

## Pacific Heights Architects #32 - Sylvain Schnaittacher

*The focus of this series is architects who had an influence over the way Pacific Heights looks today. Sylvain Schnaittacher was a highly-regarded San Francisco-born architect and one who was very involved in maintaining the standards of the profession.*



Sylvain Schnaittacher was born in San Francisco on November 30, 1874, the son of Carl Jacob and Pauline Schnaittacher. Sylvain graduated from Boys High School and studied at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art (now the San Francisco Art Institute). In 1891 he started work for A. Page Brown as a draftsman. In a short period of time, Brown had created an important collection of work and contributed to the training of some of San Francisco's finest architects including Bernard Maybeck and Willis Polk. After Brown's unfortunate death from a horse and buggy accident in 1896, at the age of only 36, Schnaittacher and Frank Van Trees completed his projects. In 1897, Schnaittacher opened his own practice with an office at 206 Kearny. Some of his earliest commissions in 1897-99 were industrial buildings South of Market.

Like many architects, Schnaittacher took a year off at the turn of the century to travel in Europe studying the history of architecture. He returned to San Francisco in 1901 and was awarded one of the first State Architects Certificates ever issued (number A17) in August 1901. In 1905 he was elected to the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). He lived with his widowed mother on Van Ness, moving her after the 1906 earthquake and fire to 1901 California. In 1908 he married his wife Cecilia. They lived first at 1770 Pacific, then moving after the birth of their son in 1911 to 1369 Hyde, and finally in 1915, to 3513 Jackson where Schnaittacher would live for the rest of his life.

In common with most of the architects of his era, Schnaittacher designed a variety of buildings, including 154 Sutter (1907), the former Argonaut Club at 421 Powell/400 Post (1909), on that intersection's north-west corner across from Union Square, and the Paige Motor Car Company building at 1699 Van Ness (1919, southwest corner of Sacramento), now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and used as the offices of a real estate brokerage company today.

Schnaittacher's legacy to San Francisco residential architecture consists of several fine single family homes and apartment buildings, such as in Presidio Heights at 3980 Clay (1905), 3444 Washington and 3580 Washington (both 1906), 3530 Washington (1907), 3452 Jackson (1908) and 3524 Jackson (1910), and in Pacific Heights, two very similar apartment buildings with spacious units at 3055 Pacific (1921, 5 apts) and 2855 Jackson (1923, 6 apts). Both Pacific Heights apartment buildings have been converted to individually-owned condominiums - a testament to the quality of his work.



3055  
Pacific



2855  
Jackson

Concerned about the need for formal training in the field, Schnaittacher served on the Examining Committee of the State Civil Service Commission for draftsmen. He was appointed to the State Board of Architecture in 1910 and was its Secretary/Treasurer from 1912 until he died. For the San Francisco Chapter of the AIA he was Secretary from 1907 through to 1916, Vice-President 1917-18, and President 1919-20. He was elected to the AIA National Board of Directors in 1924 and appointed Regional Director of the Western States. He was highly regarded in the architectural community and his sudden death on February 11, 1926 was a shock to all.

In 1924, Schnaittacher had teamed up with Bakewell and Brown (with Albert Lansburgh and Bernard Maybeck in consulting roles) to design what was perhaps one of his finest works, the impressive Temple Emanu-El (Arguello at Lake), which was awarded a Distinguished Honor in Architecture by the AIA in 1927.



Schnaittacher's season pass to the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.

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