

Pacific Heights Architects #17 - Lewis P. Hobart



Lewis P. Hobart reviewing plans.

The focus of this series is architects who had a strong influence over the way Pacific Heights looks today. Lewis Hobart lived in Pacific Heights for many years and some of his work may be seen on Washington Street, Broadway and Pacific Avenue.

Lewis Parsons Hobart was born in St. Louis, Missouri on January 14, 1873. After graduating from preparatory schools in the East, he attended U.C. Berkeley for a year. While there he was influenced by Bernard Maybeck (as were many other young students, such as Julia Morgan and Arthur Brown, Jr.), participating in drawing classes that Maybeck taught in his home. Hobart left Berkeley to study architecture for two years at the American Academy in Rome and followed that by three years of further architectural training at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris from 1901 to 1903.

Back in the United States, Hobart first worked in New York for two years, and then returned to the Bay Area in 1906, to participate in the rebuilding of the City after the earthquake and fire. He obtained his State Architectural license in October 1906 (number B429). He opened his own office in the A. Page Brown-designed Crocker Building (600 Market at Post). His classical training and knowledge of steel-frame construction stood him in good stead and he obtained commissions for several downtown office buildings from the Crocker Estate and other property owners. Surviving buildings of his from 1908 include the Postal Telegraph Building at 22 Battery, the Jewelers Building at 150 Post, the Commercial Building at 825-33 Market, and the White Investment Co. Building at 280 Battery.

Hobart is best known in San Francisco for his work implementing the design of Grace Episcopal Cathedral on Nob Hill. In 1903 Hobart had married socialite Mabel Reed Deming, a cousin of William H. Crocker who donated the site for the Cathedral. Inspired by 13th-century French Gothic architecture, the plans were drawn and the cornerstone laid in 1910, although the Cathedral was not considered finished until 1964. Hobart's four-story Cathedral House at 1051 Taylor was completed in 1912 (but recently demolished) and Hobart added the Diocesan House at 1055 Taylor in 1932.

Hobart became famous for country estates in Hillsborough, such as Richard M. Tobin's at 360 Poett Road (1907), Joseph D. Grant's *Strawberry Hill* at the end of Redington Road (1910), William H. Crocker's *New Place*, now the Burlingame Country Club (1911), George T. Cameron's *Rosecourt* at 815 Eucalyptus Avenue (1913), and George Newhall, Sr's *La Dolphine* at 1760 Manor Drive (1914).

In San Francisco an early example of a French-influenced residence can be found at 20 Presidio Terrace, designed by Hobart in 1909. His second design there, 40 Presidio Terrace, followed 10 years later. On Russian Hill, Hobart's 1050 Green built in 1913 has a distinctive Parisian look, set back from the street with a formal garden in front. Initially four full-floor view apartments, the building was converted to condominium ownership in 1987. On Nob Hill, in addition to Grace Cathedral, he was responsible for 1055 California (1920, 15 spacious half-floor apartments averaging 2500 sq.ft. each).

Some of Hobart's contributions to Pacific Heights architecture are 2970 Broadway, on the Gold Coast of Broadway, designed in 1916 for attorney Sidney M. Ehrman, 2421 Broadway designed in

1920, 2516 Pacific designed in 1921, and 2108 Washington, a house moved to that site in 1921 and completely remodeled in 1925 for the Tobin family.

At 2516 Pacific, Hobart's clients were Louis and Lydia Monteagle. Louis Finlay Monteagle was a Scot, born in 1855, who arrived in San Francisco in 1879. He was an insurance broker, a director of the Spring Valley Water Company, on the Board of Governors of the San Francisco Symphony and active in the Episcopal Church. Lydia Paige Monteagle had inherited a fortune from her parents Timothy and Mary Paige and she contributed significantly to the cost of building Grace Cathedral.

The original house at 2516 Pacific had been designed by Percy & Hamilton in 1881 on a 53 ft. by 127 ft. lot. The Monteagles bought it in 1894. With a growing family and in need of a larger house, in June 1920 they had the opportunity to buy the adjoining 32 ft. wide lot to the east, stretching from Pacific to Broadway, from the estate of Virginia Strassburger. First they commissioned Lewis Hobart to design a house above a garage on the northern half of the lot, now 2421 Broadway, and then they embarked upon the major project of rebuilding 2516 Pacific across the entire 85 ft. Pacific Avenue frontage.



2516 Pacific Avenue

The finished result is a somewhat restrained Tudor Revival composition with a brick exterior. A hipped roof comes down to a thin cornice which wraps around the bay window, which at four bays in width is much wider than would be found on a Tudor-era house in England. Note the ogee arches on the second level of the four bay windows, matching the three ogee arches on the windows of the first level of the eastern side. The arched entry has layered moldings and the columns themselves are layered. With its brick exterior, the house imparts a feeling of massiveness, of being rooted to the earth.

After Louis Monteagle died in 1940, the property was left to his sons Paige and Kenneth Monteagle. Paige bought out Kenneth's interest and lived there with his wife Louise until they sold the house in 1948 to Samuel and Celeste Stewart. The Stewart's sold the house in 1954 to the present owners, the British Government.

At first the house was used as both Consulate Offices and the Consul-General's Residence, but the British Consulate business functions were moved downtown by 1960 and the property has been used primarily as a residence ever since, with a secondary role in official entertaining. Queen Elizabeth II attended receptions there when she visited San Francisco in 1983, although she stayed at the St. Francis Hotel at that time, but other Royal visitors have had occasion to stay in the house on private visits to San Francisco over the last 50 years. The guest bedroom suite has direct access to a spacious terrace with a lovely view of the Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge.

The Hobart's knew that view well for themselves as they had bought the Edgar Mathews-designed house at 2512 Pacific in 1920. Lewis continued to live there after his wife Mabel died in 1945, finally selling it in 1947.

Other distinctive San Francisco designs by Hobart include the original California Academy of Sciences buildings in Golden Gate Park (1915-31), the Alexander Building (155 Montgomery, 1921), the O'Connor Moffatt store (now Macy's, 101 Stockton, 1928, with an addition along the O'Farrell Street side also by Hobart in 1948), the Bohemian Club (624 Taylor, 1930), the Mills

Tower (added to 220 Montgomery, 1931), and the Union Oil Co. Building (425 First Street, 1941).

In 1932 Hobart became the first President of the San Francisco Arts Commission, and later was appointed to the Board of Architects for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition held on Treasure Island, for which he also designed the Court of Flowers and the Court of Reflections. He died on October 19, 1954 and his funeral was held at Grace Cathedral.

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