

## Pacific Heights Architects #24 - T. P. Ross

*The focus of this series is architects who had an influence over the way Pacific Heights looks today. T. Paterson Ross had a distinguished career, unfortunately cut short at its height by a tragic accident. We are fortunate, however, to be able to appreciate several examples of his work remaining in Pacific Heights.*



Thomas Paterson Ross was born in Edinburgh, Scotland and came to San Francisco in 1890. Ross was a naturally talented artist and soon found work as a draftsman with architect John Gash. In 1891 they produced an unusual design for the California building for the World's Columbian Exposition to be held in Chicago in 1893, which although not accepted, gained Ross good recognition. From 1892 through 1893, he worked for architects Louis S. Stone and Harry S. Munson and in 1894 for John J. Clark. In 1895 Ross entered into a partnership with Edward A. Hatherton and in 1896 he opened his own office.

Between 1900 and 1906 he collaborated frequently with engineer Albert W. Burgren (1874-1951) and after the earthquake and fire of 1906 they set up the partnership of Ross & Burgren, first at 222 Kearny and from 1912 on at 310 California. Ross designed over 250 buildings of many types during his career: single-family homes, flats, apartment houses, hotels, churches, and many different office and commercial buildings.

Some of his earliest surviving residential work is in Presidio Heights with three residences on Spruce Street (210, 223 and 316) built between 1897 and 1900. This was followed in 1901 by a house on Russian Hill at 2707 Larkin, and another in 1904 at 1001 Chestnut, on the corner of Hyde. These were two of a very small number of houses on Russian Hill to survive the 1906 fire. Between 1903 and 1904, Ross designed several flats and houses in Cow Hollow and Presidio Heights.

His earliest work in Pacific Heights was a three-flat building at 2368-2372 Broadway, designed in 1901. In 1904, Ross designed the houses at 2210 Clay and 2121 Divisadero, and the apartments at 3110 Clay. In 1905 he added the lovely Art Nouveau three-flat building at 2209 Clay, now converted to condominiums.



The house at 2825 Broadway, the subject of this article, was commissioned by Charles G. Gebhardt and also built in 1905. This magnificent Georgian-style home is set high-up on the south side of Broadway, 100 feet west of Broderick and with a 50-foot street frontage. Two prominent features immediately noticeable to visitors are the winding entry staircase and the wrought-iron and glass front door.

In October 1906 Charles and Dorothy Gebhardt sold the house to Charles and Laura Hirshfield who kept it for five years, selling it in 1911 to Annie S. Woodward. After Annie Woodward died her heirs sold the house in 1924 to Ethel W. Glenn. In 1926 Ethel Glenn sold the house to Harold and Genevieve Law, who in turn sold it in 1932 to the company owned by real estate developer Harry B. Allen. Allen was President of the San Francisco Real Estate Board for two



years, 1923-24, and President of the California Real Estate Association in 1927, but is best known locally as the developer of Sea Cliff.

After a few more changes of ownership, the house was bought in November 1953 by Arch Monson, Jr. Monson served terms as President of the Bohemian Club and as Staff Commodore of the Corinthian Yacht Club. In May 1954, Monson was able to buy the equally spacious house next door at 2801 Broadway and was able to give his second wife June the choice of deciding in which property to make their home. She selected 2825 Broadway and Monson sold 2801 Broadway in June 1957. Monson continued to live in 2825 Broadway until he died in November 2000 and the house is now being sold as part of his estate.

At the time of the 1906 earthquake Ross and Burgren had just started construction on a 135 room apartment building at 711 Post Street. Once he knew the foundation was undamaged, the owner, George Robins, gave the order to rush the building through to completion and it became the first new apartment house to be built after the devastating downtown fire. Today it is the Ansonia Hotel.

The Sing Fat and Sing Chong buildings designed by Ross and built in 1907 at the southwest and northwest corners of Grant and California are credited with instigating the pagoda-style of architecture which predominates in Chinatown today.

In Pacific Heights in 1908, Ross and Burgren designed 2452 Broadway and 2313 Webster, a six-unit apartment building with a distinctive radius entrance located in the Webster Street Historic district. In 1909 they added 2395 Vallejo, on the corner of Steiner, and in the following year Ross arranged the transfer of part of the rear yard of that property to architect Frederick H. Meyer to benefit Meyer's own lot at 2756 Steiner.

In 1912 Ross began an association with developer William F. Chipman who pioneered the idea of 'community homes', now generally called cooperative apartment buildings. Chipman created six corporations in succession to build and sell ownership interests in Russian Hill properties. The first two were designed by Ross, starting with Greenwich Terrace at 1105-35 Greenwich, 16 apartments completed in 1913; and 2164 Hyde, 15 apartments completed in 1914. After World War I ended, Chipman commissioned Ross to design three more - the Summit at 2222 Hyde, 7 apartments completed in 1920; Union Terrace at 1020 Union, 29 apartments completed in 1921; and his masterpiece, Capo di Monte at 2111 Hyde, 30 apartments completed in 1924.



Alcazar Theater entry

In 1919 Ross received local publicity for humorously 'autographing' a building he had designed - the Shrine Temple at 650 Geary (now the Alcazar Theater). Although a Shriner himself, his request to put his name on the cornerstone of the building had been declined. Some time after the building was completed a visiting scholar from the East detected that the phrase 'Great is Allah and Great is Ross the Architect' was chiseled in Arabic script in the marble above the entry door!

In 1921 Ross married his second wife, Belle, and they moved into apartment 25 at Union Terrace, when that development was completed. Tragically though, his outstanding career was ended by a construction site accident in October 1922. During an inspection of building progress at 555 Post (the former Union

League Club, of which Ross was secretary), the sudden movement of an open freight lift caused a load of bricks to fall on top of his head, fracturing his skull. Ross survived, but was unable to ever work again, being partially paralyzed and unable to speak. In 1932, Belle moved them both to Santa Cruz where Ross lived out the remainder of his life. He died on April 26, 1957 at the age of 84.

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