

**THE CONSOLIDATED CITY
AND
COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OF SAN FRANCISCO**

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The Consolidated City and County Government of San Francisco by Percy V. Long

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READ BEFORE THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF
THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION,
HELD AT BUFFALO, NEW YORK, DECEMBER 28, 1911

BY

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INTRODUCTION

To avoid a doubling of officials and to simplify administration is the aim of the present day charter makers. San Francisco's merged City and County government is attracting attention among students of municipal affairs and this pamphlet was written in response to a request from the American Political Science Association for an article on Consolidated City and County Government. This paper was read at the annual convention of the Association held in Buffalo, December 28, 1911.

At this writing San Francisco and Denver have the only known consolidated City and County governments and Denver but recently came under such a form. As San Francisco seems to have been the birthplace of the idea of consolidated City and County government one would think that much data should be available, but, on the contrary, were it not for the files of the San Francisco daily newspapers for the years 1855 and 1856 there would be nothing but the meager official record of the legislature as the whole source of information.

To the student of municipal affairs this monograph may be of some interest.

San Francisco, December, 1911.

The Consolidated City and County Government of San Francisco

The early history of San Francisco is most interesting and, politically speaking, unique.

On June 28, 1776, the foundation colonists, consisting of seventeen Spanish soldiers and their families, two Franciscan friars, herdsmen and drovers, under the command of Lieutenant Don José Moraga, established the first white settlement in San Francisco at the site of the present Presidio. On September 17th, after the colonists had erected temporary structures, Lieutenant Moraga took possession of the Presidio in the name of the King of Spain, and the establishment was dedicated with religious and military ceremonies. Subsequently, on October 9th, the Mission of San Francisco de Asis, commonly known as Mission Dolores, was dedicated on the present site in honor of the patron saint of the Order of Franciscans.

From the foundation of the Presidio until the latter part of 1834, there was no pueblan, or municipal organization at San Francisco. The inhabitants were governed by the military commandanté of the Presidio, who was also a judge of the first instance, while license fees and taxes were imposed by the Governor of the territory. Mexico became independent of Spain in 1821, and in 1822 California accepted the control of

the Mexican Republic. On November 3, 1834, the Territorial Deputation of California, exercising the powers conferred upon it by the laws of México, directed the election of a constitutional *Ayuntamiento*, or town council, for the *Partido*, or district, of San Francisco. This *Ayuntamiento* was to be composed of an *Alcalde*, two *Regidores*, or councilmen, and a *Sindico-Procurador*, who were to reside at the Presidio. The decree ordering the election was communicated by Governor Figueroa to the Commandanté of San Francisco on November 14, 1834. The election was held December 7, 1834, at the Presidio and the *Ayuntamiento* was immediately installed.

This *Ayuntamiento* of the *Partido* of San Francisco was almost immediately succeeded by an *Ayuntamiento* of the Pueblo of San Francisco. On January 31, 1835, the Governor announced to the Commandanté of the Presidio that he had received the census of the Pueblo of San Francisco, by which it appeared that it was entitled to an *Ayuntamiento* of its own, composed of one *Alcalde*, two *Regidores*, and one *Sindico-Procurador*, and directed him to proceed to their election accordingly. The election for members of the *Ayuntamiento* of the Pueblo was held immediately, and elections were successively held in the years 1836, 1837 and 1838, and then the *Ayuntamiento* was suspended on account of there being an insufficient number of electors. This suspension was not due to any decrease in population in San Francisco, but to

the fact that the Mexican Constitution of 1836 fixed the population requisite to sustain an *Ayuntamiento* at four thousand in sea ports and at eight thousand in other pueblos. Under the previous existing laws a population of three hundred was all that was necessary to entitle a community to an *Ayuntamiento*, and San Francisco, organized as a pueblo under the old laws, remained a pueblo under the new constitution but was governed by Justices of the Peace, who were appointed with the powers of *Ayuntamientos* and who formed a Municipal *Junta* for that purpose.

The *Ayuntamiento* was not abolished, it was only suspended until the pueblo should gain the requisite population of four thousand, when it would be revived. After the American conquest, when San Francisco gained the requisite population, it again elected its *Ayuntamiento*, not under the provisions of the laws of the United States, but under the same provisions of the Mexican Constitution of 1836, by which the *Ayuntamiento* was suspended.

With the advent of commerce and shipping the anchorage of ships was changed from the unsafe one off the Presidio to the cove of Yerba Buena, and there a settlement rapidly sprang up. The seat of the government of San Francisco, starting at the Presidio, changed to the Mission, as it became the center of population, and then to the settlement of Yerba Buena as it, in commercial growth, became more populous than the Mission. These three settlements were often confused by the uninformed as being three separate

towns. They were, however, simply parts of the pueblo of San Francisco, which grew toward each other until they merged into our present continuous city.

On July 8th, 1846, the American flag was hoisted on the plaza of Yerba Buena, and the surrounding territory was declared American soil. Military government prevailed until January, 30th, 1847, when a provisional government was organized with an alcalde as chief magistrate. Subsequently attempts were made before the treaty of Queretaro to organize a city along American lines but were by military order stopped. Pueblo government continued until the adoption of a city charter under the Constitution of California.

An act of the first Legislature of the State of California, passed February 18, 1850, divided the state into counties, fixing the boundaries of San Francisco *County*.

The *City* of San Francisco was created by act of April 16, 1850 (Statutes 1850, page 223), which was an act to incorporate the city. This act provided for a complete organization of the city and a full set of offices independent of the county offices of the county of San Francisco. Thus there were two sets of officers, one for the city and one for the county. The act creating the county, and also the act creating the city, were amended at subsequent sessions of the Legislature, and finally, on April 19, 1856 (Statutes 1856, page 145), an act was passed "To Repeal the Several Charters of the City of San Fran-