

Historic Fresno County Courthouse cupola to get new home

By BoNhia
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The old Fresno County Courthouse cupola was lifted out of a dim and dusty storage unit south of downtown on Friday morning and strapped onto a trailer for a ride to its new home at the Fresno Fairgrounds. THEFRESNOBEE

- More information

To donate to the cupola restoration, contact Friends of the Big Fresno Fair at lking@fresnofair.com or (559) 650-3228.

The 119-year-old Fresno County Courthouse cupola was pulled out of storage and taken on a two-mile drive to its new home at the Fresno Fairgrounds, where it will be restored.

- The dome will be displayed at the new 7,000-square-foot Big Fresno Fair Museum that is under construction.
- A fundraising campaign is underway to pay for the cupola restoration.

The old Fresno County Courthouse cupola was lifted out of a dim and dusty storage unit south of downtown on Friday morning and strapped onto a trailer for a ride to its new home at the Fresno Fairgrounds.

After nearly a decade in storage, the cupola will begin a new life in the [Big Fresno Fair Museum](#) after a much-needed scrubbing and facelift. A partnership between the fair and the [Fresno Historical Society](#), which owns the cupola, calls for the small dome to be restored and displayed in a new museum that is under construction.

A fundraising campaign is underway to pay for that work with a goal of completing it by the fall of 2016. On Friday, officials said they were not certain yet how much money would be needed.

"History that is hidden is history lost," said Robert Oliver, a retired Fresno County judge and historical society board member.

"This is symbolic of the work (the two groups) are doing to present a place where history can be seen and felt by all," he said.

The cupola had been kept in storage, alongside other Fresno artifacts that include a carousel and opera house chandeliers, by Dick and Sally Caglia on behalf of the historical society.

Sally Caglia attended the morning move and snapped photos of the entire process on her phone.

"I'm thrilled to death," she said. "It's going to be living in perpetuity so the community will enjoy it."

The move down Butler Avenue to the fairgrounds, which included a police escort, took a little more than two hours as the truck slowly made its way around street corners, through railroad crossings and under electrical wires. The white cupola, weighing an estimated 5 to 6 tons, wobbled from side to side along the way.

The iconic cupola sat on top of [a larger dome on the old Fresno County Courthouse](#), which is now the courthouse lawn on M Street, for about 70 years. It was part of the 1896 reconstruction after a fire the year before damaged the courthouse, which was originally built in 1875. The fire caused the large copper dome to melt and collapse.

In 1966, the cupola was removed and sold at auction to Leonard Kavoian, who outbid Sally Caglia's father, Frank. Kavoian stored the cupola for years before donating it to the historical society in 1997.

Early Friday afternoon, the cupola was moved into a shed at the fairgrounds where it will be prepared for restoration. The metal has dings and the white paint is peeling.

The fair's board of directors is taking bids to help pay for the restoration. Once the dome is cleaned up, it will be part of a 7,000-square-foot museum next to the Paul Paul Theater near the Chance Avenue gate entrance.

It's not clear where the dome will be placed yet, said the fair board president, Leta Ciavaglia.

"We're trying to find a place at the fair that is elevated so you can see it."

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