

Pacific Heights Architects #26 - Samuel Newsom

This series is focused on architects who had an influence over the way Pacific Heights looks today. The neighborhood is fortunate that the fire that raged for three days following the April 1906 earthquake was halted at Van Ness Avenue. This allows us to still appreciate the work of architects such as Samuel Newsom, who were most productive prior to that catastrophe.



Samuel Newsom was born near Montreal in 1852, one of 8 boys and 4 girls. His father (Lavens M. Newsom), his uncle, and his 15 year-older brother (John J. Newsom) moved to San Francisco in 1860. The rest of the family followed in 1861. Lavens, a horticulturist, opened a nursery in Oakland. John was the first son to become an architect and in 1871 was in partnership with William C. Hoagland when Samuel joined them as a draftsman. John opened his own office in 1872 and Samuel continued to work for him until 1874 when his brother promoted him to partner and Newsom Brothers was formed. In 1878, Samuel's 5 years younger brother Joseph Cather joined John and Samuel as a draftsman. A year later, John

J. Newsom formed a partnership with another brother, Thomas D. Newsom, which lasted through 1898. That left Samuel and Joseph Cather working together from 1879 on. They established offices in San Francisco and Oakland.

The partnership of S. & J. C. Newsom was a very productive one and left us with a great legacy of Victorian architecture, principally in the Queen Anne style, the most extravagant example of which is the Carson Mansion in Eureka. It took two years and over one hundred men to build, starting in 1884. It is famous for its 'gingerbread' excess of detail. Since 1950, it has been owned and preserved by the Ingomar Club, a private men's organization.



Carson Mansion, Eureka

Two early examples of their work in San Francisco, dating from 1883, can be seen at 2100 and 2102 Bush. Two other properties designed by them in 1885 and moved to their present locations are 1735-37 Webster and 2214 Clay. The latter house survived the fire of April 1906 and was moved in 1926 from Polk Street to make way for the construction of the Alhambra Theater.

In 1884, the brothers produced an architectural pattern book titled *Picturesque Californian Homes; a volume of Forty Plates, Plans, Details and Specifications of Houses Costing from \$700 to \$15,000, and Adapted to Families Having Good Taste and Moderate Means*. Actually there were only 38 plans, but with a sample building contract and a set of specifications ready to be given to a contractor, the book was a bargain for \$3.50! It was obviously snapped up by a lot of people, probably not just those of 'moderate means', because it had to be reissued three times.

In 1886, J. C. Newsom opened a branch office of their firm in the growing city of Los Angeles, and stayed there after his partnership with Samuel was dissolved in January 1888. At the end of 1896, J. C. moved to Philadelphia, opening an architectural firm and a publishing house. Samuel, practicing by himself during this period, designed the Theodore Green Apothecary at 500-02 Divisadero (1888, now San Francisco Landmark #182), remodeled the John McMullen House at 827 Guerrero (1890, now San Francisco Landmark #123) and also designed the following Pacific Heights buildings - 2169 and 2175 Green, 2602 and 2604 Pacific (1889), and 2218 Clay (1891).

Samuel Newsom's most prestigious assignment during this period was to design the spectacular Horticultural and Agricultural Building for the 1894 California Midwinter Fair, which was held in Golden Gate Park. The building was 266 feet long by 190 feet wide and its dome had a diameter of 101 feet, reaching 90 feet in height. It was one of the three largest buildings of the Fair, holding attractive exhibits of agricultural production from many California counties and foreign countries. The architectural style was characteristic of the early Spanish period in California with low, graceful arches, domes and towers.



In 1898 Newsom took on 22 year-old Frederick H. Meyer, as a draftsman initially, but rapidly promoted him to partner. Together they designed 1916 Octavia and 1901 Pacific, both in 1899.

Samuel's son Sidney Barker Newsom joined Newsom & Meyer as a draftsman and when Meyer departed in 1901 to start his own practice, Sidney was elevated to partner. Sidney had also trained in New York with Schroeder & Parish. Joseph Cather Newsom returned from Philadelphia, and the firm of Newsom, Newsom & Newsom was in practice briefly until J. C. moved to Los Angeles again. Newsom (Samuel) & Newsom (Sidney) remained together and one of the first examples of their work in Pacific Heights is 2972 Pacific, designed in 1901.



2972 Pacific Avenue

2972 Pacific was built for merchant Leon Lewin and his wife, Lillian, on a 28'6" wide lot. Leon had originally bought a 71'6" parcel of land on the block, but sold off a 15' wide strip to the east and a 28' lot to the west. The strip to the east allowed access to 2950 Pacific and in 1907, Albert Farr designed the Cape Cod style house there, which is set back on the Broadway side of the block. Julia Morgan designed 2974 Pacific in 1916 on the lot to the west.

The McEnerney judgment establishing that title to 2972 Pacific did belong to Lillian G. Lewin was recorded on September 26, 1910 and the Lewin's continued to own the house until January 1919 when they sold it to Virginia Whiting Newall. It remained in the Newall family until it was sold by Jane Newall in 2001.

Samuel & Sidney Newsom designed 2470 Broadway and the matching pair of homes at 2815 and 2821 Steiner in 1902. In 1903 they designed the large triplex at 2928-32 Washington. Between 1904 and 1905, this productive partnership added 2676 and 2698 Pacific; 2629, 2647 and 2651 Pierce; 2637 Union, and 2576-80 Washington (now 12 apartments) to their impressive portfolio.

One of the last buildings Samuel & Sidney Newsom designed together in 1908 was a residence and laboratory at 2676-86 Union on the northeast corner of Broderick, for Theodore Kytka, a handwriting and photographic expert. That building still looks much the same today as in this antique postcard view, and has been converted to six residential condominiums.



Samuel Newsom collapsed and died on the evening of September 1, 1908, on a ferry boat taking him home across the Bay. Sidney and Samuel's other son, Noble, continued the Newsom & Newsom partnership name until the late 1920's.

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