

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Short Cut of 1909

The voyage distance from New York to San Francisco via the Panama route is 5,262 nautical miles and by the Strait of Magellan is 13,135 nautical miles, a saving of 7,873. This reduction in cruising distance, for an average cargo vessel from one of these ports to the other, saves about 120 days in voyage time and an operating cost of some \$50,000.

"Originally, constructed for the transit of the larger vessels of commerce and war then in existence or contemplated for all nations on terms of equality with charges that are just and equitable, the growth of traffic volume has enabled continuation of low tolls despite higher operation costs. The transit since 1914 through Fiscal Year 1964 in both peace and war, of 346,891 vessels of various types is the greatest satisfaction for all those contributing to this result," wrote Miles P. Du Val, Jr., in the Book Club of California Keepsake Series.

Oscar Lewis wrote the opening story of the plans for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal. San Francisco was first in the field — a "Pacific Ocean Exposition Company" was incorporated there and in 1911 San Francisco was the winner over New Orleans by a narrow margin of 188 votes to New Orleans' 159 by a vote in Congress.

The choice of spot in which to hold the Exposition was finally decided — the so-called Harbor View site, a 600-acre expanse of swampy land that extended along the bay front from Fort Mason to and beyond the Presidio wall.

At the groundbreaking exercises, October 14, 1911, President Taft turned the first symbolic spadeful of earth. The immense Palace of Machinery ("the largest wooden building in the world") and Bernard Maybeck's stately Palace of Fine Arts were at the end, with the whole: linked together by the ornate, 435-foot Tower of Jewels. The fair opened February 20, 1915 and closed December 4.

Samuel Stark, an authority on early illustrated post cards, edited the last of the Keepsake Series for the California Book Club. The first cards were issued in 1893. These cards are now known among collectors as "Pioneer Cards."

"Possibly the first post cards, as we know them now," wrote Mr. Stark, "to be issued in California were those for the California Midwinter International Exposition held in San Francisco from January 1 to June 30, 1894."

They were issued in sets of four, five and nine cards each and were copyrighted by G. L. Herbert, with lithography by Schmidt L. L. Company of San Francisco. "The Kiss of the Oceans" was the most popular of all the post-cards issued for the opening of the Panama Canal in 1915.

Private postal cards, also known as "message cards," were copyrighted in 1861. These contained a box for the stamp and address lines on one side with the other left blank for messages or advertisements. Their issuance was strictly controlled by postal laws. In 1873 the United States Post Office began issuing postal cards, although Congress had in 1870 denied it this privilege.

"Finally, in 1893, with perhaps a prodding by the Universal Postal Union, a relaxation of the postal authorities allowed private companies in this country to offer for sale view and greeting cards to which a stamp could be affixed, and which carried the same low rate as a government postal. These cards are now known as 'Pioneer Cards', according to Samuel Stark.

"On all cards of this period, messages were permitted only on the view side of the card with the other side limited to the address and the postage stamp. This resulted in many curious and fanciful cards held by present day collectors, as between 1893 and 1907 the sender of a card attempted to write as many words as possible in the space allotted. The message often encircled the margin of the card several times and produced an attractive calligraphic frame," concluded Mr. Stark.