

Boomtowns: How Photography Shaped Los Angeles and San Francisco
on view at the California Historical Society, San Francisco
October 12, 2018 through March 10, 2019

- ***Boomtowns* draws from the California Historical Society’s vast archive to consider the first one hundred years of photography in California’s two most prominent cities**
- **Exhibition features works by both anonymous photographers and well-known artists such as Ansel Adams, Laura Adams Armer, Arnold Genthe, Eadweard Muybridge, Carleton Watkins, and Minor White**

SAN FRANCISCO, California, August 20 2018 – *Boomtowns: How Photography Shaped Los Angeles and San Francisco* will be on view at the California Historical Society (678 Mission Street, San Francisco) October 12, 2018 through March 10, 2019. The galleries are open Tuesday through Sunday, 11 am–5 pm.

The new medium of photography arrived in California just in time to witness the period of rapid, nearly unimaginable growth ushered in by the state’s official entry into the Union in 1850. *Boomtowns: How Photography Shaped Los Angeles and San Francisco* considers the significant role photography played in defining how the rest of the country saw California’s two most prominent cities.

Almost as instantly as San Francisco boomed following the Gold Rush, it became the photogenic muse of enterprising view makers. A few decades later, Los Angeles began growing dramatically with the arrival of the railroad and booster campaigns that relied heavily on photography to tout the city’s year-round sunshine and abundant, fertile land. By the turn of the twentieth century, both cities were among the most photographed places in the world.

“The transformation of the place we know as California in the 1850s into a densely urban part of our country happened in front of a camera,” says Erin Garcia, managing curator of exhibitions at the California Historical Society. “The photographic record of San Francisco and Los Angeles—cities that were seemingly built from scratch not that long ago—shows us that the meaning and significance of a place is always shifting.”

Boomtowns looks at some of the earliest views of these places, who these cities were for, what forces shaped them, and how photography promoted and contributed to their growth. The exhibition invites visitors to look critically at photographs made for a broad range of purposes, from civic boosterism to real estate development, industry, and art. It also examines places where the competing interests of different groups led to layers of development and redevelopment—sites such as Union Station in Los Angeles, which was once Chinatown, or Washerwoman’s Lagoon in San Francisco, which became the Panama-Pacific International Exposition site and later the Marina District.

The exhibition features important photographic work from the California Historical Society’s permanent collection by both anonymous photographers and well-known artists such as Ansel Adams, Laura Adams Armer, Arnold Genthe, Eadweard Muybridge, Carleton Watkins, and Minor White.

The earliest work on view is a unique and extremely rare 1851 daguerreotype panorama by an unknown photographer picturing San Francisco’s shoreline. For audiences who paid to see it on display back East, the panorama made visible all the opportunities and natural resources that the push westward promised. Among the later selections is a group of photographs taken by German geographer Anton Wagner, who traversed Depression-era Los Angeles on foot with his Zeiss Ikon camera. The hundreds of photographs he made were research material for his 1935 book—the first study of the sprawling metropolis—in which he marveled that the city appeared to have “no beginning nor end.”

From pictures of San Francisco on fire following the 1906 earthquake, to photographs taken in the 1920s of the nascent Hollywoodland housing development (which bequeathed the city its iconic sign), this exhibition draws exclusively from the California Historical Society’s extensive photographic holdings.

“California Historical Society is the steward of a vast collection of photographs, including examples of some of the earliest photographs of the American West,” says Dr. Anthea Hartig, California Historical Society executive director and CEO. “These images visually share the complicated, contested, and beautiful stories of the state’s two major cities. They also prompt us to consider what forces today shape the places where we live, and what our role might be within that inevitable, continuing transformation.”

About the California Historical Society

Founded in 1871, the California Historical Society (CHS) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to inspire and empower people to make California’s richly diverse past a meaningful part of their contemporary lives. In 1979 Governor Jerry Brown designated CHS the official historical society of the State of California. Today, CHS enacts its mission with a wide range of library, exhibition, publication, education, and public outreach programs that explore the complex and continuing history of the state and represent the diversity of the California experience, past and present. Our treasured collection—documenting the history of the entire state from the Spanish Era to the present day—is brought to life through these innovative public history projects that expand and diversify our audience and broaden our public impact. Learn more at californiahistoricalsociety.org.

Contact: Jason Herrington
California Historical Society
415.357.1848 ext. 209
jherrington@calhist.org