

## Pacific Heights Architects #14 - A. Page Brown



*The focus of this series is architects who had a strong influence over the way Pacific Heights looks today. A. Page Brown was one of the first of a talented wave of architects to be attracted out to San Francisco in the late 1880's. He had a tragically brief career, but his influence continued some 30 years after his death and some of his finest work in the City can still be appreciated in Pacific Heights.*

Arthur Page Brown was born in Adams, New York in 1859. He attended Cornell University and joined the prominent New York architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White as a draftsman. He received a formal training and then continued his architectural studies with a trip to Europe, returning to New York in 1885 to open his own practice. He was brought out to San Francisco in 1889 by Mary Ann Crocker, primarily to design a mausoleum for her husband Charles, president of the Southern Pacific Railroad, who had died the year before, to be placed on top of a hill in Oakland's Mountain View Cemetery. Mary Ann Crocker also asked Brown to design an Old People's Home (Pine at Pierce). With work in hand, Brown encouraged Willis Polk to follow him out to California and Polk worked for Brown from July 1889 through August 1890.

The Old People's Home was a fine three-story plus attic 'L'-shaped structure with a rounded tower at the center of the 'L', a brick ground floor, two stories of shingle-clad wood frame above, with a decorative band of alternating circles and diamonds between the second and third stories, and attic-level dormer windows giving the building an interesting roof line. The building made an immediate impression on San Francisco society and led to a number of commissions for Brown. It survives today as Rose Court in altered form, after being threatened with demolition for many years.

For the Crocker estate Brown supervised the completion of the first Grace Cathedral (1890) and designed the City's second 'skyscraper' - an eleven-story steel-frame flat-iron office building, on Market at the intersection of Post. (The first steel-frame skyscraper was Burnham & Root's Chronicle Building, Market at Kearny, in 1889). Bernard Maybeck joined Brown's staff in 1891 to work on the Crocker Building, which survived the 1906 earthquake, but was demolished in the 1960's. Brown's commercial and residential commissions grew rapidly and his office attracted some of the most talented architects of the day to work for him, including Charles M. Rousseau, Edward R. Swain, James R. Miller, Sylvain Schnaittacher, Frank S. Van Trees, and A. C. Schweinfurth, as well as Maybeck.

Brown's office won the competition to design the California State Building for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, which they did in a fanciful Mission Revival style, and Maybeck went to Chicago on Brown's behalf to oversee its construction.





That was followed by two significant, but temporary, buildings for the Midwinter Fair held in Golden Gate Park which opened in January 1894 - the **Administration Building** and the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. However those were not the first structures in the Park that Brown had designed. In 1892 he had created a merry-go-round modeled after a circular Greek temple for the Children's Playground which the Sharon family had developed, and that same year he had created a two-arched stone Rustic Bridge to span Stow Lake.

Also in 1892, Brown had designed Trinity Church (Bush at Gough, now San Francisco Landmark #65), reminiscent of the cathedral at St. Albans, just north of London, and in 1894 Joseph Worcester, pastor of the Church of the New Jerusalem and an architectural patron in the City, commissioned Brown to design the Swedenborgian Church (Lyon at Washington). Maybeck, Schweinfurth, and artists Bruce Porter and William Keith also collaborated on the design. Examples of all their contributions to the final result may still be seen in the Church. Brown's office also designed a pastoral residence next door, at 2121 Lyon, which also survives today. The Church is scheduled to be added to the *National Register of Historic Places* in April 2003.

Brown is best known, however, for the magnificent Ferry Building, designed in late 1892, and finally completed in mid-1898 after a \$1 million construction project. The integrity of the design was proved in the earthquake of April 18, 1906 when the only real damage was the loss of some of the Colusa sandstone facing attached to the 240 foot clock tower. The elegant tower was reportedly inspired by *La Giralda*, the bell tower of Seville Cathedral which Brown had seen in his European travels. The clock remained stuck at 5.16 for a year, reminding San Franciscans of the time that the first shock had hit that fateful morning. In 1977 the Ferry Building was designated as a landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers and it also became San Francisco Landmark #90. The October 1989 earthquake ultimately triggered the demolition of the Embarcadero Freeway which had blocked the vista of the Ferry Building from Market Street since 1958. Now central to San Francisco's revitalized waterfront, it has been undergoing a \$75 million restoration and re-opens on March 21, 2003.

A lot of Brown's residential work in San Francisco was lost in the 1906 fire, such as the beautiful Alban Towne house at 1101 California, although its portico was saved and now stands by Lloyd's Lake in Golden Gate Park as a memorial. The most significant surviving residence of Brown's in the City is the Richard E. Queen House at 2212 Sacramento, which turned out to be his final project. Designed in 1895 it has a striking neoclassical facade, with full height Corinthian pilasters and an imposing semicircular entry portico with a balustrade and a Palladian window above.



The large formal reception hall leads to a wide staircase with a magnificent stained glass window one half-flight up in a cascading gold-orange-red palette. Pocket doors give entry to each of the four generously-sized public rooms on the main level. The living room and study have elegant plaster details. The dining room is paneled in quartered oak. The music room is finished in birdseye maple. All of these rooms have fireplaces with marble surrounds and carved wood mantles. Floors are

hardwood, with a different pattern in each room.



Double half-flights of stairs continue up to the second floor. Light enters it from a sunny south-facing study at one end, with the stained glass window at the other. Off the large central hall are four symmetrically-positioned bedrooms, with room for each to have its own bath. The third floor also has a central hall, and another four bedrooms and two baths. Parking is available at the rear of the property.

Richard E. Queen moved into 2212 Sacramento in late 1896 and lived there for the rest of his life. He died in 1924 leaving the property to the Catholic Church with the right for his wife and sister to reside there as long as they were alive. The church eventually received clear title from Alice Queen in 1956 after the property had fallen into disrepair and soon sold it to Robert and Frances Moonan, who embarked on a restoration. That later had to include significant roof work after sections of a crane being used to build the adjacent high-rise, 2200 Sacramento, fell onto it in the early 1960's. The house was designated as San Francisco Landmark #198 in 1990 and the Moonan's eventually sold the property to the present owners in 1996.

Brown tragically died at the young age of 36, in January 1896, three months after a runaway horse and buggy accident near his Burlingame home left him with broken bones and internal injuries. Frank Van Trees supervised the completion of 2212 Sacramento and Edward Swain the completion of the Ferry Building.

*David Parry is grateful to the owners of 2212 Sacramento for prompting this article.*

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