



The San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

Articles from The Call, The Chronicle and The Examiner (April, 1906)

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At 5:12 am on the morning of April 18, 1906 an earthquake with an estimated magnitude of 7.8 struck the coast of Northern California. Shaking was felt from Eureka in the north all the way to the Salinas Valley in the south. In the city of San Francisco buildings collapsed and fires broke out, burning for several days. The natural disaster resulted in approximately 3,000 deaths and the destruction of over 80% of the city. During the peak of the disaster newspaper reporters from the major papers made a herculean effort to keep the public informed even as their offices and presses were destroyed and the city burned all around. The papers located printing presses across the bay and continued to publish amid the pandemonium. The accounts read here from the articles published from April 19 to April 22 give a re-

markable first-hand account of the experience of living through one of the worst natural disasters to ever strike the United States. The first day (April 19) features articles from reporters from all three of the major dailies, who collaborated to get out the word.

The San Francisco Call began in 1856 as a four-page daily titled the Daily Morning Call. Politically Republican and popular with the working class, within a decade it was the leading morning paper for several decades, reaching its peak in the late 1890's and early 1900's. Mark Twain was a notable reporter early in its history. By the time of the 1906 earthquake the Call had slipped to third place and was sold to William Randolph Hearst in 1913, who merged it with the Evening Post and renamed the afternoon paper the San Francisco Call and Post.

The San Francisco Chronicle was founded in 1865 as The Daily Dramatic Chronicle by teenage brothers Charles and Michael de Young. By 1880 it had become the leading newspaper on the West Coast. It has won six Pulitzer Prizes and continues to be published to this day. It entered into a joint operating agreement with the San Francisco Examiner in 1965 which continued until 2000, when it was sold by the de Young family to the Hearst Corporation.

The San Francisco Examiner is the flagship of the Hearst Corporation and has been a pioneer of the newspaper industry sometimes dubbed the "Monarch of the Dailies". It began life as the pro-Confederacy, anti-Lincoln Democratic Press in 1863 but changed its name and tune after a mob destroyed its offices following Lincoln's assassination in 1865. George Hearst acquired the paper in 1880, some say in payment of a gambling debt, and gave it to his son, William Randolph Hearst, then 23. He hired seasoned management, featured writers such as Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, and Jack London, and deployed a unique blend of yellow journalism, foreign coverage, scandal, satire, and unabashed patriotism to achieve enormous popularity and profitability.