

Pacific Heights Architects #28 - William Mooser

Just a few individuals started dynasties of San Francisco design and architectural accomplishment. Charles M. Rousseau (followed by sons Charles J., Arthur and Oliver) would be one; Julius Case Mathews (followed by sons Walter, Edgar and Arthur) would be another. However, William Sebastian Mooser was by far the earliest, and by 1961 the firm names of William Mooser or Wm. Mooser & Son had been respected in the local architectural community for 100 years through the distinguished efforts of three generations of William Mooser.

William Sebastian Mooser was born in Geneva, Switzerland in 1834. He studied architecture in his native land before arriving in San Francisco on October 10, 1854. One of his first jobs was at the Navy Yard designing naval structures, but he soon followed many other fortune seekers of his generation and set out for the mines. He later based himself in Virginia City, Nevada to practice architecture, designing and supervising the building of at least four substantial commercial buildings there.

In 1858 Mooser returned to San Francisco, at first joining pioneer architect Victor Hoffman in practice and then opening his own office in 1861. One early Mooser design still surviving, and therefore one of San Francisco's oldest buildings, is the 1864 Pioneer Woolen Mill. It is a red-brick building with broad plank floors resting on exposed wood columns, acutely-angled onto Polk Street near Beach. During the Civil War the building was used to manufacture uniforms for Union troops. It is now incorporated into the Ghirardelli Square complex designated in 1970 as San Francisco Landmark #30. Mooser designed a second building for the Pioneer Woolen Mills across Polk Street from the first one. That survived for almost 100 years, but was demolished to be replaced by the Fontana Towers at 1000 and 1050 North Point.



The Pioneer Woolen Mill
acutely angled onto Polk Street

Most of the buildings in Ghirardelli Square were designed between 1899 and 1918 by Mooser's eldest son, William H. Mooser (1868-1962), for the chocolate manufacturer D. Ghirardelli Company. In 1962, the buildings were saved from demolition by Lurline and William Matson Roth who hired Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons to develop them into a retail and office complex, for which they received a collaborative achievement award from the American Institute of Architects in 1965.



2702 California Street

William S. Mooser entered into a few other partnerships during his career in the City, notably with English architect W. J. Cuthbertson in the early 1890's. Despite a great deal of his work being lost in the fire which followed the 1906 earthquake, we are fortunate to be able to admire in Pacific Heights the group of Queen Anne's at 2811-2821 Buchanan Street, designed by Mooser in 1893, and the magnificent home at 2702 California Street, which he designed in 1887 for carriage maker John Dupuy. The building contract notice in the June 15, 1887 *California Architect & Building News* quotes a \$7,500 construction cost for this house. For many years split into two townhouses, front and rear, the house has recently been restored to its original configuration.

Mooser was well respected in the local architectural community and was a founding member of the San Francisco Architectural Society in 1861. His eldest son, William Mooser II, joined him in practice in 1890 and continued the name of Mooser & Son after his father died of kidney failure on November 17, 1896. Since 1886, the Mooser family had lived in the magnificent Casebolt House at 2727 Pierce. This house graced the cover of the 1968 Junior League of San Francisco publication *Here Today* and is San Francisco Landmark #51. It was the original manor house of Cow Hollow, built for owner Henry Casebolt circa 1870. Architectural information prior to 1880 is difficult to find, and the house was landmarked without a firm of architects being associated with it. After Henry Casebolt sold it, the house was owned for some years by a client of Mooser's, Capt. Thomas G. Taylor. Although Mooser did not design the Casebolt House, his son William Mooser II, designed the house just to the north, 2733 Pierce, in 1899 under the Mooser & Son company name.



The Casebolt House, the Mooser family residence for 10 years.

In 1900, during the Phelan administration, William Mooser II became the first person appointed to the position of City architect, responsible for the plans and supervision of all City construction, in charge of the new Building Bureau and its building inspectors, and author of the first San Francisco building code. [Another son, Louis H. Mooser was a prominent real estate broker and President of the San Francisco Real Estate Board, 1919-20.]

William Mooser III (1893-1969), known as William Mooser, Jr. for most of his life, was educated in France, graduating from the Sorbonne in 1911 and the renowned Parisian architectural school *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1922. Returning to San Francisco in 1923, he apprenticed with MacDonald and Couchot, and later joined his father in practice for many years. He was appointed the architect for the Art Deco-style building that now houses the National Maritime Museum on Beach Street at Polk. His best known work, however, is the Santa Barbara County Courthouse, which has been called the most beautiful government building in America. Constructed in 1926 after the June 29, 1925 Santa Barbara earthquake destroyed much of the downtown including the 1872 courthouse on the same site, this building is now a local, state and national historic landmark.



Santa Barbara County Courthouse

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