

## 140+ years of History at the Conservatory of Flowers: 1879 to today!

*The mission of the Conservatory of Flowers is to connect people and plants in a place of exceptional beauty.*



The Conservatory of Flowers has captivated guests for more than a century. This gem of Victorian architecture has a long and storied history. **It is one of the oldest public wood-and-glass conservatories in North America**, potentially the oldest that continues to operate as a Conservatory. As a city, state and national historic landmark, the Conservatory remains one of the most photographed and beloved attractions in San Francisco.

### **A GEM FOR ALL**

Conservatories were fairly common among North American aristocrats in the 19th Century. Wealthy citizens erected greenhouses on their estates and created glass rooms in their urban mansions. Tropical plants were brought to California from around the world by explorers and botanists. Some were even hired by collectors to stock their greenhouses.

In the mid-19th century, James Lick, a wealthy businessman and philanthropist, ordered the greenhouse for his Santa Clara estate. Unfortunately, Lick died before it was erected, and the parts remained in crates, unused for decades. The kit was put up for sale by Lick's trustees in 1877, and purchased by a group of prominent San Franciscans who offered it to the City. The civic-minded group of donors included Leland Stanford, founder of Stanford University and Governor and Senator of California, and Charles Crocker, the industrialist responsible for much of the railroad system in the West.



Conflicting sources state that the conservatory's pieces were created alternately in France, England, or Ireland, but no documentation exists to support any of these claims, and **it remains unclear whether the components were shipped from Europe or manufactured in California. Significant use of old-growth redwood and other native trees in the building's infrastructure supports the theory that some**

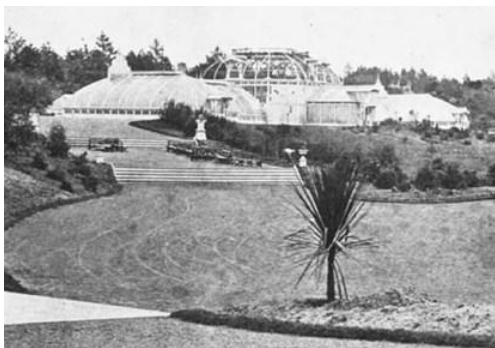
Conservatory of Flowers History

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**sections of it were constructed on the West Coast.** Some say a portion of the original materials went down with their ship in a storm. We may never know.



**The Conservatory was an instant sensation when it opened in 1879 and quickly became the most visited location in the park.** The original configuration of the interior spaces included a fountain in the entryway and another in the Palm Room, under the dome. The east wing featured the Orchid House and an aquatic plant gallery with a large pond. In the west wing, the conservatory displayed flowering and ornamental foliage in one gallery and hardwooded plants, like azaleas, in the other.



### **DESTRUCTION & RECONSTRUCTION**

Since its opening, the building has seen more than its share of accidents and natural disasters. This photo from 1883 shows the damage done to the dome by a boiler explosion. Charles Crocker came to the rescue with \$10,000 for the restoration work. During this restoration, the dome was raised by six feet and the eagle finial on top of the dome was replaced with the planet Saturn, likely a reference to the ancient Roman god of agriculture.

In 1918, the dome and adjoining room burned again, and in 1933 structural instabilities caused a 13-year **closure. The most devastating damage was done by a wind storm in 1995. After a winter of storms, 20 percent of the trees in Golden Gate Park were toppled and wind patterns changed. As a result, a relatively mild windstorm severely damaged the newly exposed Conservatory. Forty percent of the glass smashed, a portion of the rare plants were lost, and the building had to be closed.**





In early 1998, the Conservatory was placed on the 100 most Endangered World Monuments list by the World Monuments Fund. The National Trust for Historic Preservation adopted the Conservatory into its Save America's Treasures program, launched as part of then First Lady Hillary Clinton's Millennium Council projects. (Clinton is seen here with Senator Barbara Boxer and Mayor Willie Brown). **Publicity from these efforts eventually led to a fundraising campaign to raise the \$25 million dollars for the rehabilitation, which included support from the Richard & Rhoda Goldman Fund. The Conservatory reopened in 2003.**



**We are often asked how the Conservatory fared in the earthquake of 1906. The building stood strong, without damage, and the area leading up to the building, known as Conservatory Valley, became a location of temporary tents housing San Franciscans escaping the devastation and fires throughout the city.**

## VICTORIAN MEETS MODERN

Since reopening in 2003, millions of people have visited the Conservatory of Flowers, including tens of thousands of school children on free educational tours and hundreds of couples marrying in the most romantic spot in San Francisco. This modern version of the Conservatory strives to connect people and plants in a way that is most meaningful for the Bay Area community and for visitors from around the world.



Special exhibits have featured prehistoric landscapes or swamps teeming with hungry carnivorous plants. Locals learn about current horticultural and gardening trends like aquascaping, or find inspiration in the Conservatory's living walls. The Conservatory holds talks by renowned authors, including Amy Stewart, author of *Wicked Plants* and *From The Ground Up*.



The Conservatory is a place where horticultural societies, botany students, and young plant enthusiasts gather to study collections and ensure passion for living museums and conservatories will continue to flourish.

## 140 YEARS

2020 marked the 150th anniversary of Golden Gate Park, and 2019 was the 140th anniversary of Conservatory of Flowers.

The plant collection is estimated to represent 1800 species from around 50 countries. This includes many plants there are rare and endangered, and a few species that are extinct in the wild. Currently there are approximately 36 species that are endangered or critically endangered, as well as 25 species that are vulnerable to extinction.

The Conservatory welcomes 170,000 daytime visitors per year, of whom 60,000 – 70,000 visitors are San Franciscans. As of April 2022, the Conservatory became free to San Francisco residents, which we anticipate will expand our local visitation.

Public events have welcomed thousands of additional visitors to events like Botanicals and Brews Beer Gardens and the mystery series Murder at the Conservatory. Night Bloom, launched in 2018, grew even larger in 2019 to welcome over 30,000 visitors to the Conservatory at night over about 40 evenings.

1,500 students from San Francisco Unified School District schools attend free programs annually, including guided Adaptation tours for 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students. Classes of students of all ages from across the Bay Area visit the Conservatory for free

## Mission, Vision and Values

### MISSION

**WE CONNECT PEOPLE AND PLANTS IN A PLACE OF EXCEPTIONAL BEAUTY.**

#### Our Vision:

- We display and cultivate rare and unusual plants to heighten awareness of a pressing need to preserve threatened rainforest environments, making manifest the interconnectedness of all life.
- We preserve, sustain and proactively safeguard the Conservatory of Flowers iconic structure with the highest level of care that a national, state and local landmark deserves.
- We envision excellence in all aspects of operations, performance and service to our stakeholders, members and the larger community.
- We are a resource for dynamic, interesting and creative experiences and artful exhibitions that create meaningful connections in support of rare and unusual plants.
- We provide the highest level of service to our guests, partners and stakeholders.

#### Our Core Values:

- Ecology – We believe plants are the vital to all life on a healthy planet and celebrate their beauty and value.
- Integrity – We have the highest ethical conduct, sound management, professional standards and fiscal responsibility.
- Continuous Improvement – We strive for continuous improvement whereby our performance, processes or service are constantly improving, measured to or exceeding professional industry standards and best practices.
- Communication – We demonstrate open, respectful and honest communication at all times, no exceptions.
- Diversity – We are committed to social justice, equity and inclusion for all as we recruit and retain talented staff, volunteers, advisors, donors and visitors.
- Adaptability – We strive to be innovative, flexible and open to unexpected challenges and maintain a positive outlook.
- Sense of humor – We make work fun, while being engaged and productive.
- Accountability – We take responsibility for individual and team actions, recognizing that all resources and actions of the organization require laser focus for success.
- Management Decisions – We base our strategic short and long-term decisions on data, are comfortable managing risk, and ensure we build and maintain a culture of collaboration.
- Staff Development – Our workplace supports, engages and educates a talented and diverse staff and volunteer corps.

- Community – We bring our local community together and support the improvement and sustainability of our neighborhood and partner institutions.
- Humility – We see ourselves as stewards of an historic, iconic facility and precious collection as a service for the greater good.

## **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Commitment**

The Conservatory of Flowers is committed to a diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environment. As part of our organizational core values, the Conservatory recognizes that diversity in our workforce fosters excellence in our mission of connecting people and plants in a place of exceptional beauty. Our mission is inclusive to all cultures, races and ethnicities, religions, genders, sexual orientations, ages, disabilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

We strive to cultivate a workforce and institution that is as diverse as the communities we serve and the audiences we engage, but there is more work to be done.

### **Our short-term objectives are:**

- Continue to maintain an open and ongoing dialogue with our staff on diversity, inclusion, and equity, address areas for improvement and progress on a quarterly basis.
- Measure our current staff, volunteer, and advisory council demographics by distributing an internal survey, and subsequently maintain an annual survey, with the goal to evaluate, address, and improve recruitment, hiring, and retention practices.
- Recognize the Conservatory's colonialist history by developing an internal/external framework document that reexamines our past and fosters a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive narrative.
- Ensure ethical collection acquisition standards that support local communities and cultures in their ownership and protection of local native plants by sharing our collection acquisition policy internally and externally.
- Hold annual inclusivity and unconscious bias trainings for all staff, volunteers, and advisory council members.
- Annually audit and implement RPD's equity performance goal.

### **Our mid-term objectives are:**

- Continue to maintain open and ongoing dialogue with our staff and define community/ key stakeholders while initiating ongoing dialogue on diversity, inclusion, and equity, address areas of improvement and progress on a quarterly basis with all these groups.



- Listen to diverse voices by seeking frequent input and addressing concerns.
- Represent more diverse, underserved, underrepresented populations via our external channels, programming, and partnerships by diversifying promotional photos/videos, featuring diverse staff and volunteers to speak on behalf of the Conservatory, building diverse programs that attract underserved groups, and supporting underserved and underrepresented-owned businesses and partners, organization wide.
- Apply an inclusive lens to the presentation of content about plants by incorporating inclusive and unbiased language best practices to the Conservatory's interpretation standards.

### **Our long-term objectives are:**

#### **Hiring & Recruitment**

Rebuild how the Conservatory attracts and hires staff, volunteers, interns, vendors, and partners at all levels. Examples including, but not limited to increasing paid internships, building an apprenticeship program, actively reach out and widen recruitment to diverse candidates.

#### **Retention & Promotion**

Invest in new programs that foster professional growth and advancement for staff at all levels, while also providing opportunity for internal and incoming staff to grow into leadership roles. Examples including, but not limited to creating a more inclusive work culture for diverse staff and developing a mentorship program.

#### **Diversity in Leadership**

Create new opportunities for diverse and underrepresented people in the Conservatory's leadership team, Conservatory's advisory council, and committees. Examples including, but not limited to actively reaching out and widen recruitment to diverse candidates.

#### **Inclusive Organizational Culture**

Create new opportunities and practices for a diversity of staff perspectives and experiences to help inform and shape Conservatory culture. Create informal and formal systems that ensure behaviors throughout the organization are consistent with our diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

#### **Access and Accessibility**

Maintain existing and create new accessibility opportunities for people of all backgrounds and abilities to access the Conservatory through visitation, events, and school field trips. Examples including, but not limited to: developing multilingual programming, providing access to schools and drawing locals from San Francisco Recreation and Parks equity zones.

#### **Intersectional Environmentalism**

Elevate and advocate on issues relevant to the intersection of race, the outdoors, and

conservation, including environmental racism

Partner with an external agency or consultant with racial equity expertise.

### **Strategic Planning**

Ensure the Conservatory's next strategic plan focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion that builds upon our ongoing work.