



# Disaster by the Bay: The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906

*H. Paul Jeffers*

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"Not in history has a modern imperial city been so completely destroyed. San Francisco is gone!" Those were the disbelieving words of Jack London, as he surveyed, on April 19, 1906, the devastation of the city by the Golden Gate. The day before, at 5:13 A.M., a powerful earthquake, estimated to be the equivalent of 8.3 on today's Richter scale, had rocked San Francisco for forty-seven seconds, with several aftershocks following in the course of the next half hour. And as the city's residents scrambled fearfully from their beds, they discovered that the colorful and lively town with which they were familiar had indeed disappeared, replaced by an unrecognizable cityscape. Hundreds of buildings had been leveled, thousands more were on the verge of collapse, and here and there fires were already in progress, fires which would eventually grow to rage throughout the ruined town for the next three days.

In this vivid, fast-paced chronicle of what has been called the worst peacetime disaster to ever befall America, veteran journalist and author H. PAUL JEFFERS provides a gripping account of those nightmarish days in April 1906. Drawing on a wide range of eyewitness material, Jeffers follows a variety of individuals as they come to grips with an unthinkable event. Celebrities like Enrico Caruso and John Barrymore; the civil and military authorities who tried to bring order out of chaos; merchants who struggled heroically to save their shops and goods from the ruins and the flames; the suddenly homeless ordinary men and women who composed messages on scraps of paper and sticks of wood to tell of their survival (all of which, incredibly, the Postal Service actually delivered): from all these and many other perspectives Jeffers creates a riveting mosaic of catastrophe and its aftermath. With the one-hundredth anniversary of the quake approaching, this skillful narrative will be of keen interest to readers from West Coast to East. Includes forty-eight black-and-white illustrations.

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