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CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY KICKS OFF THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE WITH LAUNCH OF SIX MONTH EXHIBITION HONORING THE WORLD ICON

“A Wild Flight of the Imagination: The Story of the Golden Gate Bridge” Features Rarely Seen Artwork, Photographs and Artifacts That Takes Visitors through an Amazing Time in History

SAN FRANCISCO (February 26, 2012) – Hundreds of Bay Area residents and community leaders helped officially kick off the 75th anniversary celebrations for the Golden Gate Bridge by participating in the launch of a six-month exhibition at the California Historical Society honoring the remarkable world icon. *“A Wild Flight of the Imagination: The Story of the Golden Gate Bridge”*, which will be open to the public through October 14th, 2012, features rarely seen artwork, photographs, memorabilia, and bridge artifacts that take visitors through an amazing time in San Francisco and the nation’s history.

The California Historical Society chose February 26th to launch the exhibition because of the historical significance of that date. The official groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge took place on the same date in 1933. Dignitaries, including California Assemblymember Fiona Ma, State Librarian Kevin Starr and several Marin and San Francisco county supervisors were among those who commemorated the occasion. They arrived at today’s event in the first cars to actually drive across the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937. Guests, including several who were among the first to walk across the bridge in 1937, also enjoyed period performances by The Frisky Frolics and DecoBelles from the Art Deco Society of California. They were among the first to discover the “new” CHS building now painted “International Orange” by Sherwin Williams in honor of the 75th Anniversary.

“The Golden Gate Bridge is not only a Bay Area icon, it’s a symbol recognized throughout the world,” said Anthea Hartig, Executive Director of the California Historical Society. “This exhibition showcases the rich history of the bridge and brings to the public many of the hidden treasures and untold stories that through the years have created this remarkable architectural masterpiece.”

The title of the exhibition *A Wild Flight of the Imagination* is borrowed from a 1921 promotional prospectus for the Golden Gate Bridge. The authors, chief engineer for the Bridge Joseph Strauss and San Francisco city engineer M.M. O’Shaughnessy, used inspirational language to set a tone for the enormously ambitious engineering feat—language and imagery that would stay with the project and that clings to our image of the Bridge even today.

The exhibition begins with a look back at the Golden Gate—that great aperture that links the San Francisco Bay to the Pacific Ocean— a hundred years before the Bridge, and its history as an inspirational landscape for artist, writers, and travelers. The exhibition continues through history to the opening of the Bridge in 1937, and its continued stewardship as an icon of American history today.

“I applaud the California Historical Society for their tireless work in bringing so many amazing treasures to this exhibition,” said Assemblymember Fiona Ma. “The Golden Gate Bridge has been a faithful, constant, and welcoming icon for so many people around the world. It is important to reflect on its history and honor those who have been part of its unique story through the years.”

Visitors of the exhibition will learn what life was like in the years just before the Bridge was constructed, including ferry life and culture along the San Francisco Bay, and the increasing pressure that cars put on the city confined by water on three sides. Through a unique scrapbook of clippings from the late 1920's, viewers will trace the elaborate media campaign that succeeded in winning over a reluctant public. Visitors can join in the excitement that must have accompanied the receipt of the original 1924 Western Union telegram to San Francisco Mayor "Sunny Jim" Rolph alerting him that the Bridge had been approved by the War Department.

Works of art made by artists employed as part of the campaign for the Bridge will be shown for the first time in many years. These works include paintings by Maynard Dixon and Chesley Bonestell who imagined what the Bridge would ultimately look like. These paintings, along with drawings for the Bridge by architects John Eberson and Irving Morrow, have been in the care of the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District and are being made available for the public to see.

Images and ephemera from the groundbreaking festivities that took place on February 26, 1933, lead into photographs and scrapbooks depicting the life of workers on the Bridge. Original tools, a hard hat, underwater diving equipment, and wire samples give the visitor a more physical sense of the work.

This exhibition has been generously supported by S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation; Sherwin-Williams; The Bernard Osher Foundation; Cal Humanities; Hearst Corporation; Derry Casey Construction; Steve & Michele LeSieur; the Consulate General of Switzerland in San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge Highway & Transportation District. The California Historical Society is proud to be a partner in 75 Tributes to the Bridge, a community program commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge, organized by The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

“We are very proud of this exhibition as it showcases not only the Golden Gate Bridge but the vast historical resources available through the California Historical Society,” said Board President Tom Owens. “You can really see the changes we are making to ensure CHS is a destination and welcoming environment for Californians and visitors from around the world to visit and learn.”

The California Historical Society has been undergoing a bit of a transition in preparation for the Golden Gate Bridge exhibition. In addition to the painting of the building, a new entrance has been created that includes the launch of Ten Lions, a new bookstore and community space that features key Heyday titles that focus on California's myriad stories as well as locally crafted items from Bay Area artisans. Ten Lions will feature coffee for visitors and special events to showcase California's rich history. The California Historical Society is open Tuesday thru Sunday from 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Admission is free with a suggested donation of \$5 per person. Special events are regularly scheduled and more information can be found at www.californiahistoricalsociety.org.

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