

## Pacific Heights Architects #6 - Albert Sutton

*The focus of this series for this year is Pacific Heights architects and the homes they designed for themselves in the area. The home designed by Albert Sutton for himself is very prominently positioned on a prime Pacific Heights corner view lot.*



Albert Sutton was born in Victoria, British Columbia on June 6, 1867. He attended public schools in Portland, Oregon and graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a degree in engineering. He gained practical experience with the Southern Pacific Railroad designing bridges and buildings and also worked for architects in Portland and Tacoma, Washington before moving to San Francisco to establish his own practice in 1895. By the turn of the century he had become a prolific and sought-after designer. When licensing of architects came into effect in 1901, Sutton was one of the first group to apply. His certificate number was A36.

Early examples of his work in Pacific Heights may be found at 2732 Vallejo, which dates from 1899, and 1901 Franklin, which was built in 1900 in the Italian Renaissance style as a residence for Margaret E. Crocker, the widow of Judge Edwin B. Crocker. 1901 Franklin was bought in 1951 by the Golden Gate Spiritualist Church and the building has adapted well to its new usage.



1901 Franklin at Clay, now owned by the Golden Gate Spiritualist Church



Circa 1910 postcard of 2626-86 Union

In Cow Hollow, the home at 2626 Union was designed by Sutton in 1899 and finished in 1900. It may be seen at the extreme right of this postcard, published around 1910 to attract people from the East Coast of the United States to relocate to California. The lovely facade seen here was significantly and unsympathetically altered in 1925 when a garage was added in front of the house, so the postcard has particular interest to those who appreciate Sutton's work.

The home which is the subject of this month's article is 2663 Divisadero, which was designed by Sutton soon after he bought this lot at the south-west corner of Vallejo in August 1902. It is an imposing structure with a brick exterior which in style exhibits both English and Dutch influences. It can be considered a playful and original composition by a busy architect, who only had to please himself as a client. The squeezed gables are faintly Dutch in feeling, but the rest of the composition employs classical elements. The balustrades with their flared bases and the overscaled keystones in the segmental arches of the porch are somewhat Mannerist. On the north facade, the cornice wraps around the eastern bay window. By contrast, the western bay window is shorter, and has its own cornice. The western extension, added in 1937, should probably have had



Albert Sutton's home at Divisadero and Vallejo exhibits both English and Dutch influences

a bay window on the main level to tie the north elevation together. The flat arches above the three windows on the north side follow the line of the interior staircase from the main level to the second level. On that same side there are also overhanging eaves with exposed rafters and carved rafter tails.

In 1903 Sutton took on a partner, Charles Peter Weeks, who had studied in Paris at the renowned *École des Beaux-Arts*. Together they designed these fine Pacific Heights residences - 2221 Baker, 2562 Green, 2670 Green and 2750 Vallejo, all in 1905. They also designed a number of residences in Presidio Heights, including 230 Cherry and 233 Maple, both in 1904, and 3800, 3830 and 3838 Clay, all in 1905. One of their early commercial designs was the Baker & Hamilton building at 700 Seventh Street, built in 1904-05, which is now designated as San Francisco Landmark #193.

Sutton lived at 2663 Divisadero until late 1909 when he sold it to a widow, Mrs. Nydia S. Niles. The house was sold by her estate in 1921 to Godfrey Eacret, and then sold again in 1928 to Ellen Holladay. The home was extended in 1937 by enlarging the old garage, building what was then described as a library above it, but is now the living room, and adding a deck above that off of the master bedroom. It was acquired by the present owners from Holladay's estate. This owner, who is also an architect, has remodeled the home extensively, beginning soon after he purchased it in 1986.

Sutton & Weeks left a fine body of residential work in the City in a productive partnership which lasted until 1910, when Sutton retired for two years to his ranch in Hood River, Oregon. Two years earlier, he had been involved in a difficult divorce and custody battle over his two children with his first wife, Ethel, which may have contributed to his decision to move away from San Francisco. In 1912 he came out of retirement to join architect Harrison A. Whitney in the firm of Sutton & Whitney. Together they became one of the leading architectural firms in Portland, designing several important commercial buildings. They opened a second office in Tacoma, Washington which Sutton supervised. Sutton died of a heart attack in Tacoma on November 18, 1923.

© David Parry  
November 2001