Thank You for Your Support!

2020
A Year in Review

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San Francisco, CA 94105

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Tell Your Story—California during the time of COVID-19

Shortly after California issued a statewide stay-at-home order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CHS’s newly formed Digital Engagement Team initiated an online project to document this extraordinary moment. Tell Your Story—California in the Time of COVID-19 is a collection of stories and photographs of everyday life in California during a crisis of historic proportions. Since the project launched in April 2020, more than four hundred people from as far north as Redding and as far south as San Diego have shared stories full of heartbreak, humor, and resilience.

These powerful personal accounts will become primary source material for researchers and shape future understandings of our present moment. Equally important is that the material is available to contemporary audiences seeking catharsis and connection in a time of isolation. To that end, we created an online gallery on our website where we periodically add new Tell Your Story selections. We are also showcasing several entries in our Mission Street and Annie Alley windows. With the ongoing temporary closure of our headquarters, the street-level Tell Your Story display promotes the project while enlivening our storefront even as many of our neighbors remain boarded up. CHS’s Tell Your Story project has been featured in the New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN online, and the San Francisco Chronicle.

The Fred Korematsu Case Files

As a partner with the CSU Japanese American Digitization Project, CHS has been able to provide online access to several collections related to the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, including the Fred Korematsu case files from the ACLU of Northern California. Korematsu, a young welder born to Japanese immigrant parents in Oakland, resisted the order to report to an incarceration camp and was arrested for his refusal to comply. He was represented by the ACLU of Northern California in Korematsu v. United States (1944), which challenged the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066 in California courts and the US Supreme Court. Notably, the national ACLU office opposed the San Francisco chapter’s decision to focus on the constitutionality of the executive order. The case files include correspondence documenting this split, as well as personal letters between Korematsu and his attorneys.

This Is What Democracy Looked Like

CHS hosted several virtual programs in 2020. One example was a discussion with Alicia Chen, a graphic designer based in Brooklyn, whose 2020 book This Is What Democracy Looked Like studies the visual history of ballot design in the United States. Paper ballots from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries illuminate the process of voting that remains to this day the heart of our democracy. In 2020, a year in which the act of voting was front and center in a volatile election and a divided electorate, Chen joined CHS in a virtual program to talk about her research, including her time spent at the CHS archives and discoveries she made there.

Alicia Cheng discussed the history of the printed ballot using examples from the California Historical Society’s and other collections.
Before stay-at-home orders, CHS hosted seven in-person programs on topics from hidden African American histories to the Save the Redwoods movement.

CHS programs did not stop in March; they just went virtual. Topics ranged from the Reginaldo F. del Valle papers to the first women’s suffrage march in the United States to “American Disruptor: The Scandalous Life of Leland Stanford.”

Every month we posted new blog entries highlighting the history of this diverse state and sharing the stories behind CHS’s collections. Blog subjects included “Celebrating Native American Heritage Month,” “The 42nd Anniversary of People’s Temple,” and “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride at 50.”

CHS continued its work on the Teaching California project, a website that provides free and flexible resources for teaching California’s K–12 History-Social Science Framework.

The North Baker Research Library continued to provide reference and reproduction services throughout the shutdown, with library staff fielding nearly 1,000 email requests.

CHS Rights and Reproductions program continued service without letup, responding to upward of 1,000 inquiries, and fulfilled dozens of requests from filmmakers, scholars, designers, and individuals.

More than 1,100 items from six collections related to civil rights and civil liberties were added to the CHS digital library.

CHS introduced its new vision statement in July: “To collect, share, and honor the extraordinarily diverse stories from throughout our state so that Californians may utilize history’s lessons to create a brighter tomorrow for everyone.”

In July, CHS staff formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion team to ensure that DEI initiatives are centered and championed in all aspects of our work as we move forward implementing our new vision.

CHS was a virtual host of San Francisco History Days in September 2020. Alongside the California African American Museum and the Institute for Historical Study, CHS cosponsored the virtual program “Revealing San Francisco’s Hidden 19th-Century Black History: A Tour of California Historical Society Artifacts.”

CHS—thanks to virtual exhibitor booths, videos, and digital exhibitions—joined the University of Southern California and other archives in celebrating the history and culture of the greater Los Angeles area at LA Archives Bazaar in October.

During November, CHS surveyed local and cultural history organizations to measure the need for a proposed new Education and Field Services Program. Both need and interest proved to be very strong.

On November 13, after implementing all SFDPH-recommended safety measures, CHS welcomed the public back into its galleries and store. The building remained open until November 28, when San Francisco reinstated its shelter-in-place order.

The exhibition From the Gold Rush to the Earthquake: Selections from the Collection—featuring nineteenth-century landscapes alongside archival material about people who were largely omitted from such paintings—briefly reopened in November and will be available to view again in 2021.
**Mission**
To inspire and empower people to make California’s richly diverse past a meaningful part of their contemporary lives.

**Vision**
To collect, share, and honor the extraordinarily diverse stories from throughout our state so that Californians may utilize history’s lessons to create a brighter tomorrow for everyone.

**Values**
The California Historical Society fulfills its mission by:
- Championing PK–16 education and lifelong learning
- Honoring diversity and inclusion in leadership, staffing, programming, interpretation, and services
- Sharing authority with others
- Reaching Californians statewide
- Increasing access to CHS collections
- Forming and strengthening effective and mutually beneficial partnerships
- Advocating the relevance of history’s lessons to our contemporary lives

The **California Historical Society** received support from California Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, San Francisco Grants for the Arts, Yerba Buena Community Benefit District, and hundreds of individuals, families, and foundations. **Thank you!**

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**Marketing and Social Media Impact**

- **Newsletter subscribers**: 29,618
- **Newsletter opens**: 236,606
- **Facebook followers**: 20,027
- **Instagram followers**: 13,400
- **Twitter followers**: 4,316
- **Virtual programs views**: 45,759
- **Website users**: 79,428
- **Website pageviews**: 199,818
- **Blog views**: 59,716