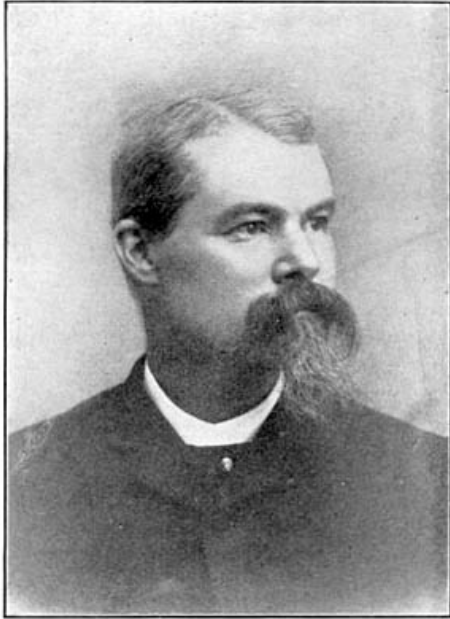


Douglas Gunn

No man was ever more thoroughly identified with the history of a city than is Douglas Gunn with that of San Diego. No city has ever had a more sincere and zealous advocate.

--San Diego Union, January 12, 1888.

Among San Diego's unsung pioneers, Douglas Gunn is a man worth remembering. The onetime publisher of the *San Diego Union* was the city's first "modern" mayor and a tireless promoter of his adopted city.



Born in Ohio in 1841, Gunn was twelve when his family moved to California, where his father, Dr. Lewis C. Gunn purchased the *Sonora Herald*. Here Gunn learned the printing trade. When the family moved to San Francisco in 1860, young Gunn worked with his father on the *San Francisco Times*, edited by Dr. Gunn. By the time the family moved to San Diego in 1868, young Gunn was an experienced newspaper man.

He purchased a small interest in the recently established *San Diego Union* and walked several miles daily from his home in Alonzo Horton's "New Town" to the *Union* office in Old Town. Gunn started as a reporter and printer but assumed editorial control of the weekly newspaper in 1871. He moved the press to New Town and on March 20, 1871, he printed the inaugural issue of the *Daily Union*, the first daily newspaper in San Diego.

Gunn bought out *Union* co-owner Edward Bushyhead in 1873 for \$5000 in cash. He quickly expanded the newspaper's size as readership thrived during a brief real estate boom, driven by belief that a railroad would soon extend to San Diego. But the railroad project collapsed amid the "Panic of 1873," which plunged the nation into a severe depression that lasted for the remainder of the decade.

As the *Union* struggled to survive, Gunn did most of the local reporting and news editing by himself. The daily slowly grew and prospered in the 1880s. He sold the newspaper in August 1886 to the San Diego Union Company, managed by Colonel John R. Berry.

With his publishing responsibilities gone, Gunn devoted his time to investing in the growing city. As the editor of the *Union*, Gunn had lobbied hard for a railroad connection to San Diego. When the railroad finally arrived in 1885, the huge real estate "boom of the eighties" took off in San Diego.

Gunn bought heavily, buying several properties in downtown and the Middletown area. He built a particularly handsome building at Sixth and F Streets, called the Express Block. In a lengthy article he wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* on January 1, 1887, the retired editor boasted of San Diego's new prosperity, "built first upon the anticipation and finally the realization of railroad connection with her harbor."

Gunn's article noted that the city population had jumped from 7,500 at the start of 1886 to more than 12,000 by year's end, and new arrivals exceeded departures by 1,300 a month. The county population had more than doubled to over 35,000. But cheap land was still available, according to Gunn and he prophesied "The 'boom,' as it is called, will not stop while an acre remains unoccupied."

In early 1887, Gunn decided to promote San Diego to the world in lavish book that would describe the region in text but also include expensive photographs to illustrate the features of the city and county. He hired a Los Angeles photographer, Herve Friend, of the American Photogravure Company. The two men traveled about the county, covering an estimated 1,200 miles while Friend photographed the wonders of San Diego County.



Ruins of the Old Mission, San Diego.

Photographed by Herve Friend for Picturesque San Diego (1887).

The *Union* described the work of its former publisher: "The illustrations will comprise natural scenery as well as prominent improvements. The process employed is almost equal to steel engraving, and the work when completed will far surpass anything ever attempted before."

Gunn's *Picturesque San Diego* appeared in October 1887. Printed in Chicago, the hardcover, 97-page book contained 72 photogravure plates. One thousand copies were offered for sale at \$10 each. Reviewers from San Francisco to New York City applauded the book. A paperback version called *San Diego Illustrated*, which contained woodcut images and sold for \$1, was released five months later. Two thousand copies of the second book were donated by Gunn to the Chamber of Commerce for mail distribution to the east coast.

On the heels of success, Gunn decided to run for city mayor. Nominally a Republican, Gunn ran for mayor on the "Citizens Non-Partisan" ticket against the "Straight Republican" candidate, John R. Berry—the same man who had followed Gunn as editor of the *Union*. After a hard-

fought campaign, Gunn won the election on April 2, 1889, by 428 votes. He would serve only one, two-year term. His tenure was the first under a historic city charter that established the office of mayor, as well as a two-house city council, and professional police and fire departments.

By the fall of 1891, Gunn was struggling financially. Once worth an estimated \$100,000 during the great boom, he had lost heavily when the bubble burst in late spring 1888. After his term as mayor, Gunn hoped to recoup his fortunes. Instead, the “financially embarrassed” civic leader borrowed heavily at ruinous interest rates.

On November 29, 1891, the *Union* announced news that “stopped the pulse of the entire city.” Fifty-year-old Douglas Gunn had been found dead in his office at 735 Sixth Street. Gunn, who had never married, was survived by his elderly parents; his brother Chester Gunn, a county supervisor; and his sister Anna Lee Gunn, who was married to businessman George W. Marston. He was interred at Mt. Hope Cemetery, accompanied by “the largest attendance ever witnessed at a funeral in San Diego.”



San Diego, looking Southwest—Coronado Beach opposite.

Photographed by Herve Friend for *Picturesque San Diego* (1887).

Originally published as “SAN DIEGO PIONEER MOVED FROM NEWSPAPERS TO MAYOR'S CHAIR Douglas Gunn promoted his home city with expensive photos in lavish book,” by Richard Crawford, in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 25, 2011.