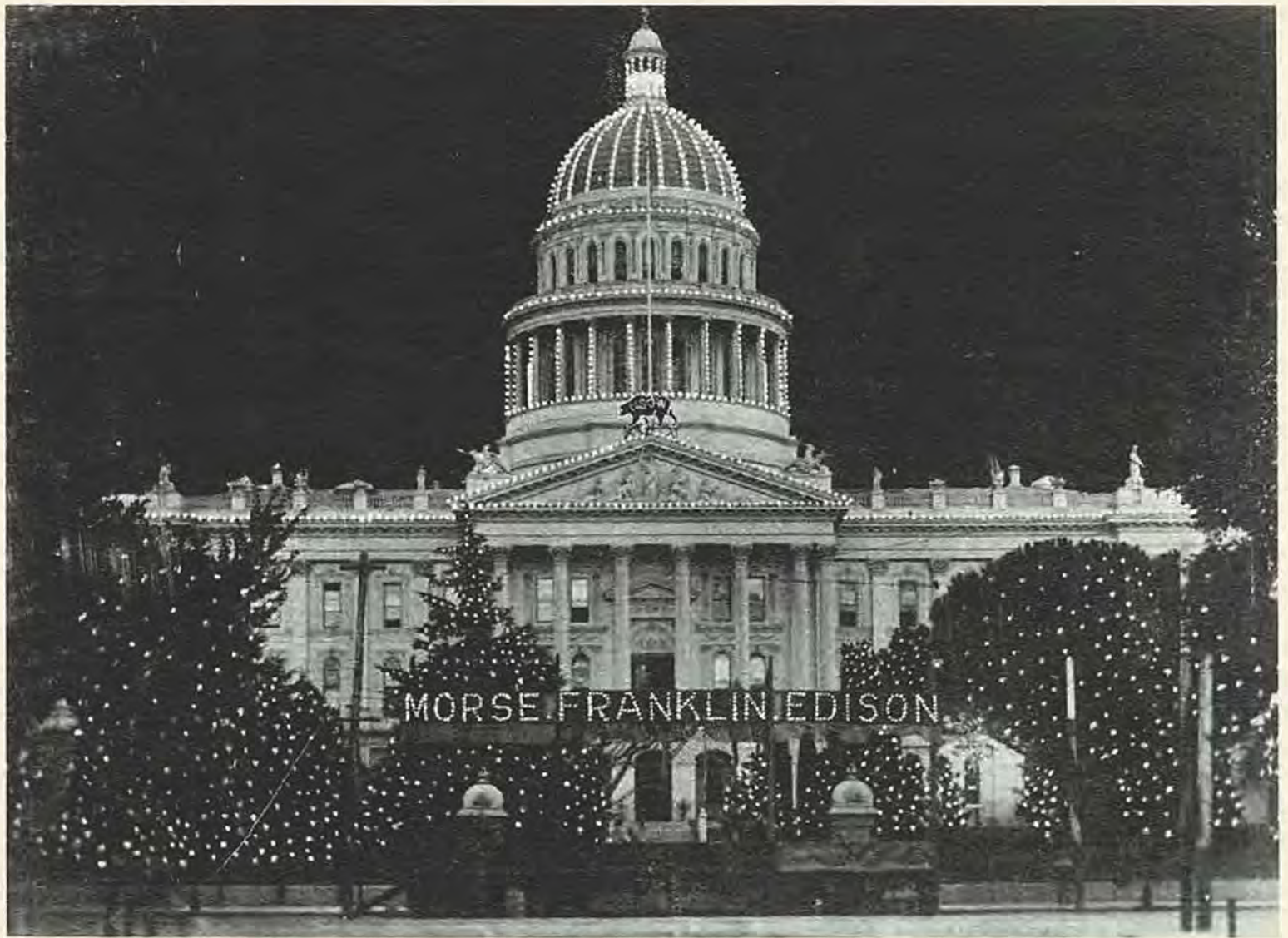
which was patterned after the 250 year old Spanish fortress in Panama, probably the strongest type of construction known. This type of construction was needed because of the enormous size of the proposed structure. The foundation extended far below the basement floor. Those foundations supporting the outer walls and the rotunda were 18 feet wide at the base; those under the inner walls were 9 feet wide. On a footing of concrete, brick was laid in diminishing courses so that the foundations curved inward as they rose to meet the walls.

Clearly the capitol was strongly built. Records of its construction, however, are incomplete. The architects, who superintended the builders worked from general plans, solving the ever present problems as they occurred. Many minor records still exist, but the original architect's drawings, even the original plans, have vanished.

By 1869 the capitol was very close to completion. As the Sacramento Union said, "The skeleton work of the interior already gives evidence of its magnificent

California's capitol under construction.





State Capitol decorated for The Festival of Lights, the 1895 celebration of electrical power generation at Folsom.

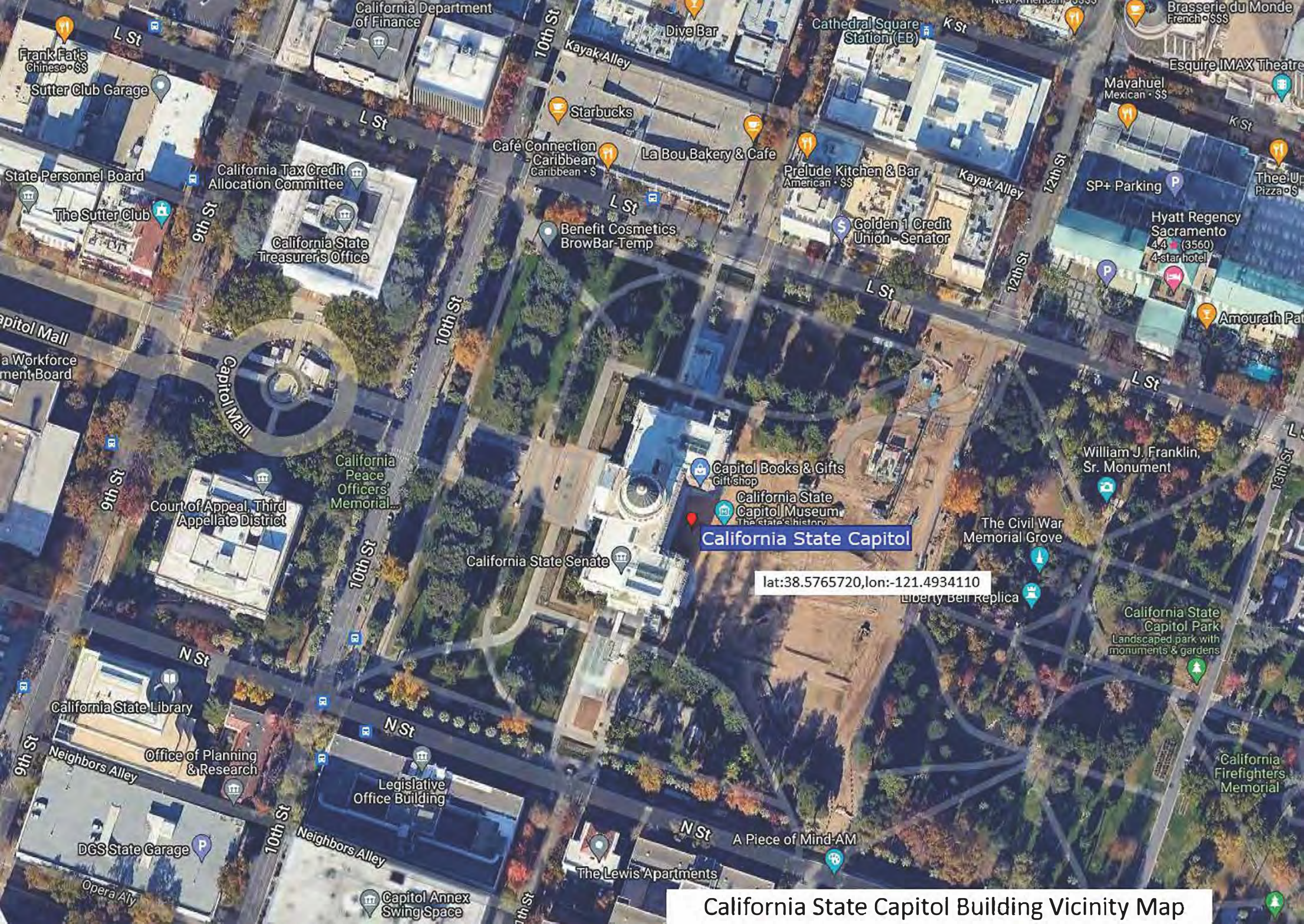
proportions and the promised elegance of its architectural finish, particularly the legislative halls and the state library." On November 26, 1868, the offices of the Governor and Secretary of State were opened. The building was occupied by State Departments on December 6, and the legislature held its first session in its new chambers.

From 1870 through 1874 finishing touches were put on the new capitol. The work was completed by Gordon P. Cummings, who succeeded Reuben Clark in 1865, after Clark fell ill. The three porticoes were completed during 1872. Their columns represented the outcome of architect Cummings' losing battle with the Board of Capitol Commissioners. Although he as-

sured them that it was customary to have such large columns cast in three sections, the board did not believe that sectional columns were sufficiently dignified for the capitol of California. Consequently they were cast in San Francisco as iron monoliths, each weighing about 11 tons. When the fourth was sent up on a river boat, it was accompanied by the man who had contracted to transport it to the capitol grounds. He brought his 10 horse team with him, and a crowd followed to watch him maneuver the long column through the downtown streets. The Union recorded that the only casualty was a skinned hip for one horse. The dome and third floor were also completed during this period. The interior was embellished according to

the decorative ideas in vogue, popularly known as the "General Grant." The grounds of the original site, which extended up to Twelfth Street, were graded and planted with grass and trees. In 1874 the capitol was then declared completed.

Since the capitol's completion in 1874 there have been several improvements, as well as major remodelings in 1906-08, in 1928, and in 1939. In all, the total expenditure on the building and grounds has exceeded \$3,000,000. In 1973, following concern over the safety of the building in the event of a major earthquake, the Sacramento Section of ASCE passed a resolution urging that the State take whatever steps necessary to preserve the present building. During the present restoration, much of the interior is being rebuilt to more nearly resemble the original beauty.



California State Capitol

lat:38.5765720,lon:-121.4934110

California State Capitol Building Vicinity Map

Sacramento, one of many California Capitals

The immigration of thousands of “Forty-niners” in search of gold prompted California’s admission as the 31st state into the Union in 1850, thus creating the need for a state capital. California did not have a permanent seat of government until 1854. Cities vied for the opportunity to house the state capital for the power, prestige, and economic benefit that accompanied it. Four capitol buildings existed in other cities before Sacramento became the permanent site.

The first State Constitutional Convention was held in 1849 at Colton Hall in Monterey. During the convention, delegates discussed the need for a suitable location for the seat of California’s government. Anticipating prestige and profit, communities from all over the state made attractive offers that included free land and buildings.

Monterey

September 9, 1849 – October 13, 1849

The first State Constitutional Convention in 1849 was held at Colton Hall in Monterey. During the convention, 48 delegates worked diligently to write California’s first constitution as well as to build a state infrastructure from scratch.

Pueblo de San Jose

December 15, 1849 – May 1, 1851

While the delegates were still convened in Monterey, communities competed with one another to become the home of California’s capital.

“During this session, two men from the booming little town of Pueblo de San Jose were sent galloping over the hills to Monterey to offer Washington Square in their town as a capitol site and to assure delegates that a suitable building would await them. After hours of debate the convention accepted the offer and named Pueblo de San Jose the capitol-with the qualification that, by law, it might be moved elsewhere.”

However, the newly elected legislators quickly became disgruntled with the poorly lit and ventilated accommodations in San Jose. Several more proposals to provide land, buildings, and money for construction were presented to the Legislature. Among these was a generous offer from General Vallejo, whose proposal to remove the capital to the town of Vallejo was approved by the Legislature.

Vallejo

January 5, 1852 – January 12, 1852

January 3, 1853 – February 4, 1853

Having promised land and accommodations, General Vallejo worked furiously to complete the capitol before the commencement of the third legislative session. Unfortunately, when the legislators arrived, construction was still in progress. The noise and lack of furnishings made work impossible. A new battle to move the capital ensued, and charges were made that General Vallejo had broken his contract. In a spirit of compromise, the legislators agreed to keep the town of Vallejo as the permanent location of the capital, but the Legislature would be removed to Sacramento to finish the session. A steamer was chartered, and the legislators were ferried 110 miles upriver to the town of Sacramento.

Benicia

February 11, 1853 – February 25, 1854

When the Legislature returned to Vallejo in 1854, the legislators were once again dissatisfied with the conditions. General Vallejo asked to be released from his contract because he felt he had been discredited by the repeated removal of the capital. The legislators were concerned that roving about the state would erode the people's confidence in state government. Despite their concerns, they moved to the town of Benicia, which had promised them the use of their City Hall. However, the facilities were inadequate, and a second proposal from Sacramento brought the Legislature back for good.

Sacramento

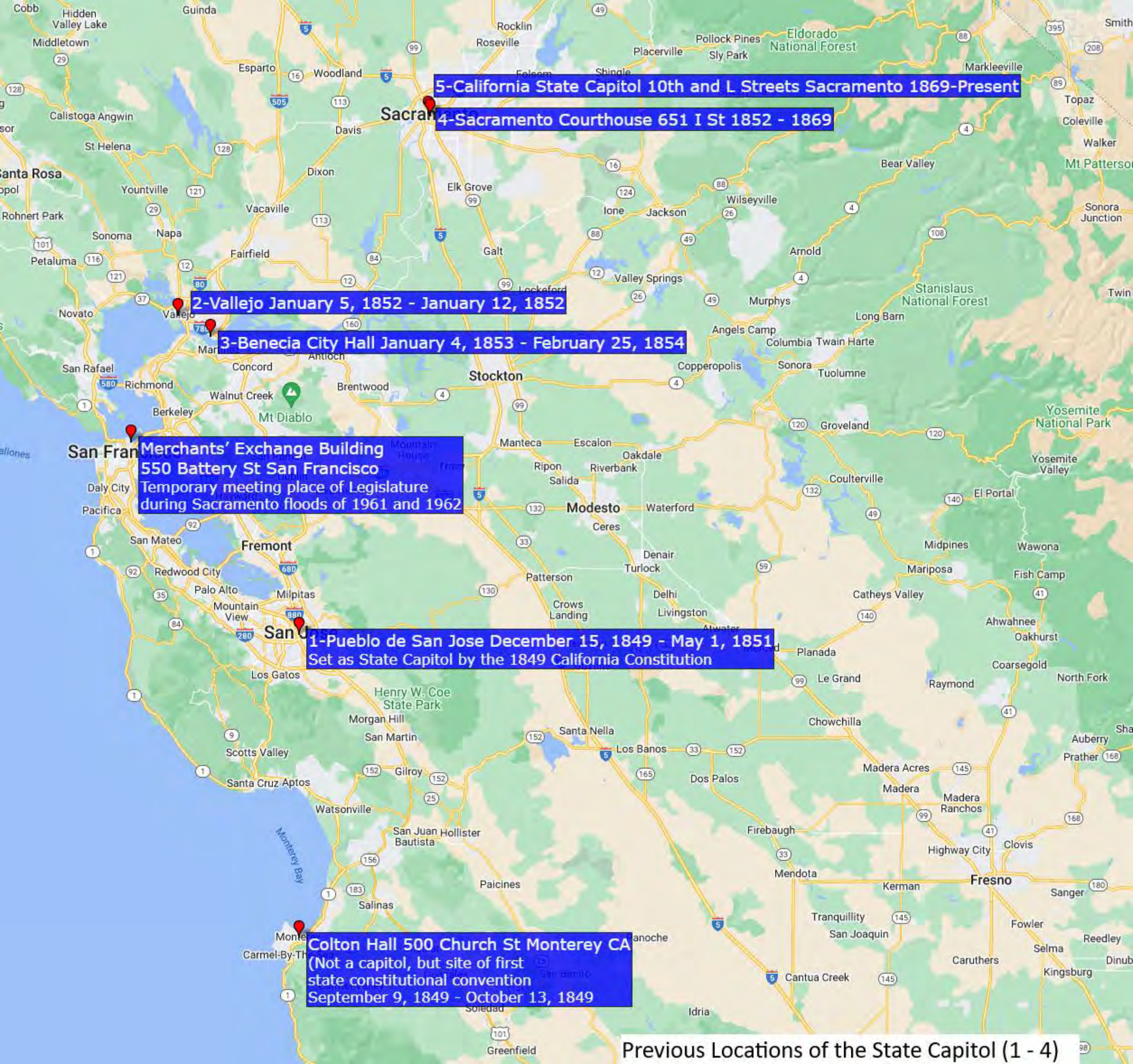
January 16, 1852 – November 2, 1853

February 28, 1854 – present day

The first time the Legislature convened in Sacramento, it was on a temporary basis because the capitol in Vallejo was still incomplete. An interesting twist resulted from General Vallejo's breach of contract. A restraining order was issued by J.D. Hoppe of San Jose to prevent the Governor from having the state's archives sent to Sacramento. It was stated that the archives were being held in the "true legal capitol" and that the Removal Act of 1851 was conditional on Vallejo fulfilling his contract.

The Legislature was provided ample and comfortable accommodations in the courthouse in Sacramento. It would be another year and two more removal acts before Sacramento would successfully capture the prize and become California's final seat of government in 1854. Construction on the present-day Capitol began in 1860, and the building has endured for nearly 150 years after its completion in 1874.

Even after Sacramento became the permanent seat of California's government in 1854, there were several unsuccessful efforts to relocate the capital to Oakland (1858-59), San Jose (1875-78, 1893, 1903), Berkeley (1907), and Monterey (1933-41).



5-California State Capitol 10th and L Streets Sacramento 1869-Present

4-Sacramento Courthouse 651 I St 1852 - 1869

2-Vallejo January 5, 1852 - January 12, 1852

3-Benecia City Hall January 4, 1853 - February 25, 1854

**San Fran Merchants' Exchange Building
550 Battery St San Francisco
Temporary meeting place of Legislature
during Sacramento floods of 1861 and 1862**

**1-Pueblo de San Jose December 15, 1849 - May 1, 1851
Set as State Capitol by the 1849 California Constitution**

**Colton Hall 500 Church St Monterey CA
(Not a capitol, but site of first
state constitutional convention
September 9, 1849 - October 13, 1849**

Previous Locations of the State Capitol (1 - 4)

American Society of Civil Engineers
Sacramento Section

Local Historic Civil Engineering Landmark

California State Capitol Building

References

<u>History of the State Capitol Building</u>	<u>Capitol Construction</u>	<u>History of the Capitol Restoration Project (1976-1982)</u>
<u>Capitol Restoration Project Repository</u>	<u>Legislation</u>	<u>The California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS)</u>