



The focus of this series has been Pacific Heights architects and homes they designed for themselves in the area. Strictly speaking, William Hollis was a developer rather than an architect but, as with many developers today, their understanding of the potential market, their vision of what is saleable, and therefore what should be built, means that they have considerable influence in the design process. The house at 2319 Webster is a surviving example of over 1000 developed by William Hollis and his company in San Francisco and one that he chose as his residence.

William Hollis was born in Iowa in 1839. He arrived in California in 1852, along with many other young adventurers, to seek his fortune in the Gold Country. He moved to San Francisco at the end of that decade, working as a clerk, a mining secretary and as statewide secretary of the Sons of Temperance. In September 1866 he formed and incorporated a company called The Real Estate Associates (TREA) to buy and sell, manage and improve, business and residential real estate in San Francisco. The company had an initial capitalization of \$240,000 which was doubled by 1870. Initially Hollis acted as Secretary, Treasurer and Business Manager with a Board of Directors which included real estate brokers, bankers, attorneys, and a title researcher. Progress was slow at first and it wasn't until 1870 that the company began to construct houses. But the decade of the 1870's proved to be extremely productive for TREA, during which time they built over 1,000 Italianate-style homes, of which about 200 survive today, mainly in Pacific Heights, the Western Addition, the Mission district and Noe Valley.

In October 1870, TREA purchased the three-block parcel of land bounded by Sacramento and Clay, extending from Webster west to Pierce. The first section to be subdivided and advertised was the block from Fillmore to Steiner. The first sales of completed homes were recorded in June 1871. Several of that initial group of houses remain, including 2503 Clay, 2211 and 2229 Fillmore, 2530-32, 2538-40, 2552-56, and 2564 Sacramento. The homes on Steiner were the last to be built by the company on that block, in late 1873, and five are still intact - 2204, 2206, 2208, 2242 and 2244.

Hollis had taken over as President of TREA at the end of 1873 and the strong real estate market of 1874 triggered a growth period for the company. Between 1874 and 1876 the company employed as many as 400 craftsmen at a time (day laborers) building houses. Later homes remaining from that initial three-block purchase of land can be seen at 2231-51 Steiner, built in 1874, and 2637-73 Clay, opposite Alta Plaza Park, built in 1875, and pictured in the Junior League's 1968 book *Here Today*.

A typical house would take 60 days to build and their record was 41 houses completed in one five-month period. The homes were sold on installment plans with 10-25% down payments and the balance carried as a loan by the company at a very reasonable interest rate. 35 years later, John P. Young, in volume two of his 1912 work *San Francisco: A History of the Pacific Coast Metropolis* recognized TREA's "worthy motive of promoting thrift and the desire for a home", which resulted in "rows of houses of frame, two stories in height, all of which were alike externally and internally" and "were sold on easy terms to people who had only two objects in view, and who were necessarily compelled to subordinate any esthetic aspirations they may have had to considerations of thrift."

However, among TREA's buyers for homes were prominent architect Albert A. Bennett, who designed the State Capitol in Sacramento, and was the original owner of 2373 California (1876), and Frederick B. Wood, the original owner of 2237 Steiner, a draftsman for architect Charles Geddes at

the time, who went on to become a successful San Francisco architect in his own right.

Other TREA houses from 1875 can be seen at 2115-25 Bush, part of the Bush Street-Cottage Row Historic District, and 2524, 2530, and 2536 Clay, which, along with the earlier house at 2503 Clay, were added as a group of four to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. Also in 1875 TREA built seven homes on the south-east corner of Broadway and Gough, of which two remain, 1787 Broadway and 2312 Gough, the latter pictured in Joe Alioto's book *The San Francisco I Love*.

In 1875 TREA commissioned architect David Farquharson to design a six-story office building at 230 Montgomery. In 1870 Farquharson had designed a group of 40 single-story bay-windowed cottages on a Pacific Heights block (later called 'Tuckerville', after the project's financial backer, jeweler J. W. Tucker). Only one of those houses remains - 2209 Jackson. But there is no record of Farquharson designing any houses for TREA. In 1878, New York architect John Remer was reported to be preparing 'plans, elevations and working drawings' for the company. He bought two TREA houses on Buchanan, living in one with his family from 1878 to 1881 as well as keeping his office in the 230 Montgomery building. But the TREA houses of the late 1870's that Remer may have been involved with are indistinguishable from their earlier ones. Consequently it is reasonable to assume that Hollis not only provided the continuity and driving force for TREA, but that he had also overseen the evolution of the standard TREA house plan.

Hollis moved into 2319 Webster, the subject of this month's article, in 1878. He signed for the water connection on December 23, 1878. There are five homes remaining on Webster from that development (2311, 2315, 2317, 2319 and 2321), all now part of the Webster Street Historic District. They were TREA's only group of houses in the District.



2319 Webster

As was typical of the standard TREA plan, the house is fully detached, set back from the street, with a walkway and windows on the south side to admit lots of light into the house. A few steps lead up to the entry door which opens into the lower hallway. To the left, on the south side, is the double parlor living room and dining room. The living room has a bay window overlooking the front garden and the dining room has an original coal-burning fireplace. The living room and dining room both feature high ceilings with center medallions and crown moldings. From the dining room one door leads back out to the hallway and another door opens to the kitchen. A door from the kitchen leads out to the rear porch and garden. On the upper level the plan provided for three bedrooms, the largest of which is at the front of the house with a bay window and attractive moldings. The bedroom at the rear overlooks the garden. The middle bedroom is the smallest of the three and is adjacent to the single bathroom in the house. Hollis lived in 2319 Webster for almost 10 years and the house externally appears almost the same today as it did 124 years ago. Unlike the three remaining houses of the group to the south of it (2311, 2315 and 2317) the challenge of putting a garage underneath it has not yet been met here.

A four-year long depression which had started in 1877 brought the TREA model down. The company had carried back too many mortgages, over-committed on its land purchases and probably sold its finished product too cheaply. In 1881 creditors successfully petitioned the Superior Court for the dissolution of the company. Although the 1880's and 1890's became boom decades for residential construction in San Francisco, the TREA easy-purchase installment plan model advanced by Hollis would not be repeated.