

Inspired by Mexico: Architect Bertram Goodhue Introduces Spanish Colonial Revival into Balboa Park

By Iris H.W. Engstrand

G. Aubrey Davidson's laudatory address to an excited crowd attending the opening of the Panama-California Exposition on January 1, 1915, gave no inkling that the Spanish Colonial architectural legacy that is so familiar to San Diegans today was ever in doubt.

The buildings of this exposition have not been thrown up with the careless unconcern that characterizes a transient pleasure resort. They are part of the surroundings, with the aspect of permanence and far-seeing design...Here is pictured this happy combination of splendid temples, the story of the friars, the thrilling tale of the pioneers, the orderly conquest of commerce, coupled with the hopes of an El Dorado where life can expand in this fragrant land of opportunity.¹



G. Aubrey Davidson, ca. 1915.
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As early as 1909, Davidson, then president of the Chamber of Commerce, had suggested that San Diego hold an exposition in 1915 to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal. When City Park was selected as the site in 1910, it seemed appropriate to rename the park for Spanish explorer Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, who had discovered the Pacific Ocean and claimed the

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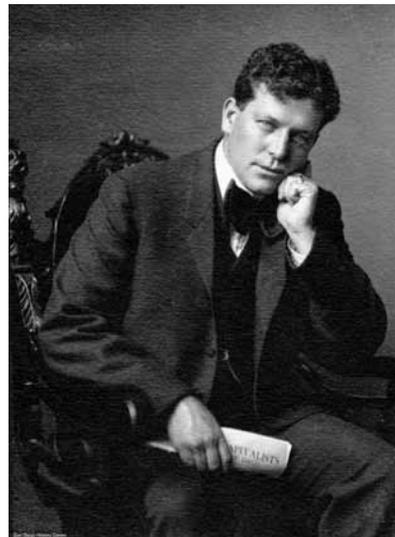


Portrait of Bertram Goodhue from Romy Wyllie, Bertram Goodhue: His Life and Residential Architecture, frontispiece, Courtesy of Goodhue Family Archives.

entire west coast of the Americas for Spain on September 29, 1513.² Besides tying the park to Panama, the celebration could also be combined with Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo's arrival on September 28, 1542 by naming the bridge at the west entrance in his honor.³ The hiring of project architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue would bring rich decoration, exotic architecture and multiple uses to the park. Goodhue's proposed central complex of Spanish colonial buildings would forever set aside the plan developed by Samuel T. Parsons for a natural picturesque park free of man-made obstructions.⁴

Nevertheless, the appointment of Goodhue was not a given. It was first necessary to appoint a team to construct and organize the Exposition and, second, to raise funds for its construction. The Panama California Exposition Corporation, formed on September 4, 1909, was headed by Ulysses S. Grant, Jr., as president, and D.C. Collier as director general.⁵ George W. Marston directed the Building and Grounds Committee and saw to the appointment of John Charles Olmsted, of the Olmsted Brothers Firm of New York, as the landscape architect for the exposition. It was expected that Olmsted's stepbrother Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. would be a part of the decisions being made.⁶ This also led to the appointment of Frank P. Allen, Jr. as Director of Works, since John Olmsted had worked with Allen in Seattle and knew his capabilities.⁷

Members of the Building and Grounds Committee wanted to appoint local architect Irving Gill, well respected for his Mission Revival Style, as the consulting architect for the Exposition.⁸ Others, however, favored Bertram Goodhue, an East Coast architect who had traveled through Mexico in 1892 to study its architecture. He had recently used the style to design La Santísima Trinidad, a



David C. Collier portrait. ©SDHC #OP 7831.

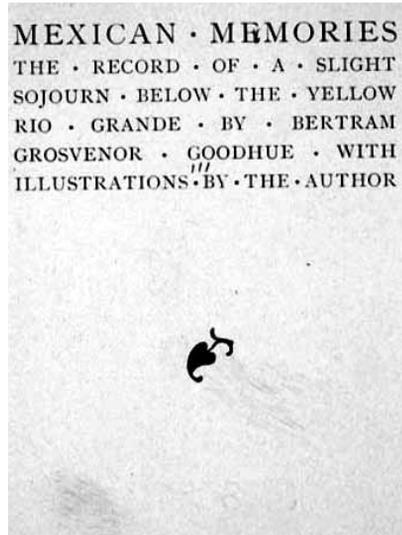
procathedral in Havana, Cuba, and a hotel in Colon, Panama. The hotel commission had come through the recommendation of Goodhue's friend Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.⁹ Although Olmsted first suggested Goodhue for the Balboa Park project, his choice was not initially accepted. It was left to Pasadena architect Elmer Grey to successfully support Goodhue's application.¹⁰

Bertram Goodhue, born in Pomfret, Connecticut, on April 28, 1869, completed his formal education in 1884 at the age of fifteen.¹¹ In that year he traveled to New York to study drafting for six years under James Renwick, architect of Grace Church and St. Patrick's Cathedral. Perhaps the most

significant aspect of his education, however, was his extended journey to Mexico in 1890 during which time he, like many a "yankee" before and after him, fell in love with the landscape, lifestyle, and architecture of a very different neighboring country to the south. Goodhue's small book entitled *Mexican Memories: The Record of a Slight Sojourn below the Yellow Rio Grande* published in New York in 1892, "with illustrations by the author," is a remarkable tale of a young American becoming acquainted with a totally different way of life.¹² To give one example, he begins as follows:

El Paso is, as I have said, the quintessence of everything hateful and modern. Paso del Norte is one of the sleepest of the delightfully dormant Mexican towns... I suppose they have churches in El Paso, but there is nothing to remind one of the delightful old cathedral, so little and so tumble-down across the river.¹³

While crossing the expansive countryside as far as Mexico City and Puebla, Goodhue became intrigued with the use of domes, towers, ornate facades and plain walls. He came to believe in three principles, as did his contemporary Frank Lloyd Wright, that first "architecture must be organically united with its landscape or setting," that, second, one should rely "on unpretentious vernacular forms, often geometrically simple, for the primary inspiration of designs" and, third, that the tower, "which has served for centuries as a dramatic marker to enhance the structure that lies at its base" should be incorporated into compositions.¹⁴

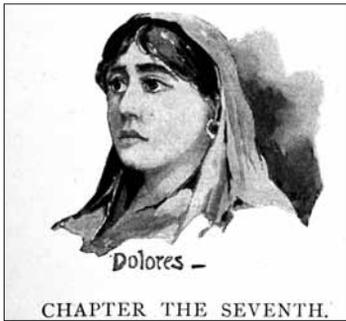


Title page *Mexican Memories*, New York 1892.

Again, a few paragraphs show Goodhue's deep appreciation for what might be called the Mexican lifestyle:

Now every little peon village has its "parroquia," and a true church it is, too, in every sense of the word—none of your modern abominations with tawdry chromos and similar commercial articles of decoration as in the North.

As soon as you enter from the blazing sunlight through the western doorway into the cool half-light within, you see, in a large majority of cases, a Churrigueresque splendor in the sanctuary opposite you, "black with tarnished gold," the subdued magnificence of which is broken in places by dark pictures, as old as those of the great masters, and many times of a degree of excellence which approaches them very nearly.



Dolores from Mexican Memories, New York, 1892.



Cathedral Towers Puebla, from Mexican Memories, New York, 1892.

Goodhue's travels brought him into contact with a number of people in Mexico from all walks of life. Even though he was studying the architecture, Goodhue was charmed by the women, the farmers, the priests, and generally all the people he met along the way. His arrival in Mexico City brought forth the following comment:

The Cathedral in the Capital surpasses all others...in grandeur and extent. It is generally considered the finest church of the land, and it is not for me to take exception to the opinion of my betters, although admitting that the interior of the one in Puebla de Los Angeles—the most charming city in Mexico—pleases me more.¹⁵

After his return to the United States, Goodhue went into partnership, at age twenty-two, with the firm of Cram and Wentworth in Boston. A few years later,

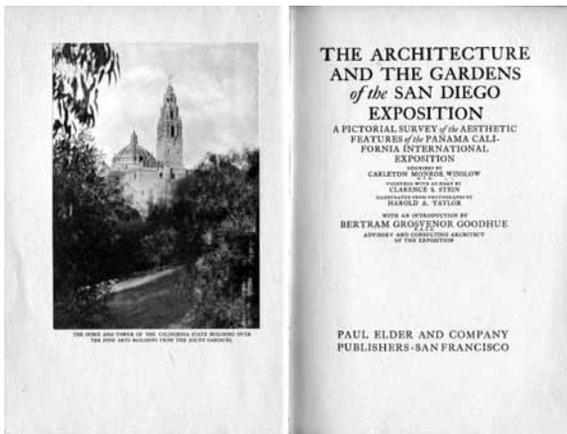


The Cathedral, Mexico City from Mexican Memories, New York, 1892.

upon the death of Charles Wentworth, he became a partner in the firm of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson, where he remained for the next fifteen years. The firm specialized in designing churches, homes and colleges in eclectic English and French Gothic Revival styles. Goodhue, inspired by Mexican architecture, preferred Spanish Colonial revival and used this style on the procathedral in Havana and the hotel in Panama. Goodhue had extended his knowledge of Spanish Colonial

architecture by a return trip to Mexico in 1899 and had become known as a major proponent of the popular “Spanish” style.

From the time that John Olmsted was first asked by Marston’s committee to design the exposition in Balboa Park in 1911, he had wanted Goodhue to be a part of the team.¹⁶ When that position became a reality, Goodhue, in turn, hired



Carleton Winslow, Sr., The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition, San Francisco, 1915.



California building completed in 1914. ©SDHC #852.

Carleton M. Winslow, Sr., a partner in the firm of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson, as Architect-in-Residence. Winslow then designed many of the temporary buildings and supervised the construction of those permanent buildings that Goodhue had designed.¹⁷

Born in Damariscotta, Maine, in 1876, Winslow grew up in a working-class family.¹⁸ Having left school at an early age, he was sent to Chicago and was apprenticed to a stonecutter for six months rendering drawings. After a bout with typhoid fever, young Winslow left for New York and took a job in the office of Daniel Wade, architect for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. While there, he borrowed \$500 from Wade to take a trip through Italy, during which time he was hired to help remodel a villa near the town of Capri. After three months in southern Italy, Winslow became committed to Mediterranean architecture—especially its domes, arches and towers. Upon returning to New York, he sought work with Bertram Goodhue, whose designs were exactly what had impressed Winslow during his travels.

An article in the *San Diego Union* on January 28, 1911, introduced Goodhue to San Diegans:

Proceeding in harmony with the plan of the directors of the Panama-California Exposition to follow as nearly as possible the Spanish-Mission type of architecture in the buildings to be erected...the Grounds Committee...employed Bertram G. Goodhue of New York and Santa Barbara¹⁹ to make the comprehensive plan for the various structures.

Mr. Goodhue is not only one of the most noted architects in the United States, but he is perhaps the only one who has made a worldwide study of Mission type of architecture. He has traveled to all parts of the globe where this type of architecture prevails, and spent years of time studying it in all its details.²⁰

The article also pointed out that Goodhue, one of the leading exponents of Gothic architecture in the United States, had created the design for the United States Military Academy at West Point, St. Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue in New York, and great cathedrals from Havana to Detroit.²¹ Even though much of his firm's work in the early twentieth century drew on English precedents, Goodhue,

drew upon Spanish antecedents as he skillfully integrated landscape and architecture. Goodhue's independence of mind is revealed by his readiness to abandon Beaux-Arts formalism...for a scheme based on a



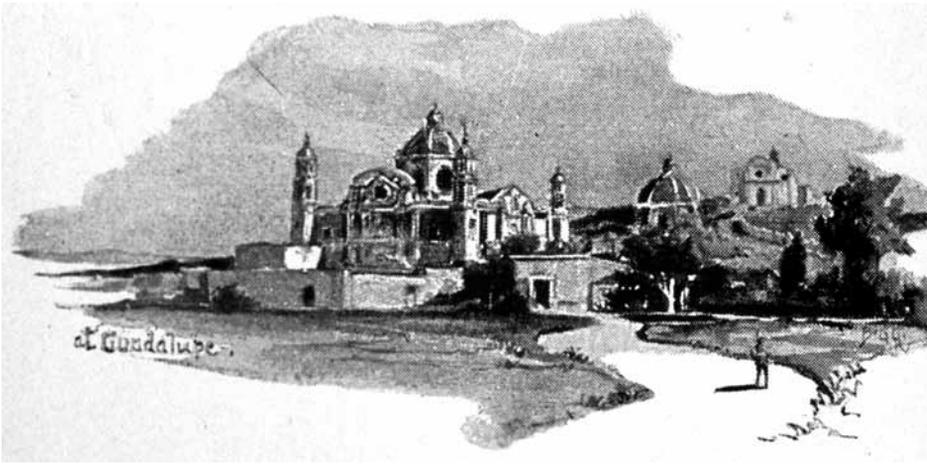
Nebraska State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska.

more variegated and natural order. His design was so successful that it launched a revival of Spanish Colonial style that spread throughout California and eventually eastward to many other parts of the United States.²²

In fact, Goodhue displayed such a tendency toward innovation that he parted ways with the more conservative Cram and Ferguson in 1914 and searched for a new, more

personal expression. After the exposition in Balboa Park, Goodhue designed the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago (1918-28), the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, DC (1919-24) and the Nebraska State Capitol (1918-28)—all of which demonstrated “his ongoing effort to integrate purposeful ornamentation with traditional styles.”²³

It is easy to discern from Goodhue's writing about San Diego that his Mexican travels had given him a deep admiration and appreciation of Hispanic traditions. He compared Southern California with the most beautiful regions of Europe and the New World, and believed that in San Diego could be found “the tenderest of skies, the bluest of seas, mountains of perfect outline,” reminding him “of the soft speech and unfailing courtesy” that he had found in Mexico. In San Diego he had endeavored, as far as possible, to reflect in its fair, “something of the effect of the old Spanish and Mission days and thus to link the spirit of the old seekers of the fabled Eldorado with that of the twentieth century.”²⁴ Goodhue, proud of his overall exposition design, wrote at its completion that within the confines of this perfect park, “was built a city in miniature wherein everything that met the



The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico from Mexican Memories, New York 1892.

eye and ear of the visitor was meant to recall to mind the glamour and mystery and poetry of the old Spanish days."²⁵

The buildings that Bertram Goodhue personally designed, and destined to be permanent, were found within the California Quadrangle. The south wing of the Fine Arts Building contained a chapel with a "Carmelite belfry containing a century-old Spanish bell brought from Gibraltar. The sturdy buttresses of the south façade recall those of the Mission San Gabriel."²⁶ The richly ornamented frontispiece of the California State Building reflected "the principal architectural element of Spanish and Mexican buildings."²⁷ The corridor running along the

I n t r o d u c t o r y

 N as inspiring a site as the world can offer, a broad mesa surrounded by palm-filled canyons and commanding a gorgeous view of the flower-gowned slopes, the peaks of California and Mexico, the vineyards and orchards of orange and olive and the majestic Pacific, San Diego has built its Exposition Beautiful, to last not only throughout 1915, but as many years thereafter as stone and staunch timber will hold together.

No conventional architecture is here, such as crammed the grounds of the old-style world's fair, but mission and cathedral and palace uniformly of the Spanish Colonial type, the type which Cabrillo knew when he, the first white man to see the Pacific coast of what was to be the United States, sailed into the Harbor of the Sun in 1542; the type which Viscaino knew, the type which Fray Serra knew and did much to reproduce when he planted civilization on the west coast, at the old mission of San Diego de Alcalá. No conventional costumes clothe the guards and attendants. They are caballero and conquistadore, guardsmen of Castile, dancing girls of Aragon. The atmosphere of old Spain and the days of the padres is flawless, decked out with the added quaintness of the Indian life of the Southwest.

Over the appealing lines of the buildings, over the cool cloisters, around the pergolas which overhang the canyons, up the slopes of the campaniles and the domes and the mission bell towers where the pigeons nest, everywhere swarms the semi-tropical foliage of southern California, the palm and cypress, the eucalypt and acacia, the rose, the clematis, the jasmine, the honeysuckle, the triumphant splendor of the bougainvillea. The scent of the orange floods the air, cooled by the soft zephyr from the near-by sea. Here is rest; here is peace; here is happiness. Here is the loveliness of bountiful Nature, assembled and crystallized at San Diego's Exposition Beautiful.

Introductory from San Diego 1915 Panama-California Exposition Souvenir Book.



Postcard courtesy J. Michael Kelly.

south side of the Plaza de California was “wistfully reminiscent of the passing charm of San Fernando Mission.”²⁸

How much credit does Bertram Goodhue deserve for promoting the idea of a Spanish Colonial Revival? Certainly he stepped into a situation already receptive to his ideas.²⁹ Nevertheless the movement had not really taken hold in 1910 even though certain architects, including Irving Gill, were influenced by mission architecture. An article in the *San Diego Union* entitled, “Architectural Gems of Old Spain Revived,” explains that

The Exposition might have gone ahead and erected buildings of Greek or Roman type, or other conventional types which have appeared at all world’s fairs of the past. Beyond a doubt the result would have been beautiful...[but]...the Exposition adopted a different plan, and now offers to the world something which is not only wondrously beautiful, but also is creative in that it has brought about a genuine renaissance of the glories of Spanish art and architecture.³⁰

Another writer points out that many people who had never been to California imagined it to be a land “dominated by the old Spanish Mission style of architecture,” but this, of course, was not the case since much of California exhibited various types of bungalows, several variations of Victorian architecture, or the Arts and Crafts style in many residences.

But for the people from all parts of the land who go to see San Diego's Exposition, it is their ideal visualized. There the fairy Spanish city is a reality, old courts and patios abound. Stately towers reach into the restful blue of California skies. A carefully trained wilderness of tropical plants delights the eyes. It is a sweet and restful land where "castles in Spain" seem realities; a land in which you "loaf and invite your soul."³¹



Goodhue's proposed sketch of domed building for CalTech from Romy Wyllie, Bertram Goodhue, p. 91. Courtesy of Caltech Archives.

And today in San Diego, we have the lasting influence of Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue and his fellow designers who can truly be said to have been "inspired by Mexico" in bringing a Spanish Colonial Revival not only to Balboa Park but to Southern California and beyond. Although Goodhue refined his architectural style, his work continued to express his Mexican "roots."³² His designs for the Balboa Park Exposition led to a number of commissions including the Union Railway Station in Riverside and the California Institute of Technology. For this latter work, he was personally chosen by Trustee George Hale who wrote:

I discovered Bertram Goodhue when I first looked across the great causeway that leads to the San Diego Exposition. This superb creation, so Spanish in feeling—yet so rarely equaled in Spain—with its stately approach, its walls springing from the hillside, its welcoming gateway, its soaring tower, and its resplendent dome, foretelling all the southern privacy and charm of the courts that lie beyond reveal much of its author.³³



St. Bartholomew's Church, New York City, designed by Bertram Goodhue. Photo by David Kahn.

After the fair opened, Goodhue received other commissions. In 1917 he traveled to New York City to redesign St. Bartholomew's Church complete with dome.³⁴ He returned to San Diego in 1918 as chief architect of the

Marine Corps Recruit Depot, and in 1921 lent his talent to design the Los Angeles Public Library, where he was joined by his Exposition associate Carleton Winslow then working in California.³⁵ The writer of the January 1, 1915, article in evaluating the work of Bertram Goodhue and his team may have said it best:

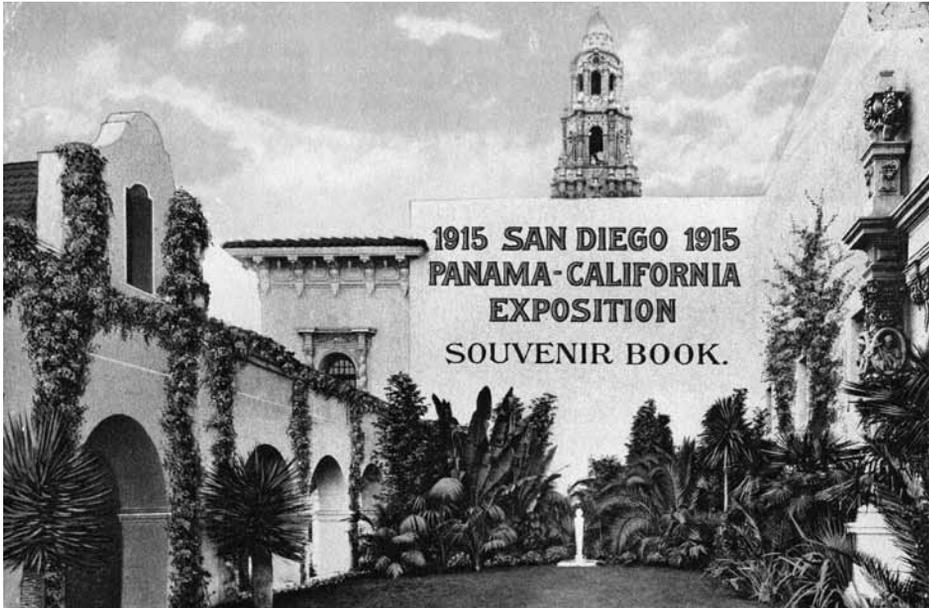
The impression of the architects who have seen the Exposition in the city... is that there has been revived an art which should have been revived decades ago, but which, now re-created, is destined to take on new life and strength and to last for many years to come.



Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. Photo by JR Robertson.

And, indeed, six years later Katherine Elspeth Oliver penned an article entitled “Balboa, Dream Place of the Southwest” that recalled:

Six years back when this dream place, the incomparable setting of the Panama-California Exposition, sprang from the chaparral with



San Diego Panama-California Exposition 1915 Souvenir Book. Photo courtesy San Diego History Center.



North side of El Prado, Balboa Park. Postcard courtesy J. Michael Kelly.

the audacity and wonder of a flower bouquet in a conjurer's hat, men lacked words adequate for its praise. It captivated them—it enthralled them—this peerless replica of old Castile—this marvelous classic of a dead age made to live again, materialized in the heart of the so new West . . . the genesis chapter of the West coast—a chapter of high deeds and mighty accomplishments—of romance and story memorialized in forms of beauty that lifted the heart with delight and filled it with reverence.³⁶

The exposition buildings were not without their critics, but the fact remains that these structures created and designed one hundred years ago by the architectural team of Bertram Goodhue have stood the test of time. Today they give testimony to the permanence of their architectural influence and the lasting power of institutional memory. Sadly, Bertram Goodhue died suddenly from a heart attack in 1924 at age fifty-five, just three years after the article by Oliver was written. Although buried in New York City at the Chapel of the Intercession, his memory lives on in San Diego as plans are made for the centennial of the Panama-California Exposition. Goodhue's structures were built "to last not only throughout 1915, but as many years thereafter as stone and staunch timber will hold together."³⁷ San Diego's "Fairy Spanish City" is indeed today's reality in Balboa Park.

NOTES

1. Carleton M. Winslow, Jr., "The Architecture of the Panama-California Exposition: 1909-1915," master's thesis, University of San Diego, 1976, 33. Quoted from Davidson's opening address, 8.
2. Nuñez de Balboa, born in Jerez de los Caballeros in Extremadura, Spain, c. 1457, was a descendant of the lord mason of the castle of Balboa, which is located in northwestern Spain. Balboa led a group of Spaniards overland across the Isthmus of Panama to become the first European to discover the Pacific Ocean. See Nancy Carol Carter, "Renaming Balboa Park: Correcting the Record," *The Journal of San Diego History* (hereafter *JSDH*) 56 nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2010): 31-42.
3. Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, sailing for Spain from the port of Navidad in Mexico on June 17, 1542, was the first European explorer to land on the shores of what was later named San Diego de Alcalá by Sebastián Vizcaíno on November 12, 1602.
4. Building upon the work of Kate Sessions who had begun planting trees in the park in 1892, landscape architect Samuel Parsons, former superintendent of New York's Central Park, offered a design for the gardens. Parsons wanted to preserve the park's "great natural picture" and keep it relatively free from any buildings. From 1904-1906, some 14,000 more trees and shrubs were planted in an effort to create a "natural" setting. Heartily supported by civic leaders, the park exemplified the City Beautiful movement begun in Chicago in 1893.
5. "Landscape Architect: Samuel T. Parsons, Jr." *San Diego Union*, November 10, 1902. Richard Amero, "Colonel D.C. Collier: An Inspiration to the Citizens of San Diego," *JSDH* 56, no. 4 (Fall 2010), 208.
6. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., was the son of the famous landscape designer of New York's Central Park and the grounds for the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago.
7. Frank P. Allen served as Architect and Director of Works for the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition in Seattle and had worked with John Olmsted on the project. Allen designed the Roman-aqueduct style Cabrillo Bridge, the Italian-Renaissance Sacramento Valley Building, the rococo-style Commerce and Industries Building, the Mexican-Churrigueresque San Joaquin Valley Building, and the Mission-style Montana Building. See Richard Amero, *Balboa Park Expositions, Chapter 8: Sources and Attributions*, at <http://www.balboaparkhistory.net/amero.htm> (accessed December 26, 2011).
8. See Richard Amero, *The Question of Irving Gill's Role in the Design of the Administration Building in Balboa Park*, <http://www.balboaparkhistory.net/amero.htm> (accessed December 26, 2011).
9. Romy Wyllie, *Bertram Goodhue: His Life and Residential Architecture*. (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2007), 74.
10. Wyllie, *Bertram Goodhue*, 74-75. Grey, designer of the Huntington Library, did not like Gill and "considered his work to be too modern and devoid of beauty, telling Goodhue that Gill 'hasn't a broad enough outlook for such a position as the Exhibition one.'" Goodhue, when he heard about the commission, indicated his interest in a letter to Elmer Grey, who in turn wrote to the San Diego committee. See also Esther McCoy, *Five California Architects* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1975), 87-90, for details.
11. His parents, Charles Wells Goodhue and Helen Eldredge Grosvenor Goodhue, were of modest means and unable to send their son to Yale, the college of some of his more prosperous ancestors. For a complete biography of Goodhue, see Wyllie, *Bertram Goodhue*.
12. Bertram Goodhue, *Mexican Memories: The Record of a Slight Sojourn below the Yellow Rio Grande* (New York: Geo. M. Allen Co., 1892).
13. Goodhue, *Mexican Memories*, 11.
14. H. Keith Sawyers, "The Architectural Vision of Bertram Goodhue," in Frederick C. Luebke, ed. *A Harmony of the Arts: The Nebraska State Capitol* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 22.
15. Goodhue, *Mexican Memories*, 90-91.

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16. As mentioned above, Goodhue's entrance on the scene has always been controversial. Irving Gill, whose reputation was well established in San Diego, was the logical local choice.
17. Inspired by a trip to Italy, Winslow's earliest visions for the park included a lake with Venetian gondolas floating about.
18. Winslow's mother died when he was a child and his father worked as a boot and shoe salesman. Young Carleton left school after the eighth grade but continued his interest in drawing. Sent to live with an uncle in Chicago, he worked for a stonemason rendering shop drawings. Winslow, Jr., *Architecture of the Panama-California Exposition*, 24.
19. Goodhue designed the Spanish-style Gillespie house in Montecito in 1903-1905.
20. *San Diego Union*, January 28, 1911, 10:3-4. Mission Style and Spanish Colonial Style are often confused. Mission Style or Mission Revival consists of simple, clean lines representing the austerity of mission life in the early settlement of California. Spanish Colonial Style, which Goodhue observed through his travels in Mexico, had more decorative baroque features with elaborate interiors made possible by funds from the silver mines discovered during the sixteenth century.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Sawyers, "The Architectural Vision of Bertram Goodhue," 24-25. Most world fairs up until that time had been organized on the basis of a Beaux-Arts formalism.
23. *Ibid.*, 25.
24. Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, "The Architecture and the Gardens," in Carleton Winslow, Sr. *The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition: A Pictorial Survey of the Aesthetic Features of the Panama-California International Exposition* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company Publishers, 1915), 5-6.
25. *Ibid.*, 6.
26. Winslow, Sr. *The Architecture and the Gardens of the San Diego Exposition*, 28.
27. *Ibid.*, 32.
28. *Ibid.*, 52.
29. For example buildings in the 1880s in St. Augustine, Florida; the Main Quad at Stanford University, and examples at the 1893 Chicago Exposition,.
30. *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1915.
31. Bense Smythe, "The Fair at San Diego," *Review of Reviews* (May 1915), 88.
32. Goodhue was committed to the idea that the temporary buildings should not "be other than temporary, for it must be remembered that Exposition Architecture differs from that of our everyday world in being essentially of the fabric of a dream—not to endure but to produce a merely temporary effect. It should provide, after the fashion that stage scenery provides—illusion rather than reality." Goodhue believed that the Cabrillo Bridge, the California Quadrangle with the California State Building and the Fine Arts Building would remain while "the rest was to be swept away entirely." Goodhue, "The Architecture and the Gardens," 7.
33. George Ellery Hale as quoted by Wyllie in *Bertram Goodhue*, 118.
34. The second location of St. Bartholomew's Church on the southwest corner of Madison Avenue and East 44th Street was designed by James Renwick in whose office Goodhue had first served as an apprentice. The present church, designed by Goodhue in a simplified Byzantine style, preserved the old church portal but included a new tile-patterned dome and was built in 1916-1917.
35. Wyllie, *Bertram Goodhue*, 113.
36. *Overland Monthly*, August 1921.
37. *The Official Guide Book of the Panama-California Exposition San Diego 1915*. San Diego, 1915.