

Today in History - April 18

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Earthquake!

At 5:12 a.m. on **April 18**, 1906, a magnitude 8.3 (Richter Scale) earthquake struck [San Francisco](#). With thousands of un-reinforced brick buildings and closely-spaced wooden Victorian dwellings, the city was poorly prepared for the quake. Collapsed buildings, broken chimneys, and a water shortage due to broken mains, led to several large fires that soon coalesced into a citywide holocaust. The fire raged for three days, sweeping over nearly a quarter of the city, including the entire downtown area.



[Ruins of San Francisco from the Site of the Mechanics' Pavilion](#). Oakland, Calif: Smith Bros., c1906. [Panoramic Photographs](#). Prints & Photographs Division

Over 3,000 people are estimated to have died as a result of the disaster. For those who survived, the first few weeks were hard; as aid poured in from around the country, thousands slept in tents in city parks, and citizens were asked to do their cooking in the street. A severe shortage of public transportation made a taxicab out of anything on wheels. Numerous businesses relocated temporarily to [Oakland](#), and many refugees found lodgings outside the city. Most of the cities of central California were badly damaged. However, reconstruction proceeded at a furious pace, and by 1908, San Francisco was well on the way to recovery.



[Three Years After, San Francisco, April 1909](#). San Francisco, Cal.: R.J. Waters Aerial Photograph Co., April 1909. [Panoramic Photographs](#). Prints & Photographs Division

Learn More

- Search on *San Francisco earthquake* in [Panoramic Photographs](#) to find more photographs of San Francisco around the time of the 1906 earthquake and fire.
- Images of San Francisco throughout its history are found in the Library's [pictorial collections](#).
- Search [Chronicling America](#), a collection of historic American newspapers, to find articles about the earthquake. Start with [Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906: Topics in Chronicling America](#).
- Included in the Library's [American Treasures Exhibition](#) are several artifacts from the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. [Newspapers](#), [images](#), and [eyewitness accounts](#) document the cataclysmic scale of the earthquake.
- The extraordinary circumstances resulting from the earthquake are demonstrated by "Proclamation by the Mayor" found in the collection, [Printed Ephemera: Three Centuries of Broadides and Other Printed Ephemera](#).
- The impact of the earthquake on the Chinese immigrant population is represented in the collection, [The Chinese in California 1880-1925](#). Search on *earthquake* to find images of the Chinatown section of San Francisco.
- [Before and After the Great Earthquake and Fire: Early Films of San Francisco, 1897 to 1916](#) consists of twenty-six films of San Francisco before and after the 1906 disaster. Seven films describe the great earthquake and fire. The collection also includes background information on [Early San Francisco](#).
- Search [Today in History](#) on *San Francisco* to learn about more events in the history of this great city such as Andrew Smith Hallidie's cable car and the 1896 opening of the Sutro Baths.
- Visit the University of California Berkeley's Bancroft Library presentation [The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire](#).

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