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JACK LONDON AND THE GREAT EARTHQUAKE AND FIRESTORMS OF 1906

Philip L. Fradkin, guest curator

at the

California Historical Society

February 9 – June 10, 2006

San Francisco – On Thursday, February 9, 2006, the California Historical Society opens its earthshaking centennial exhibit, ***Jack London and the Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906***, guest curated by author and historian, Philip L. Fradkin, (*The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906*, University of California Press, 2005).

On the morning of April 18, 1906, Jack London and his wife, Charmian, were in Glen Ellen shaken awake, like everyone else in the Bay Area and northern California by the earthquake of the century. By 6 a.m. the Londons were mounted on their “quivering and skittish” horses and galloping to their nearby Beauty Ranch which had been reduced to rubble. They rode up to the crest of Sonoma Mountain and saw smoke rising in the directions of Santa Rosa and San Francisco.

The subsequent journeys of the Londons through the blackened and twisted debris from Ft. Bragg to San Francisco produced words and images that helped to define this country’s greatest urban disaster. No couple (and certainly no celebrity couple) traveled so widely to see so much within so little time – and, Jack was indeed at the height of his celebrity as an author in 1906.

The editor of Collier’s magazine asked London to write 2,500 words on the destruction of San Francisco. It was the story of a lifetime, and he had been there. The pay was exceptionally good at ten cents a word, and he needed the money. Jack went to work on April 24. “Hot from his hand I snatched the scribbled sheets and swiftly typed them,” said Charmian. They wired the story the same day, and it arrived in time to be published in the May 5 issue.

To create this exhibit, Mr. Fradkin has combined photographic images taken by Jack London, as well as images from the collections of the California Historical Society, utilized text references from the May 5, 1906 article in *Collier's* magazine, and excerpts from Charmian London's diary and scrapbooks. Some of these images have never been seen before or been available for public display.

The California Historical wishes to thank its sponsors, Borel Private Bank & Trust Company, the Candelaria Fund and San Francisco Grants for the Arts. We also wish to thank the California State Parks, Jack London State Historical Park for permission to reproduce images from their collection of Jack London's original negatives, and the Huntington Library for reproductions from their collection of Charmian London's scrapbook and diary.

Jack London and the Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906 will be open to the public February 9 through June 10, 2006. The California Historical Society Museum is located at 678 Mission Street, San Francisco. Hours: Wednesday through Saturday 12 noon to 4:30 p.m. For general information, please call: 415.357.1848.

The California Historical Society was founded in 1871. A nonprofit, membership organization, CHS is the state's official historical society, and is privately funded. Its mission is to engage public interest & participation in collecting, preserving, & presenting art, artifacts & written materials relevant to the history of California, & to support historical research, publication, & education.