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THE SAN JOSE ELECTRIC LIGHT TOWER,

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Diane E. Durbeck
6954 Bret Harte Dr.
San Jose, CA 95120
(408) 268-2348

Leland High School
Charles Sullivan-advisor

April 27, 1983

965-18M-20

Famed Tower Pioneered S. J. Electric Lights

County Ranks Among
Highest Electrified
Of Rural Areas.

THE LIGHT ON THE TOWER.
ADAM RHEIL ACKNOWLEDGES IT
IS GOOD.
*Such Also Is the Opinion of the People.
What the Evening Papers
Have to Say.*

Tower Dominated San Jose 34 Years

FALLS TO STREET

Fifteen Tons of Steel Crash to
Ground When Historic
Structure Collapses.

TOWER TO BE FINISHED FOR NEW YEAR FESTIVAL

Celebration Committee Holds
Enthusiastic Meeting at the
Chamber of Commerce.

Electric Tower
Made San Jose
World Famous

PAINING RECALLS HISTORY OF CITY'S OLD LIGHT TOWER

Unique Market Street Monu-
ment Topped Over by
Wind Dec. 3, 1915.

*San Jose
Electric
Light Tower*

When San Jose Built Its Tower
To Become "Paris of the West"

THE ORDINANCE.
What J. J. Owen Expects from the
City of San Jose.

Early Electric Firms Fought Over Tower

1915 Gale Finishes
Stormy Saga of Odd
Enterprise.

Famed Tower City's Mark 34 Years

Pictorial Lighting
Structure Child of
Mercury Editorial.

Once Famous San Jose Landmark ELECTRIC TOWER FALLS TO STREET

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A Vision from the Tower

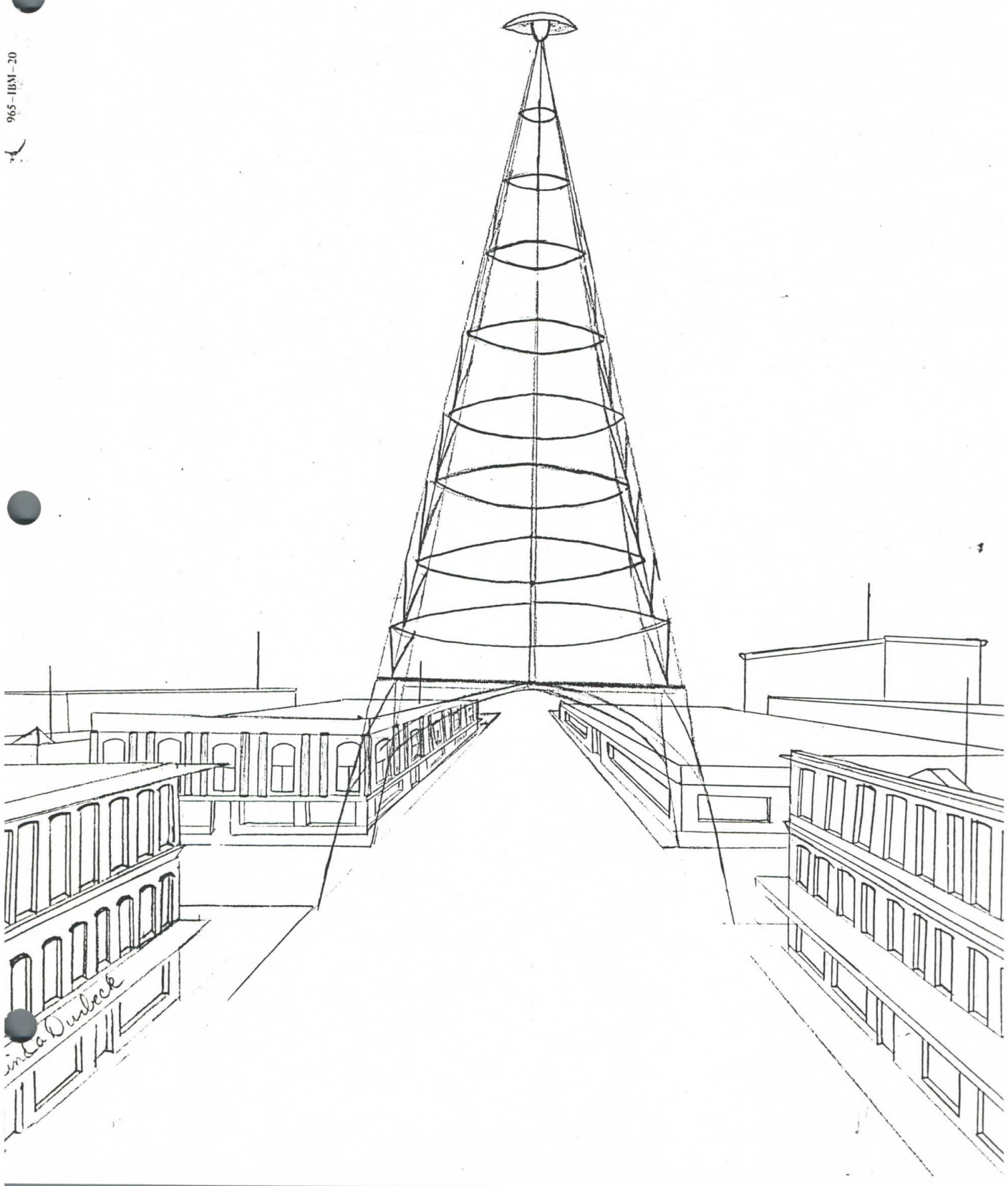
I stood on the top of the tower one day
The electric tower of San Jose
And never again till the day I die
Will a vision so beautiful bless my eye
As that which below and around me lay,
From the top of the tower in San Jose

It seemed that whim of a ... hand
Had waved above it divining wand
And wafted there from some mystic place
A people of Lillputian race
And curve of nature and line of art
And light and shadow and human mart
We strongly blended below that day
As I stood on the tower of San Jose

One lone little cloud slow floated above
A dot in the reamless azure deep
As white as the soul of a baby's love
As still as the stars when the night winds sleep
I thought it was the mist of an angel's breath
Frozen and floating away to death
Far down below me, around, around, away,
A curious picture the city lay

Madge Morris

[San Jose Daily Mercury, January 20, 1900, p.8 (microfilm)]



inda Oulbeck

Introduction

That San Jose might be known as the "Beacon City" was the dream of James Jerome Owen, owner and editor of the San Jose Weekly Mercury in the early 1880's. The city gained nation-wide attention as Owen's dream of a large electric light tower in downtown San Jose to light the streets became a reality. On December 13, 1881, "the lightning shot up across the wires and the six electric lamps at the top shown out in all glory" from the 237 foot tower, at that time the brightest source in the nation. The citizens of San Jose "realized that they had the wonder of the nineteenth century...they lived in the only city lighted by...a tower which like the Colossus at Rhodes stood astride her two principal streets."

The tower was a technical but not commercial success. Lawsuits and financial problems plagued "Owen's Folly" and only intermittent operation was possible until the tower mercifully collapsed in a heavy wind storm on December 3, 1915. In all it was an interesting and heady adventure. "Today," to quote a 1954 Mercury article, "only old photos and yellowed newspaper clippings remain to remind San Joseans of the old electric light tower- the magnificent, but slightly wacky dream that became the seventh wonder of the west."

The San Jose Electric Light Tower

"A hundred horse-power Brush light on the dome of the Court House, with an immense shade or reflector to throw the light down over the city,...(would) give us a much better light than we have now, and at much less cost." So exhorted James Jerome Owen, owner of the San Jose Weekly Mercury, in an editorial of May 13, 1880.* Owen, originator of the San Jose Electric Tower, also suggested placing additional lights at other elevated points to overcome building shadows.

J. J. Owen had recently returned from the St. Louis exposition "and was dazzled by the possibility of the new-fangled electric light for civic illumination." He had been caught in the national controversy "as to whether high lighting or low lighting was the coming thing."¹ Shortly thereafter, Wabash, Indiana, put the idea of high lighting to a practical test. Four lights were suspended one hundred feet above the business part of town on the iron flagstaff of the Court House. Councilmen reported that the light met the expected radius of one half mile. After this success, Owen decided on high lighting and wrote his rousing editorial.²

* This editorial was difficult to find, for every single source dated it May 13, 1881. However, the Weekly Mercury was not published on that date.

The San Jose Electric Light Tower

During the summer months of 1881, a flurry of ideas for the electric tower found their way onto the pages of the Mercury. It was early resolved to place the light above an intersection, where it would "in no manner interfere with the free use of streets or sidewalks."³ One article suggested renting engines from the local planing and flouring mills during the nighttime hours to run the light.⁴ Another suggested conveying water from nearby Penitencia Canyon to drive a turbine wheel to run "all the electric machinery San Jose would ever require." In addition, "the surplus water might be used for sprinkling the streets, which alone would work a saving to the city that would more than pay the interest on the cost of the work." Even the San Francisco Herald wrote, carefully suggesting increasing the power to at least 30,000 candle-power. The Mercury replied that 36,000 candle-power were currently under consideration.⁵

In early June an agent from the California Electric Company toured San Jose and proposed building a tower for an experimental 12,000 candle-power light. He claimed three such towers would adequately light the entire city at 20% the equivalent cost of gas lamps.⁶ Soon after both the Business Agent and Secretary of the company visited the city to follow up on the plans. All involved agreed the optimum height for the best exhibition of the

The San Jose Electric Light Tower

light to be approximately 200 feet.⁷

The Mercury promoted the generally optimistic mood. Week after week it exhorted the tremendous cost savings expected. It proudly highlighted a quote from the Akron Beacon: "It will not cost as much to light the entire city hereafter as it has heretofore cost to light a section less than a single ward."⁸ The public became infected with the excitement; one "old subscriber" penned a letter to the Mercury asking to be kept well abreast of all developments on the tower. The paper responded reassuringly.⁹

Various plans for the construction of the light slowly evolved. The Mercury eventually supported the idea of a tower, designed by San Jose architect John Gash. A young artist, Howard Peelor, drew a perspective view of the proposed tower. The view was taken from an imaginary vantage near the Hensley House and represented the Washington and Jefferson blocks and adjacent buildings, as well as a portion of the Farmer's Union. This drawing was placed in one of the show windows of Wood & Brown's Drugstore on First Street for several days.¹⁰ When Harper's Weekly ran an article on San Jose's tower on December 10, 1881, Peelor's drawing was included with the short explanation and history of the tower.¹¹ However, at the suggestion of J. J. Owen, Peelor sketched

The San Jose Electric Light Tower

in some additional impressive buildings to enhance San Jose's image.¹²

Gash's perception of the tower as displayed at Wood & Brown's was soon modified. The original had called for a beautiful but expensive dome. This gave way to a cage in the form of a pyramid. This and other modifications greatly reduced the cost and complexity of the project, while permitting the full two hundred foot altitude required. The Mercury heralded the alterations as removing "the last obstacle to a speedy construction." The paper confidently announced at the end of June that the tower would be built within the sixty days granted by the city.¹³

In early July, A. C. Stoddard placed a rival plan for the tower in the show windows of Rhodes & Lewis Drugstore. He proposed a windmill tower, with the light to be placed on an adjustable flagstaff. The Mercury lept at this idea and thoroughly attacked every one of its numerous weaknesses. The poorly designed plan withered away.¹⁴

By the end of the month, Gash had drawn up the final plans. The contract for erecting the tower was awarded to James Sheehan.¹⁵ The tower itself would be two hundred feet high. The fifty-eight foot square base would corner on the four street corners. The light would be placed

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six or eight feet higher than the six foot square top of the tower. A five foot flat reflector would surmount the light, expected to be equal to a half moon for a radius of one mile. The cost was projected to be about \$2000. The only question yet undecided was that of location. The two possibilities were the intersection of Santa Clara and San Pedro, or the intersection of Santa Clara and Market. A decision was to be reached by the end of the week.¹⁶

The Mercury continued to report other instances of electric lighting. The paper relayed in detail the progress of a much smaller tower in Akron, Ohio as reported by the Akron Beacon¹⁷ and the successful contract between the city of Buffalo and the Brush Electric Light Company of Buffalo to light the island for one year for \$5000 as reported by the Buffalo Courier.¹⁸ It also printed an excerpt from the Mining and Scientific Press on electric lighting in Wabash, Indiana. The latter article mentioned the talk of electric lights on the dome of the Capitol in Washington D.C.; Congress was to consider the idea during the next session.¹⁹

Public enthusiasm rose in support of the tower. A public subscription campaign was taken up after additional editorials by Owen argued that the bright glare of the light would "make crime shrink away and

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leave San Jose." He added solemnly that the tower would defy the elements, cheat gravitation, and all of its enemies."²⁰ Subscriptions ranging from 25¢ to \$25 poured into the office of the Mercury.²¹ Each subscriber was given the following certificate, neatly printed:²²

Ownership Certificate.

This is to certify that ___ has subscribed and paid the sum of ___ to aid in the construction of a tower for the Brush electric light to be located at the intersection of Santa Clara and Market streets, in the city of San Jose, and entitles him or his assigns to an ownership in said tower to the amount of his subscription.

To secure additional donors, Owen assured his readers that they would be reimbursed by the owner after the tower demonstrated its success. By late July, \$1800 had been raised.²³

By the end of July, work was progressing rapidly on the models for the large couplings. It was announced that the iron would be ready for the builders in two weeks.²⁴ The Pioneer was confident enough to print that "Bro. Owen will have his tower built before many days."²⁵ As predicted, two weeks later, on August 11, 1881, the ground was broken and the foundation laid. Construction of the tower had begun at last.²⁶

The San Jose Electric Light Tower

The tower slowly assumed its shape despite numerous delays. Even before much could be built of the tower, a large, complex net of scaffolding had to be erected.²⁷ The iron for the tower didn't arrive until the last days of August. The pieces of the tower were made of black boiler pipe, bolted together and braced as the work went forward. At one point a cross-rod broke, making the entire tower twist on its base and sending local citizens scurrying for their lives.²⁸ The Common Council met with Owen and Gash and discussed a report of the Committee of Mechanics; the Council granted 60 additional days to complete the tower with the new plans.²⁹ The cross-rod bracing was doubled.³⁰ Needless to say, the projected cost of construction was increased.

Caught up in the feverish excitement, the Pioneer was bold enough to propose an electric light for Mt. Hamilton, for San Jose could not see the existing lantern.³¹ Meanwhile, it doggedly continued with its hopeful speculations on the tower. In August it announced that the tower was "fast approaching completion."³² Three weeks later, it modified its tone and declared that the tower was "slowly approaching completion;" however, it was "beginning to show its beautiful proportions."³³

To cover rising costs, a successful benefit was held

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at the California Theater on November 30. The Pioneer urged every citizen interested in the tower's success to turn out. The evening commenced with a grand opening of "The Electric Tower," performed by Bronson and Parkman's Orchestra. The program then continued as J. Wesley Moore sang "Once Again"; J. Gerstmayer and daughter did a flute solo with piano accompaniment; Lois Singletary sang; Prof. A. Gerstmayer and daughter performed a flute solo with piano accompaniment; B. Coffee executed a silver statue clog dance; Prof. King played a piano solo; Miss Cora Finch sang "Grand Valce"; Miss Nona West sang "Pas Seul"; fourteen male voices gave a rendition of Turner's Chorus; and Mr. Cosgrove and Mr. Coffee performed Dutch and Irish comedy.³⁴ The evening was a fabulous success, raising \$450.³⁵ The entire subscription campaign raised a total of \$3456.75.³⁶

By late November, Mr. Campbell, the superintendent, was able to announce that the tower was nearing completion. He expected the irons of the upper portions to be assembled rapidly, taking about two weeks. He mentioned that the extra workers hired for the past week, creating a weekly payroll of \$250, were no longer needed.³⁷ On the twenty-ninth of November, the San Francisco Figaro announced that the tower would be finished in two weeks. The Figaro praised Owen and the citizens of San Jose,

The San Jose Electric Light Tower

declaring that "soon the electric light will supercede the thievish gas companies."³⁸

At 6:30 p.m. on December 13, 1881, the tower was lit for the first time. An immense crowd had congregated in the vicinity to witness the spectacle. Soon a "soft white light was observed at the summit of the tower, which grew in intensity and brilliancy until the full power of the six globes was exhibited, and until the city for a mile in radius from the central point was enveloped in a glow like that of the golden moon." The crowd was impressed and factories and mills blew their steam whistles.³⁹

People from all over the area wrote to the Mercury in praise of the light citing their own experiences on that first night. Mr. K. K. Dunlap, Mr. W. F. Ellis, Mr. R. B. Crichton, Mr. J. H. Cornthwaite, and Mr. J. A. Clayton all affirmed the strength of the light at various points in the city. At the Guadalupe Bridge, a half-mile from the tower, an observer's shadow from the light was clearly discernible, in spite of a gas jet less than forty feet away. Ralph Lowe, of New Almaden, sent a telegram stating that the light was plainly visible from New Almaden Hill. The Mercury article on the phenomenal success of the tower concluded, "San Jose may justly pride herself upon the fact that she is the only city

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west of the Rocky Mountains that has risen to the dignity of being illuminated by the electric light."⁴⁰

The San Francisco Chronicle congratulated the Mercury and proposed a similar project for the city of San Francisco.⁴¹ The Truckee Republican was but one of numerous papers that pronounced the tower a grand success.⁴² Charles A. Wyman wrote to the Mercury on December 14, rejoicing that thievery would now be discouraged, and inquiring whether local towns would advertise and plan their streets in relation to the new tower light.⁴³

The euphoria of the tower success lingered on. Madge Morris was taken up to the top of the tower one afternoon and received the inspiration for her poem, "A Vision from the Tower." The editor of the Pioneer also made the ascent and later glowingly described the "grand panorama" of the Santa Clara Valley.⁴⁴ One night all gas lights were forbidden until 10 p.m. in order that the citizenry might see the true effect of the tower light.⁴⁵ Some believed additional towers should be erected to eliminate shadows. The Pioneer asserted "four towers at the cost of \$2000 each will just knock full moonlight all hollow."⁴⁶ Others argued for high masts outside the city, where lower buildings obviated the need for tall towers. Eventually, twelve supplementary masts, each 150 feet

The San Jose Electric Light Tower

high, were constructed in various parts of the city.

The gas companies did not sit by silently. Shrewd observers noticed that new burners were put on many street lamps the day before. The Pioneer remarked that "the gas was never so brilliant as on Tuesday night," and asked why "the gas companies have given us so much better light for the past few days."⁴⁷ However, everyone else agreed that the drastic energy cost reduction was a cause for celebration. Gas had cost the city about \$10,000 a year; electricity would cost less than half that sum.⁴⁸

The final structure of the tower was 207 feet tall. Six four-thousand candlepower lights were mounted on a thirty-foot flagpole. Its 24,000 candlepower system was the brightest in the United States and third brightest in the world. In its day, it did much to give San Jose world-wide notoriety. Newspapers and magazines all over the state, the country, and the world recognized the unique experiment in San Jose. Mail vaguely addressed to "the city with the light tower" or even "care of the saloon under the light tower" had a way of roaming in from odd corners of the globe.⁴⁹ Even a Parisian delegation examined the tower prior to the construction of the Eiffel Tower.⁵⁰

Unlike today, San Jose policemen once showed the keenest rivalry for the downtown night beat. Wild ducks

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and geese flying at night were attracted by the bright lights. They would fly right into the tower, break their necks, and fall to the street. The policemen could make some extra money selling these casualties to restaurants.⁵¹ However, what attracted the fowl also attracted the Saturday night drunks, and policemen often had to discourage them from climbing the tower.⁵²

The tower was not ignored in the daytime either. Great banners hung from it at County Fair time.⁵³ Fireworks were launched from its top platform on the Fourth of July. During the holiday season strings of colored lights transformed it into a giant Christmas tree.⁵⁴

The electric tower was lit for the ninth occasion on January 9, 1882 for the visit of the Knights of Pythias from San Francisco. The opportunity was used to try a new reflector for one-third better results.⁵⁵ By the same month, the ordinance granting certain rights to Owen and his associates as owners of the tower had been passed by the Mayor and Common Council. The ordinance conferred upon Owen the right to construct an elevator and observatory, with the option to charge. The city reserved the right to install a town clock.⁵⁶ One immediate advantage the city gained from the tower was a sudden increase in the value of those properties affected

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by the light.⁵⁷

In early February, the San Jose Brush Electric Light Company offered to take over the lighting of the tower. Henry D. Woolfe, secretary pro-tempore of the company, proposed that the tower be lit from dusk to dawn every night except those of a full moon. He suggested the price of \$3 per month per gas lamp displaced by the tower.⁵⁸ The city accepted the offer.⁵⁹ The company's capital stock was taken rapidly.⁶⁰ By early March it had incorporated with \$100,000 in capital stock divided into 10,000 shares. The directors were James A. Clayton, Pedro de Saisset, Thomas Rea, T.S. Whipple, and George H. Roe.⁶¹

All was not perfect with the light tower, however. Though subscriptions had paid \$3,456.75, the total cost of construction came to \$5,969.41. As a result, many labor and material liens were slapped on it. Suits were begun in the courts to recover alleged unpaid claims. On March 29, 1882, the tower was sold to the company, now called the San Jose Light and Power Company, for \$5,000.⁶²

Before long, the competitor of San Jose Light and Power, the Electric Improvement Company, went before the City Council and obtained the exclusive franchise to light the city. San Jose Light and Power refused to lease the electric tower to Electric Improvement, so the

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tower remained dark for several years.⁶³

In February of 1891, Harry Edwards, manager of Electric Improvement, asked the council for permission to light the tower. He argued that because it was paid for by public subscription, the tower was public property. The council agreed and the tower was relighted on February 28.

Meanwhile, San Jose Light and Power had secured a injunction to stop proceedings. Edwards and other Electric Improvement officials skipped town to avoid service of the injunction. Their absence did not foil San Jose Light and Power. Its manager,* took some workmen down to the tower, cut all the wires, and took down the lamps. To make things doubly sure, they guarded the tower all night.

California laws at that time did not permit service of an injunction on Sunday, so shortly before midnight on Sunday, Edwards and his vice-president, James W. Rea, went to the tower and proceeded to rewire it despite the efforts of San Jose Light and Power guards to prevent them. All this occurred on a very stormy, rainy night. Monday night the lights on the tower were flashed on again.

Edwards and his officers were haled into court on a charge of contempt. They contended that they had not

*Of two sources which name this incident, one names the manager Quilty, the other Gillespie.

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violated an injunction on which there had been no service. They also countered that their rival company had wantonly destroyed property. Judge Reynolds grinned widely and fined both sides \$50 each, much to the amusement of the spectators, and dissolved the injunction. The fight between the rival companies continued for many years until their merger with the Pacific Gas and Electric Company.⁶⁴

To resolve the lighting question, the Mercury stepped into the controversy. The city leased the tower from San Jose Light and Power, the Mercury providing the rent. The city then gave permission to Electric Improvement to light the tower with twelve lamps of 2000 candlepower each. The public, the Record, and the Herald each expressed their appreciation to the Mercury for the end of the fiasco.⁶⁵

At about the turn of the century, the cost of lighting the tower was about \$75 to \$100 monthly. Because of a deficiency in the Street Light fund, the tower went dark again in 1899. By that time the tower was beginning to show its age. A stay on the east side of the lower portion was hanging loose and several rods and stays near the top had become "bent and warped in a rather alarming manner." In 1900, City Engineer Barker gave his opinion that the tower would never fall over

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like a tree crashing down upon neighboring buildings. The structure was too firmly rooted at the four corners; if it should give way, the crown would simply "topple and hang over like a big sunflower on a stalk." The Board of Police and Fire Commissioners decided a thorough investigation of the tower's condition was needed, though few believed it would be necessary to remove it.⁶⁶

By 1902, high winds had severely tested the tower. After receiving several complaints, the Mayor employed an expert, D. Sheedy, to examine the structure and report its needs to the City Council. Councilman Macaulay helped pass a resolution authorizing the Committee on Public Buildings to make any repairs needed.⁶⁷

The following week Sheedy went to work overhauling the tower with a wrench and hammer. He recommended to the Council a coat of paint for the tower to withstand the ravages of rust. He specified a particular brand of graphite variety made in Detroit. The Council instructed the Clerk to call for bids, stipulating that the graphite paint be used.⁶⁸

During the winter of 1914-15, severe gales swept through the valley and irreparably damaged the tower. After the particularly damaging storm of February 8, 1915, a public subscription campaign was started to rebuild the tower. Nine months later, on November 8,

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1915, a \$6100 contract was let to Golden Gate Iron Works for the rebuilding of the tower.⁶⁹

Work started on November 20 as several truck-loads of wood arrived for the construction of the scaffolding under the direction of Contractor Hoffman. Mayor Husted, several councilmen, and Alexander Hart, Chairman of the Tower Committee gathered to see the fruit of their efforts.⁷⁰ By the end of the month, those involved believed that the tower would be completed in time for the extravagant New Year's Festival.⁷¹

At 11:55 a.m. on December 3, 1915, the fifteen ton steel tower collapsed.⁷² High winds that morning had buffeted the structure. Slowly at first the structure twisted, then with increasing velocity, as rods and supports snapped, it crashed toward Spring's store to the north side of the wooden platform which had been built thirty-eight feet from the ground by the contractor. A great sheet of blue flame shot up into the air as a broken trolley wire contacted one of the street rails.

Inspection revealed that the old joints had crystallized. This weakness was exacerbated by the constant traffic vibration, and finally overloaded by the strong winds. Fortunately, no one had been in the vicinity of the tower because of inclement weather.⁷³

The city owed the Golden Gate Iron Works \$4000 for

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work completed under the now-expired contract. It also paid the company \$125 to remove the debris from the street. Several days of debate about the best course of action for the tower followed while engineers made a thorough investigation.⁷⁴

The people of San Jose were divided as to what the fate of the tower should be. Another public campaign was started to rebuild it.⁷⁵ At the same time, the Outdoor Art League argued against a rebirth of the tower. It denounced the tower as too outdated, expensive, unimportant, and view-blocking; use the money for other things, it urged.⁷⁶ By far the most original idea for the tower came from Isabelle C. Merrimas. She proposed turning its remains into a Persian roof garden. She suggested leaving the uprights to support a beautiful terraced roof garden graced with California shrubs, trees, and bulbs.⁷⁷

By December 18, the ruins of the tower had clearly become a public danger. Dismantling was soon begun.⁷⁸ The rebuilding campaign died of inertia.⁷⁹ The salvageable iron was sold for \$175.⁸⁰ On December 30, 1915, the last of the historical tower was removed. For convenience and safety it was done at night. Not a trace of the old symbol remained.⁸¹

During its thirty-four year existence, the tower

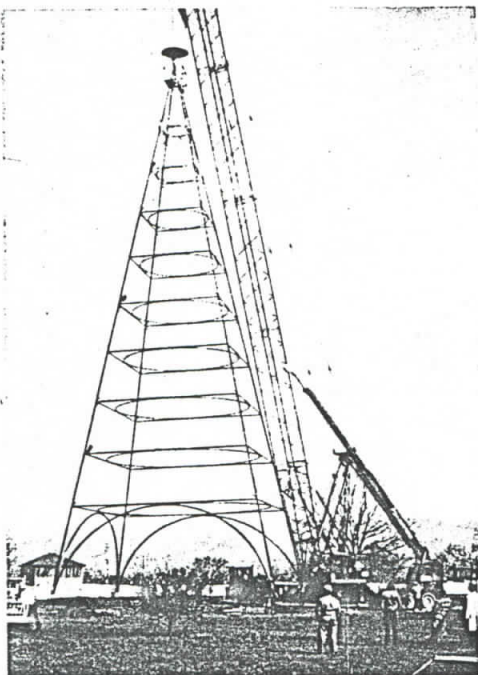
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gave San Jose recognition all over the country and the world. It had been completed eight years before the Eiffel Tower and had been the tallest structure of its kind in the country.⁸² The tower had been an attraction for tourists, but Owen's dream of seeing the town known as the "Beacon City" was never realized. However, a Tower Grocery, Tower Cigar Store, and a Tower Saloon opened for business in the buildings surrounding the structure's base.⁸³ To quote a Mercury Herald article, "San Jose had been provided with a lot of publicity, much amusement, and occasionally light from the famous tower."⁸⁴

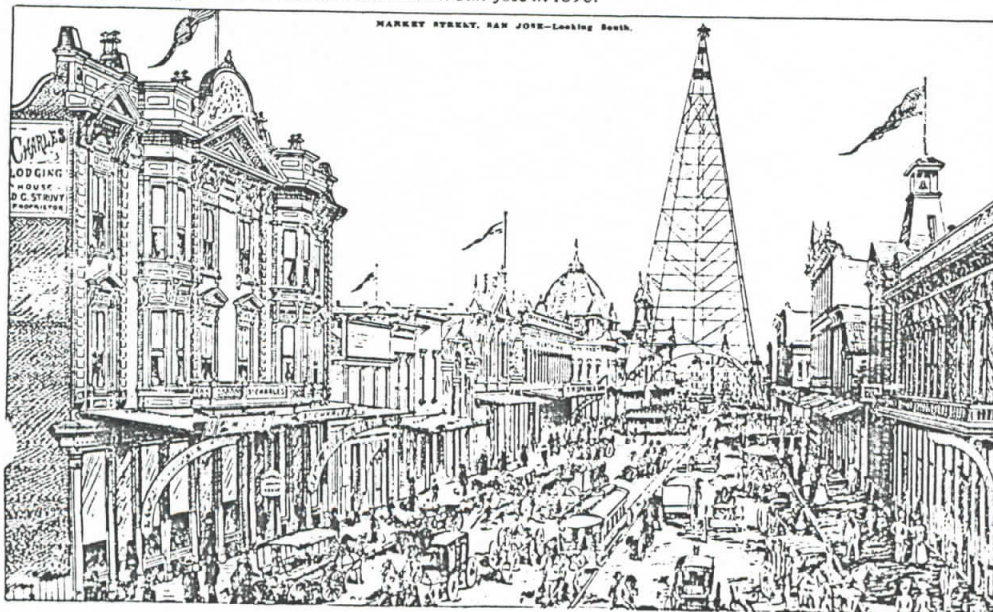
Epilogue

In 1976, in view of the upcoming bicentennial celebration of the City of San Jose, city officials felt that it would be desirable to add a highly visible historical symbol to the San Jose Historical Museum in Kelley Park. The idea of constructing a replica of San Jose's famous electric light tower was widely approved. The San Jose Real Estate Board spent eighteen months raising money, designing, publicizing, and building the structure. The 110 foot half-scale replica was dedicated on May 1, 1977 at the museum. The tower is lighted for special nighttime events and is, once again, considered a picturesque symbol of San Jose.

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San Jose's famous light tower as it stood in downtown San Jose in 1890.



Electric Tower Made San Jose World Famous

An old-timer in San Jose is one who can remember when the city's down-town center was graced by one of the seven wonders of the west—the 237-foot light tower which stood with one foot firmly embedded in each of the four corners of the Santa Clara and Market street intersection.

The old tower, memory of which is perpetuated in the Tower cafe and Tower grill on that corner, went down in a wind-storm December 3, 1915. In its day, it did much to give San Jose world-wide notoriety. Vaguely addressed mail to "the city with the light tower," or even "care of the saloon under the light tower," had a way of roaming in from odd corners of the globe.

Mercury-Inspired

Building of the tower was the result of an editorial in the San Jose Mercury, written by its editor, J. J. Owen, in May, 1881. In 1879 the first electrical lighting central station in the world had been built in San Francisco, for arc lights. The resultant display impressed the Mercury editor, and he suggested that San Jose be lighted by electric lights atop a huge tower.

The idea caught the public fancy, and a spontaneous stream of subscriptions began to flow in.

Ground was broken in August and at dusk the evening of December 13 the lights were turned on for the first time, in the presence of hundreds of townspeople.

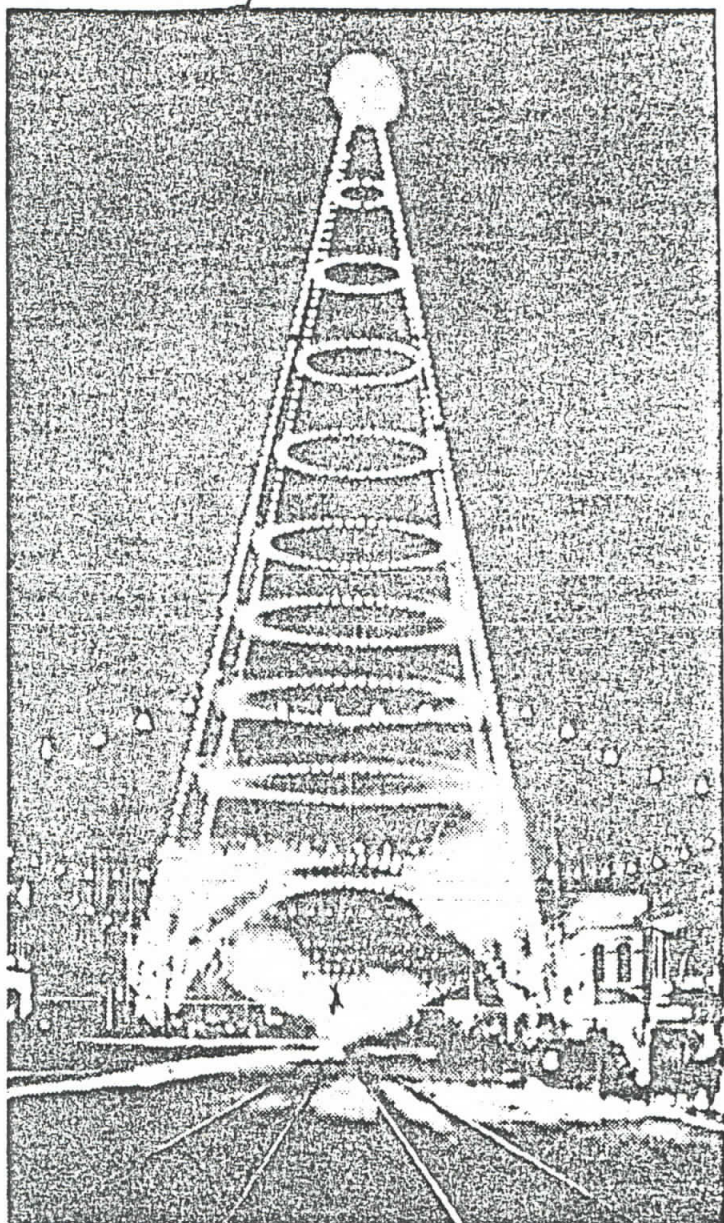
The tower was a tubular steel structure, 207 feet high and with a 30-foot mast. Its 24,000 candle-power system of lights was the brightest in the United States and the third brightest in the world.

Aesthetically, the tower was a huge success. But it had fiscal troubles right from the start. Its building cost was \$5500 and less than \$3500 was raised by subscription. As attachments for labor and materials accumulated it was sold to the San Jose Light & Power company, which had just organized for \$5000 in March, 1882.

The rival Electric Development company got the contract to light the city. The owners of the tower wouldn't permit the other company to service the tower, which stayed dark until the Electric Development company wangled the city council's authorization to light it on the grounds that it was public property.

Bitter Warfare

This was the beginning of bitter battles, in and out of court. Wires were cut in the dead of night, repaired, and cut again, until a wise judge slapped a fine of \$50 impartially on both companies and bade them behave themselves.



REMEMBER WHEN?—This dazzling structure once straddled the intersection of Market and Santa Clara streets. It was a light tower, 237 feet high, and for years after it was built in the '80s it was the city's only source of street illumination. The tower went down in a storm in December, 1915.

erected. 12 supplementary masts, each 150 feet high, to hold arc lights over various parts of the city.

There was always considerable sway to the tower, not much being known in those days about the proper bracing of such high structures, and finally the joints crystallized. It was weakened by a severe storm in February, 1915, and a campaign was started for funds to rebuild it. But before the money was all raised, down went the tower in the December wind and rain, in a great flash of blue flame.

Drinks Are Soft If Job Isn't

WEST NEW YORK, N. J. (AP).—A 16-year-old schoolgirl on vacation walked into a store and ordered an ice cream soda. Five minutes later she was behind the counter, lured into a waitress uniform by a fast-talking proprietor, who promised her all the sodas she could drink in addition to regular wages.

Portable Foxholes Needed In Normandy

NEVADA, Mo. (AP).—Speaking of the wet Normandy weather, Pvt. Beryl Hamilton wrote in a letter to relatives: "What the U. S. army needs is not a good 5-cent cigar but a good portable foxhole with a water-proof lid."

United Air Lines Aid Military Transport

More than 7,000,000 miles were flown and over 19,500,000 pounds of men, materials and mail were carried for the air transport command by United Air Lines in its

PAINTING RECALLS HISTORY OF CITY'S OLD LIGHT TOWER

Unique Market Street Monument Topped Over by Wind Dec. 3, 1915.

By JOSEPHINE HUGHSTON.

Before it was lost, but there really was a time when San Jose policemen shared the ancient rivalry over getting the night beat around Market and Santa Clara streets.

And it was all on account of the electric light tower which stood there for years, one support mounting skyward from each of the four corners.

Not that the bright lights exercised any particular fascination for San Jose's "finest"—but—

In those good old days wild game was considerably more plentiful in this locality than it is now. Wild duck and geese flying at night were attracted by the bright crown of lights on the tower and would dash themselves against it, falling to the ground with their necks broken. This was all in the days before it was unlawful to sell wild game, and the policeman on the night beat around the tower could pick up a nice piece of change by selling the duck and geese to restaurant keepers.

SYMBOL OF SAN JOSE.

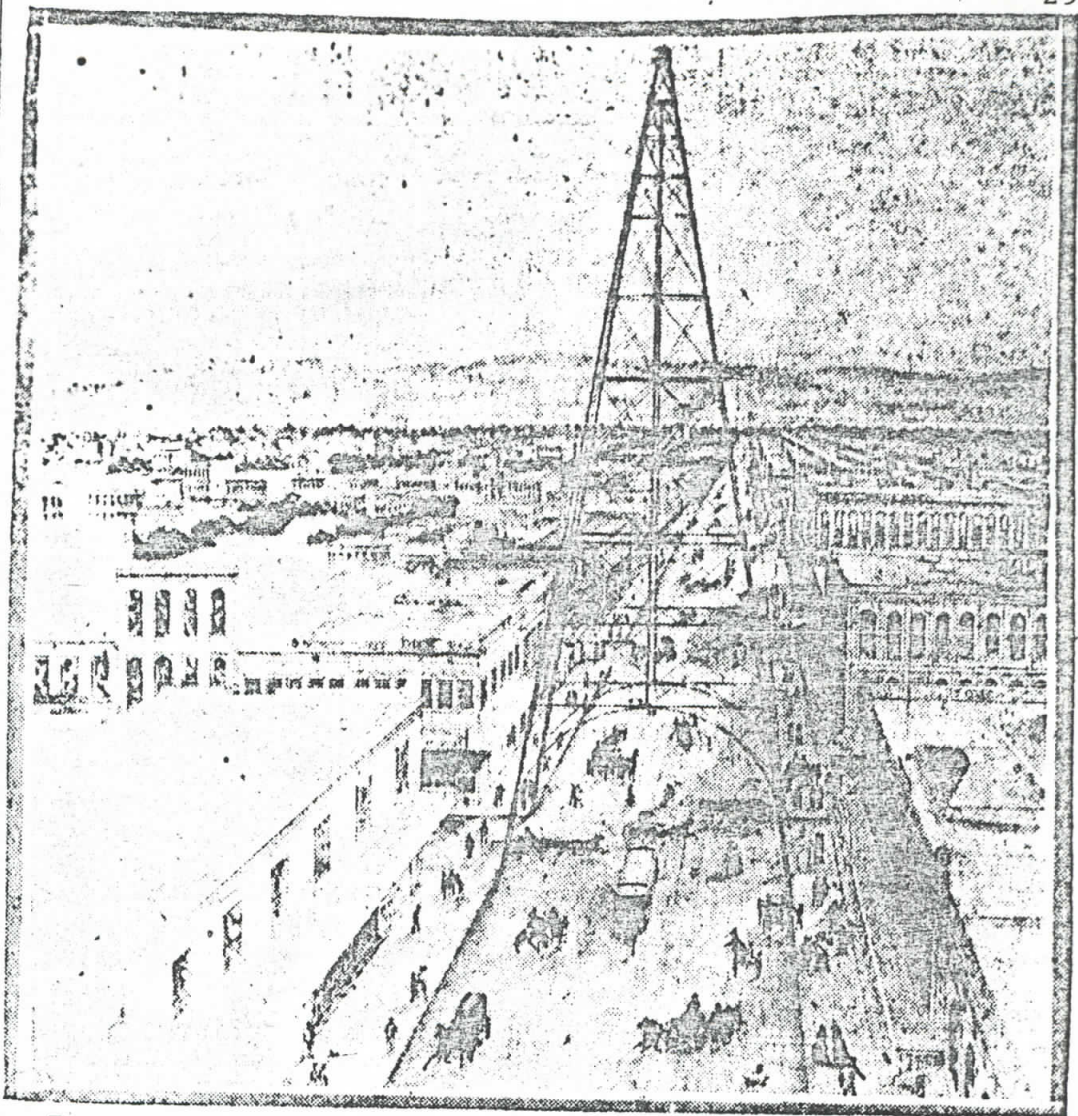
For many years the old electric tower was almost a symbol of San Jose in the public mind. Travellers from all over the world remembered San Jose as the place where the "big electric light tower" was located.

The tower resulted from an editorial written by J. J. Owen, at that time editor of the Mercury, and appearing in that paper May 13, 1881. His idea of a high tower surmounted by electric lights caught the fancy of the public as the ideal lighting scheme, and subscriptions ranging from 25 cents to \$25 began to pour in, until at last they totaled \$3456.75.

Plans for the tower, which was to be the highest of its kind ever erected in the United States, were drawn up and ground was broken for the tower on August 11, 1881. On December 13 of the same year, at 6:30 p. m., the lights were turned on. Hundreds of people gathered to see the lights flash on for the first time. People in the surrounding country wrote letters to the Mercury telling how the lights were visible from their places, and one rancher in the foothills wrote that he could see to read a newspaper by the new lights.

TROUBLE STARTS.

But all was not joy about the light tower. Though \$3,456.75 had been collected in subscriptions, the tower cost about \$5,500. Consequently it was faced by many attachments for labor and materials. So it was sold to the San Jose Light and Power company for \$5,000 on March 29, 1882. Then the Electric Improvement company, which was organized as a competitor of the San Jose Light and Power company, got the contract to light the city. The San Jose Light and Power company, however, owned the tower which lighted the city, and would not permit the rival company to use the tower. As a result the tower remained dark for a long time.



Drawing, looking west on Santa Clara street, of the famous electric light tower which stood at the corner of Market and Santa Clara streets from 1881 to 1915 and became San Jose's best known landmark. The drawing, which was done by Harold G. Peelor, artist, of this city, is accurate as far as the tower and the four corners of Market and Santa Clara streets are concerned, but the large and imposing office buildings beyond were added at the suggestion of J. J. Owen as the picture was to be published, in Harper's Weekly. The tower was 207 feet in height and was surmounted by a 30-foot flagpole. It had a crown of six 2100 candlepower lights.—Mercury Herald Photo.

HOOVER NAMES HOME LOAN BANK BOARD MEMBERS

Franklin W. Fort, Jersey Republican, Appointed President of Group.

By The Associated Press.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 6.—The five man bi-partisan board which will supervise the new federal home loan discount bank system—designed to do for home financing what the federal reserve system has done in the commercial field—was created today by President Hoover with a New Jersey Republican, Franklin W. Fort, as its chairman.

The board, comprising insurance building and loan and economic experts will have...

TODAY'S BROADCAST

SUBJECT TO STATION CHANGES

(The following are the leading programs scheduled today by nearby broadcasting stations. For your convenience the stations are named in the order in which you will find them in turning the dial of your radio receiver—KYA near one end of the dial and KTAB at the other end.)

10 TO 11 A. M.

- KYA—Cartoons; 10:30, Melody.
- KQW—10:15, Sunday School.
- KGO—Music; 10:30, orchestra, contralto.
- KPO—Rembrandt Trio.
- KFRC—Concert; 10:30, Organ.
- KTAB—Baptist church.

11 TO 12 A. M.

- KYA—Old St. Mary's church.
- KQW—Baptist church.
- KGO—Orchestra; 11:30, Sunday Forum.
- KPO—Bible story.
- KFRC—Symphony, Toscha Seidel.
- KTAB—Baptist service.

Tips On Dial Tuning Today

- 9:30 a. m.—Max Pantelleff, Russian baritone—KGO.
- 4:30 p. m.—N. Y. Philharmonic orchestra—KFRC.
- 8:30 p. m.—Eugene Cunningham, "The Readers Guide"—KPO.

KPO—Catholic hour; 2:30, song and verse.

KFRC—Ballads; 2:30, Prof. Lindaley.

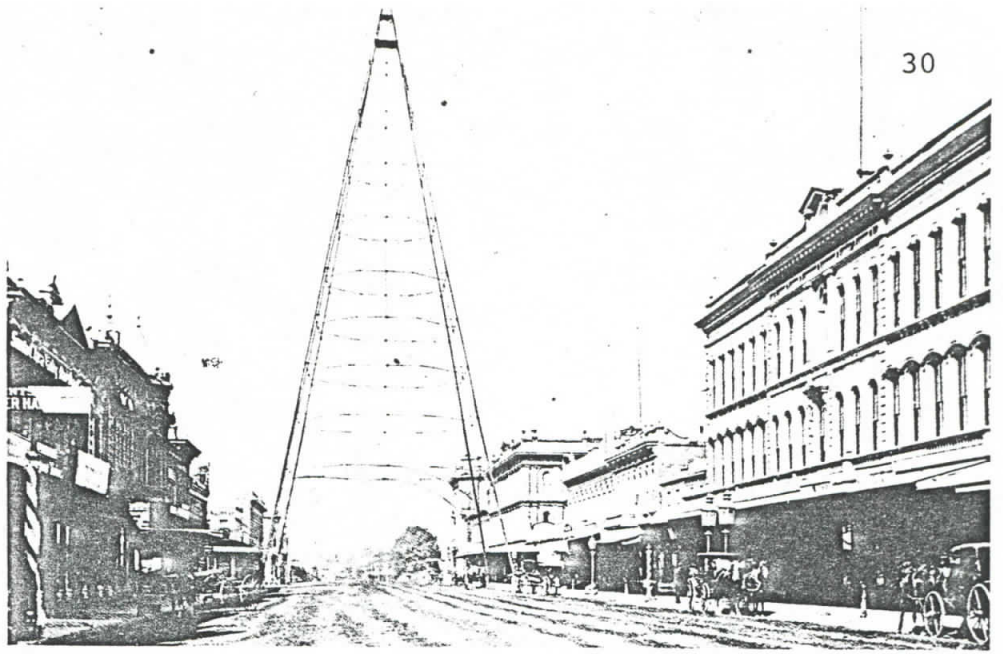
KTAB—2:30, melodies.

3 TO 4 P. M.

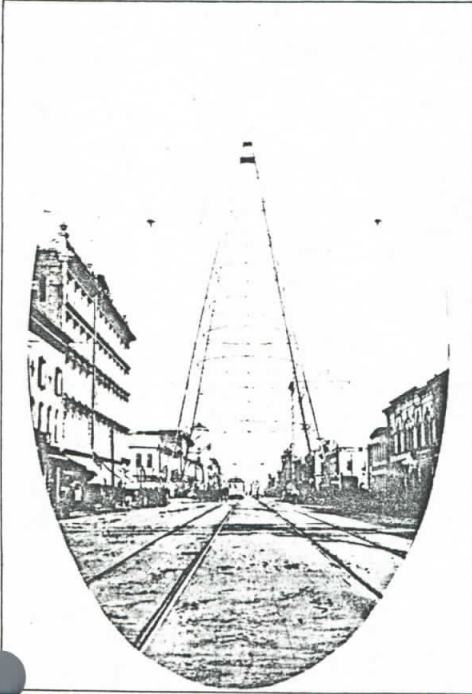
- KGO—Piano; 3:15, talk; 3:30, male quartet.
- KPO—Girls' trio; 3:30, male trio.
- KFRC—Eton Boys; 3:15, studio;

The true value

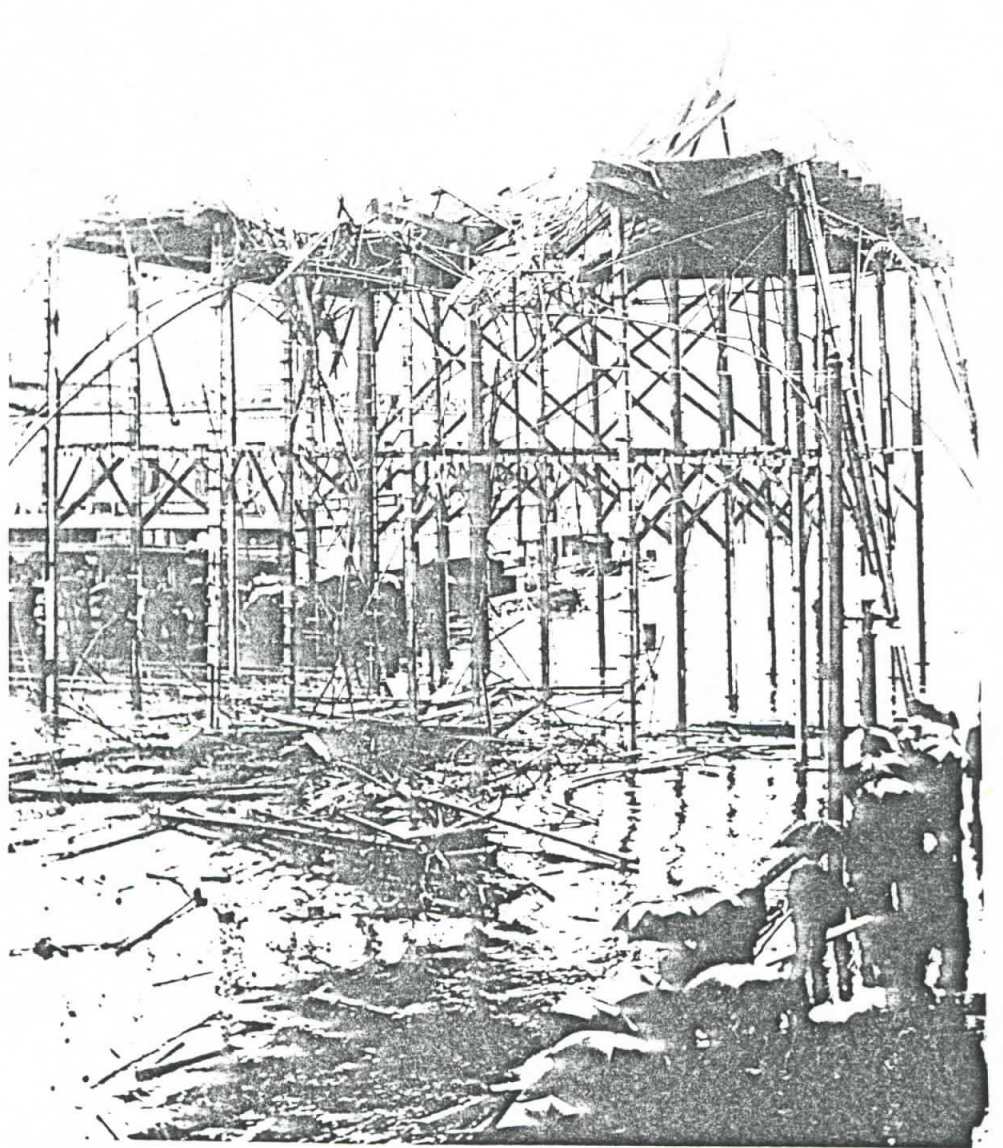
Michael Faraday was asked in Parliament what the value of electricity was. He retorted, "Someday you will tax it."



TOWER POWER: J. J. Owen's electric light tower in 1886 (above); the 237-foot San Jose electric tower crashed into Santa Clara Street in 1915 (below).



Delicate, yet overpowering, San Jose electric tower viewed from Santa Clara Street, circa 1910.



NOTES

- ¹"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," microfilm collection in the San Jose Public Library, Microfilm Division, pp. 40-45.
 - ²San Jose Weekly Mercury, May 13, 1880, p.2 (microfilm).
 - ³"Electric Towers," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 9, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
 - ⁴"Cheap Power," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 9, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
 - ⁵"A Treasure," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 16, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
 - ⁶"Electric Sreet Light," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 9, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
 - ⁷"A Scientific Opinion," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 16, p. 2 (microfilm).
 - ⁸"The Akron Tower Light," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 23, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
 - ⁹San Jose Weekly Mercury, July 21, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
 - ¹⁰"The Electric Light Tower," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 23, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
 - ¹¹"Electric Light Tower at San Jose, California," Harper's Weekly, Vol. 25, December 10, 1881, PP. 820-1 (microfilm).
 - ¹²San Jose Mercury Herald, August 7, 1932, p. 36 (microfilm).
 - ¹³San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 30, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
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- ¹⁴San Jose Weekly Mercury, July 7, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ¹⁵San Jose Weekly Mercury, July 21, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ¹⁶San Jose Weekly Mercury, July 21, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ¹⁷"The Akron Tower Light," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 23, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ¹⁸"The Electric Light in Buffalo," San Jose Weekly Mercury, July 21, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ¹⁹"How It Works," San Jose Weekly Mercury, June 16, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ²⁰Edwin A. Beilharz and Donald O. DeMers Jr., San Jose: California's First City, (Tulsa, 1980), pp. 118-120.
- ²¹"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45.
- ²²San Jose Daily Mercury, January 20, 1900, p. 8 (microfilm).
- ²³San Jose Weekly Mercury, July 21, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ²⁴San Jose Weekly Mercury, July 28, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ²⁵San Jose Pioneer, July 30, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ²⁶San Jose Weekly Mercury, August 11, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ²⁷"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45.
- ²⁸Beilharz, pp. 118-120.
- ²⁹San Jose Weekly Mercury, October 22, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ³⁰San Jose Daily Mercury, January 20, 1900, p. 8 (microfilm).
- ³¹San Jose Pioneer, August 20, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
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- ³²San Jose Pioneer, August 27, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ³³San Jose Pioneer, September 17, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ³⁴San Jose Pioneer, November 26, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ³⁵San Jose Pioneer, December 3, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ³⁶"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45.
- ³⁷San Jose Weekly Mercury, November 17, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ³⁸San Jose Weekly Mercury, December 8, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ³⁹"The New Light," San Jose Weekly Mercury, December 15, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁴⁰"The New Light," San Jose Weekly Mercury, December 15, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁴¹"Dispatch from the San Francisco Chronicle," San Jose Weekly Mercury, December 15, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁴²San Jose Daily Mercury, January 20, 1900, p. 8 (microfilm).
- ⁴³San Jose Weekly Mercury, December 15, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁴⁴"A Grand Success," San Jose Pioneer, December 17, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁴⁵San Jose Mercury Herald, September 10, 1944, p. 9 (microfilm).
- ⁴⁶San Jose Pioneer, December 17, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁴⁷San Jose Pioneer, December 17, 1881, p. 3 (microfilm).
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- ⁴⁸San Jose Weekly Mercury, December 22, 1881, p. 2 (microfilm).
- ⁴⁹San Jose Mercury Herald, September 10, 1944, p. 9 (microfilm).
- ⁵⁰California Today, August 24, 1975, p. 18 (microfilm).
- ⁵¹San Jose Mercury Herald, August 7, 1932, p. 36 (microfilm).
- ⁵²San Jose Mercury Herald, September 10, 1944, p. 9 (microfilm).
- ⁵³"History of the Tower," San Jose Electric Tower (Replica) Dedication Program, May 1, 1977.
- ⁵⁴Ralph Rambo, Almost Forgotten, (San Jose, 1964), p. 44.
- ⁵⁵San Jose Pioneer, January 7, 1882, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁵⁶San Jose Morning Times, January 18, 1882, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁵⁷San Jose Daily Mercury, January 20, 1900, p. 8 (microfilm).
- ⁵⁸"The Electric Light," San Jose Pioneer, February 4, 1882, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁵⁹"Electric Light," San Jose Pioneer, February 25, 1882, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁶⁰San Jose Pioneer, February 11, 1882, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁶¹San Jose Pioneer, March 4, 1882, p. 3 (microfilm).
- ⁶²"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45.
- ⁶³San Jose Mercury Herald, August 7, 1932, p. 36 (microfilm).
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- ⁶⁴San Jose Mercury Herald, August 7, 1932, p. 36 (microfilm).
- ⁶⁵San Jose Daily Mercury, March 30, 1892, p. 8 (microfilm).
- ⁶⁶San Jose Daily Mercury, January 20, 1900, p. 8 (microfilm).
- ⁶⁷San Jose Daily Mercury, March 4, 1902, p. 5 (microfilm).
- ⁶⁸San Jose Daily Mercury, March 11, 1902, p. 5 (microfilm).
- ⁶⁹"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45.
- ⁷⁰San Jose Mercury Herald, November 21, 1915, p. 13 (microfilm).
- ⁷¹San Jose Mercury Herald, December 1, 1915, p. 16 (microfilm).
- ⁷²Eugene T. Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County, (Los Angeles, 1922), p. 171. Though this source was written only a few years after the tower had fallen, it dated the fall as 1917.
- ⁷³San Jose Mercury Herald, December 4, 1915, pp. 1,3 (microfilm).
- ⁷⁴San Jose Mercury Herald, December 7, 1915, pp. 1-3 (microfilm).
- ⁷⁵"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45.
- ⁷⁶San Jose Mercury Herald, December 12, 1915, p. 1 (microfilm).
- ⁷⁷San Jose Mercury Herald, December 11, 1915, p. 1 (microfilm).
- ⁷⁸San Jose Mercury Herald, December 18, 1915, p. 1 (microfilm).
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⁷⁹"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45. Columnist Frank Freeman asked what happened to the funds collected to rebuild the tower. San Jose Mercury Herald, April 19, 1951, p. 19 (microfilm).

⁸⁰San Jose Mercury Herald, December 28, 1915, p. 1 (microfilm).

⁸¹San Jose Mercury Herald, December 30, 1915, p. 1 (microfilm).

⁸²"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45.

⁸³Beilharz, pp. 118-120.

⁸⁴"City of San Jose Scrapbooks A-E," pp. 40-45.

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- 27: Beilharz, Edwin A. San Jose: California's First City,
Tulsa, 1980, pp. 208-209.
- 28: San Jose Mercury Herald, September 10, 1944, p. 9
(microfilm).
- 29: San Jose Mercury Herald, August 7, 1932, p. 36
(microfilm).
- 30: Beilharz, Edwin A. San Jose: California's First City
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2. Sawyer, Eugene T. History of Santa Clara County. Los Angeles, 1922, 1259 pp.

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2. San Jose Daily Mercury, March 1892- March 1902 (microfilm).
3. San Jose Mercury Herald, November 1915- April 1951 (microfilm).
4. San Jose Morning Times, January 1882 (microfilm).
5. San Jose Pioneer, July 1881- March 1882 (microfilm).
6. San Jose Weekly Mercury, May 1880- December 1881 (microfilm).

III. UNPUBLISHED ARTICLES

1. Larson, Linda S. "San Jose's Electric Light Tower 1881-1981." San Jose, 1981.