



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 9/16/14

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### **FRESNO HISTORICAL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP TO BRING THE FRESNO COURTHOUSE CUPOLA TO THE BIG FRESNO FAIR MUSEUM**

*Debut will mark the first time in nearly 30 years the historical structure has been seen by the public*

**Fresno, California – September 15, 2014...**Judge Robert Oliver stood alongside the iconic Fresno Courthouse Cupola as representatives from the Fresno Historical Society, The Big Fresno Fair, Friends of the Big Fresno Fair and the Caglia family gathered to formally announce an agreement between The Big Fresno Fair and Fresno Historical Society that will allow the cupola to be part of The Big Fresno Fair Museum as part of a long-term loan agreement.

“The cupola preserves a piece of our history in Fresno County and our judicial system,” stated Judge Oliver former President the Fresno Historical Society board and current member. “We have a mission – and a responsibility – to ensure more of our artifacts like the Fresno Courthouse Cupola are preserved for the public to see, learn from and understand the history behind it. This partnership with The Big Fresno Fair allows us to accomplish that mission. We look forward to having the cupola on display at the Fair Museum for a very long time.”

First unveiled in 2013, The Big Fresno Fair Museum showcases over 2,600 items from varying points in the Fair’s history telling a story not only of the Fair’s history, but of life in the Central Valley over the last 131 years. A 10,000 sq. ft. expansion that includes an additional story being built will add to the Museum’s current footprint. The Fresno Courthouse Cupola will be displayed on the top of the expanded Big Fresno Fair Museum, just adjacent to the Chance Avenue Gate entrance. Along with the cupola being displayed on the roof, an area in the Museum will be reminiscent of a Fresno Courthouse courtroom. According to Big Fresno Fair CEO, John C. Alkire, the addition of the cupola will be complete by 2016. “It will likely take a year to raise funds to pay for this large restoration project and another year to complete the restoration,” said Alkire. “Once it’s complete, it will be an incredible addition to our Museum that displays Fresno County’s rich history and a great honor to share this with the public.”

Constructed in 1875 with the design led by Sacramento architect A.A. Bennett, the Fresno Courthouse was 95 ft. long, 60 ft. wide and 57 ft. high. The dome that topped the courthouse brought that height to a staggering 112 ft. In 1893 two wings were added to the courthouse, one on each side of the original building and the first dome was replaced by a larger copper dome. Wide granite steps and tail columns were also added that same year. On July 29, 1895 a fire damaged the courthouse and caused the copper dome to melt and collapse through the upper floors. The courthouse was then rebuilt with a third story, a large front room and a wider, fireproof dome. A cupola, designed by John M. Curtis of San Francisco, was set on top of the dome.

Then in 1962, a report found that that the old Fresno Courthouse would be unable to withstand an earthquake as strong as that which destroyed the Kern County Courthouse in Bakersfield in 1952. The engineers estimated it would cost \$844,250 to make the building structurally sound – recommending they do not rehabilitate the

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structure. This led to a long, highly publicized political battle that took place over the courthouse and the iconic cupola that rested at its perch. In 1966, the cupola was removed from the Fresno Courthouse not to be viewed by the public again for nearly 20 years until it was displayed briefly in 1985 outside the Fresno Metropolitan Museum and then again, returned to a warehouse for storing. The Fresno Historical Society officially took ownership of the cupola in 1997. The proposed debut of the cupola as part of The Big Fresno Fair Museum in 2016 will be the first time in nearly 30 years it has been seen by the public.

“We are thrilled to be able to share our assets at the Fresno Historical Society and work with partners such as The Big Fresno Fair to bring historical gems like the Fresno Courthouse Cupola back to life for people to enjoy again,” said Dan Adams, President of the Fresno Historical Society Board. “We look forward to a long partnership with The Big Fresno Fair and its Museum.”

A fundraising campaign is now underway to help pay for the extensive restoration needed for the cupola. Individuals and organizations who are interested in donating to these restoration efforts are asked to contact the Friends of the Big Fresno Fair at (559) 650-3228 or [lking@fresnofair.com](mailto:lking@fresnofair.com).

**Attachments:**

- Photo of Fresno Courthouse Cupola with (from left to right) Brian I. Tatarian, Friends of the Big Fresno Fair Board President; Judge Robert Oliver, Fresno Historical Society Board of Trustees Member and former President; Leta Ciavaglia, Big Fresno Fair Board of Directors President; John C. Alkire, Big Fresno Fair CEO; and Dan Adams, Fresno Historical Society Board of Trustees President.
- Fresno Courthouse Timeline provided by the Fresno Historical Society.

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