



Almost 100 years before Hurricane Katrina flooded the Gulf Coast of the United States, one of the worst natural disasters in United States history devastated San Francisco.

On April 18, 1906, at 5:12 in the morning, “The Great San Francisco Earthquake” struck. The quake was followed by a series of fires that burned for three days and destroyed more than 500 blocks of the city.

The earthquake measured 8.25 on the Richter scale and lasted about one minute. It is estimated that more than 3,000 people -- and perhaps as many as 6,000 -- died as a result of the quake and fires. About 250,000 people were left homeless. Damage to buildings and homes was estimated at \$400 million. That would equal about \$8.2 billion in damage today.

San Francisco Then and Now

In 1906, San Francisco was the largest city in California. The state’s population was 1.5 million people, which made it the 21st largest U.S. State. Today, San Francisco is the fourth largest city in California. California has more people -- 36.1 million in all -- than any other state.

In 1906, there were 53,000 dwellings and 304 farms in San Francisco. Today, the city is home to 354,000 housing units and eight farms.

After the Quake

Just nine years after the great quake the city of San Francisco hosted a World’s Fair. The 1915 fair featured a reproduction of the Panama Canal (which had opened a year earlier), a Ford assembly line that turned out a new car every 10 minutes, and the Liberty Bell, which had made a cross-country journey from Philadelphia for this special occasion. In addition, Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, made the first cross-country phone call to the fairgrounds before the fair opened. Another cross-country call was made every day the fair was open.