

## Pacific Heights Architects #18 - Frederick F. Hamilton

*The original focus of this series was architects who had designed houses for themselves in Pacific Heights. Research in conjunction with #17 in this series on Lewis Hobart and 2516 Pacific led me to the work of Percy & Hamilton, who designed three adjacent houses directly across the street, including one for Hamilton himself to live in.*

Frederick F. Hamilton was born in Addison, Maine in 1851. He began work in 1866 as a draftsman in the office of Boston architect and book illustrator Hammatt Billings. In 1872 he joined J. B. Samuels in partnership and they designed several prominent commercial buildings and churches around Boston. In September 1875 he journeyed out to California and worked on the ill-fated San Francisco City Hall, then under the direction of original architect, Augustus Laver. That building took 20 years to complete, but, when the earthquake of April 18, 1906 shook it apart, was found to have been very badly constructed. In 1878 Hamilton traveled back east, but returned again to San Francisco in 1879. He joined fellow Maine native, George W. Percy, in partnership in January 1880.

Percy was Hamilton's senior by four years, having been born in 1847, in Bath, Maine. He apprenticed with prominent Portland, Maine architect, Francis H. Fassett, from 1866 until 1870, when he came out to California to work in Stockton for two years. In April 1872 he relocated to Chicago to work on the rebuilding of that city following the great fire of October 1871. He returned to Boston in May 1873 to work as Superintendent of Construction for the commercial architectural firm of Bradlee and Winslow. Percy made his final move out to San Francisco in September 1875, opening his own office in the City until the partnership with Hamilton was formed in 1880.

Both architects had considerable experience of working with Maine granite and both would have been inspired by the architectural work of Henry Hobson Richardson in Boston (Brattle Square Church from 1871, and the magnificent Trinity Church built 1872-77). Richardson is still the only American architect to have a style named after him - Richardsonian Romanesque. One of Percy & Hamilton's most important buildings in that style is Greystone Cellars in St. Helena, over 400 feet long, with walls 22 inches thick, and over 110,000 sq. ft of interior space. It was built in 1886-89 for William Bourn who was establishing a cooperative winery for Napa Valley growers. It was operated for many years by the Christian Brothers, and is now the Culinary Institute of America's west coast campus. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

In San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, Percy & Hamilton's Sharon Building has been described as a nearly perfect example of Romanesque architecture. It was built in 1887 with funds bequeathed to the City by William Sharon, who had died in 1885 leaving a \$10,000,000 fortune from Comstock mine ownership. With the adjacent Children's Playground and Carousel it comprised the first playground facility built in a public park in the United States. The Sharon Building was designated as San Francisco Landmark #124 in 1981 and now houses an art studio.

In 1889 Percy & Hamilton designed an office and museum for the California Academy of Sciences on Market Street, between 4th and 5th, on land donated by James Lick, who also funded the construction. Unfortunately, that building and most of the Academy's collection was destroyed in the fire that followed the 1906 earthquake. But a little-known building of Percy & Hamilton's did survive in the fire area, 71-85 2nd Street at Mission, originally built in 1897 for Wells, Fargo & Co. It was rebuilt in 1908 with an additional floor under the direction of architects Meyers & Ward. Henry H. Meyers had started work for Percy & Hamilton as a draftsman in 1891 and went into partnership with Clarence R. Ward in 1902.

Beginning in 1880 with a two-story double house on the 1700 block of Post Street, since a victim of redevelopment, and continuing through to 1899 when Hamilton died, Percy & Hamilton were responsible for a significant number of houses and churches in Pacific Heights. Unfortunately many of the residences have since been replaced to create denser uses of the land, but these houses survive, although some have been significantly altered: 2547 Washington (1884), 1923 Webster (1885), 2513 Broadway and 2201 Broderick (1889), 1902 Broderick (1893), 2318 Fillmore and 2230 Sacramento (1894), 2705 Buchanan (1897). Two of their surviving churches in the area are the First Unitarian Church at Franklin and Geary (1887), now San Francisco Landmark #40, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church at California and Broderick (1892).



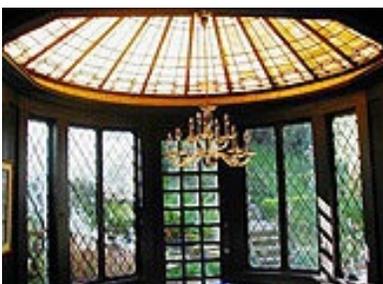
2516 Pacific as originally built

One of Percy & Hamilton's earliest designs in Pacific Heights was the original house at 2516 Pacific for owner Charles Heise in 1881 on a 53 ft. by 127 ft. lot. The house was bought by Louis and Lydia Monteagle in 1894. This house may be seen in the postcard image. In 1920 the Monteagles were able to buy the adjoining 32 ft. wide lot to the east and they commissioned architect Lewis Hobart to redesign 2516 Pacific across the entire 85 ft. frontage.

In 1884 Charles Heise commissioned Percy & Hamilton to design a new house for him across the street, which still stands at 2517 Pacific, now the oldest surviving house on that block. Later Percy & Hamilton would design another one just to the west of that at 2519 Pacific in 1892 for owner J. C. Stubbs. Just prior to that though, in 1890, Frederick Hamilton designed a house for himself at 2513 Pacific, which he retained as his residence until he died. The house has a traditional layout and has a lot of original detail. The stained glass entry door and surround is particularly elegant and attractive at night with hall lights illuminating it. A curved bay dining room extension was built in 1914 under the supervision of architect T. Paterson Ross with a beautiful marble glass fan dome above it, which has recently been restored. In 1923 a garage was installed for \$500, neatly centered under the curved living room window. An original fireplace can still be seen on the west wall in the now converted basement/garage.



2513 Pacific entry



2513 Pacific extension

Hamilton died on December 1, 1899, bringing to an end San Francisco's most highly successful Victorian-era partnership. Percy & Hamilton had just secured a major office building project at the time, for long-term client Alvinza Hayward, 400 Montgomery at California. Percy completed the design for the building in 1900. Percy also took on Willis Polk as a partner during that year, but Percy died on December 14, 1900, just over a year after Hamilton. The office building was completed in 1901 under the construction supervision of Henry Meyers. With its steel-frame and reinforced

concrete floors, it became one of the few downtown buildings to survive the 1906 earthquake. Percy had been a local pioneer in the use of reinforced concrete, writing papers recommending its use for strength and fire protection. It has an unusual 'H' shape and was declared in 1909 by architect and writer B. J. S. Cahill to be "one of the most beautiful buildings in San Francisco". It is now called the Kohl Building and is San Francisco Landmark #161.

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