Room One: San Francisco in the New Century

Grand Opera: The 1906 Season

San Francisco had long been a haven for creativity, as literature, photography, fine arts, and music all flourished there. The economic boom of the 1890s lent the bohemian city a gaiety that did not disappear at the turn of the century. With fortunes made and money flowing, wealthier San Franciscans turned their attention to culture. They were determined to refine their city's reputation and make it a recognized center for the arts. Their efforts were rewarded with the engagement of the Metropolitan Opera Company's production of Bizet's "Carmen." Staged the evening of April 17, 1906 at the Grand Opera House on Mission Street, "Carmen" was the most exciting cultural event of the season. The renowned tenor Enrico Caruso played the character of Don Jose; famed soprano Olive Fremstad was cast in the title role.

The Grand Opera House program for its 1906 season reflected the economic prosperity and high level of cultural interest prevalent in San Francisco at the time. Its cover is a stylish rendering of a couple in evening clothes, the woman in a long white dress and veil and the man in top hat and dress suit. The profusion of advertisements for material goods highlight the city's burgeoning consumer demands. Wealthy citizens had the funds, leisure, and inclination to don their best and patronize highbrow entertainment. Tickets to that evening's performance were expensive and difficult to find; their stubs marked both social standing and seat reservations.