

Charlene Duval, Executive Secretary

cduval@sourisseauacademy.org

Leilani Marshall, Archivist

lmarshall@sourisseauacademy.org

Phone: 408 808-2064

Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

Eccentric Architecture!

by Thomas Layton

Les Amis (The Friends)

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[140] **Battlements! — on City Hall?** For over a century-and-a-half, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties have provided a blank canvas for architectural flights of fancy. Constructed in 1855, San Jose's first City Hall, designed by Levi Goodrich, was conceived as a medieval fortress with rooftop parapets and battlements — perhaps to protect crooked politicians from their constituents! When some of these masonry flourishes collapsed in the earthquake of 1868, the building was remodeled with a Greek Revival facade, which stood until its destruction in the 1906 Earthquake.



[141] **Sarah's cottage!** But eccentricity remained alive and well! Beginning in 1884 with a six-room farmhouse, Sarah Winchester was driven by mystical belief to undertake three decades of expansion, finally reaching a height of seven-stories (shown here) just before the 1906 Earthquake reduced it to the three-stories that we see today. In a twist of fate, five months after Sarah's death in 1922, the major lifetime achievement of this intensely private woman was christened the Winchester Mystery House and opened as a tourist attraction.



[142] **Defending Seabright!** With its cut-stone battlements boldly facing the Pacific, this venerable castle appeared sufficient to repel any Naval attack upon the sunbathers sprawled along Seabright Beach. But, never judge a book by looking at its cover! Built in 1899 as a commercial bathhouse, *Seabright Castle*'s rock-cut outer walls were in reality a sculptured stucco skin plastered over a flimsy wooden frame. After multiple incarnations including *Casa del Mar Restaurant* during the 1940s and as an art gallery during the 1950s, the castle was torn down in 1967 when the pounding surf washed away its foundation.



[143] **An Egyptian Temple at 21st and San Antonio!** The year was 1909, and the neighbors watched with growing consternation as A.D.M. Cooper's Art Studio began to take shape at the corner of 21st and San Antonio Streets. Nothing in their experience could have prepared them for this imposing Egyptian Temple, fronted by a row of polychrome pillars intricately painted with Pharaonic symbols. Nor would they ever come to terms with the paintings of nudes (many of which were snatched up by local drinking establishments) that enlivened the gallery's interior walls.

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History
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[144] **Casinos on the beach!** For two glorious years following its construction in 1904, the roof of *Neptune's Casino* on the Santa Cruz Beach supported enough onion-topped parapets (over 15 of them) to outshine a Russian Imperial skyline! Shortly after it burned to the ground in June 1906, it was replaced by the Moorish-inspired domed building and arched colonnade that we know today.



[145] A Pueblo in Los Gatos? From the Hearst Castle in San Simeon to the *Women's City Club* in Berkeley, Julia Morgan was always ready for a new architectural challenge. Thus, in 1910, she accepted a commission to design the Pueblo-style *Montezuma Mountain School for Boys*. The school was located in the hills above Los Gatos, where a self-governing student body would follow a hands-on curriculum that was intended to foster the development of self-confident and civically engaged young men. Thus, this architectural style, popular in the Southwest and California (and consonant with the then-popular Mission Revival and Spanish Colonial styles) seemed appropriate for the dormitory and classroom center. The school closed in 1955 and was subsequently stripped of its Pueblo-style flourishes. It now serves as the *Sisters of Presentation Conference and Retreat Center*.



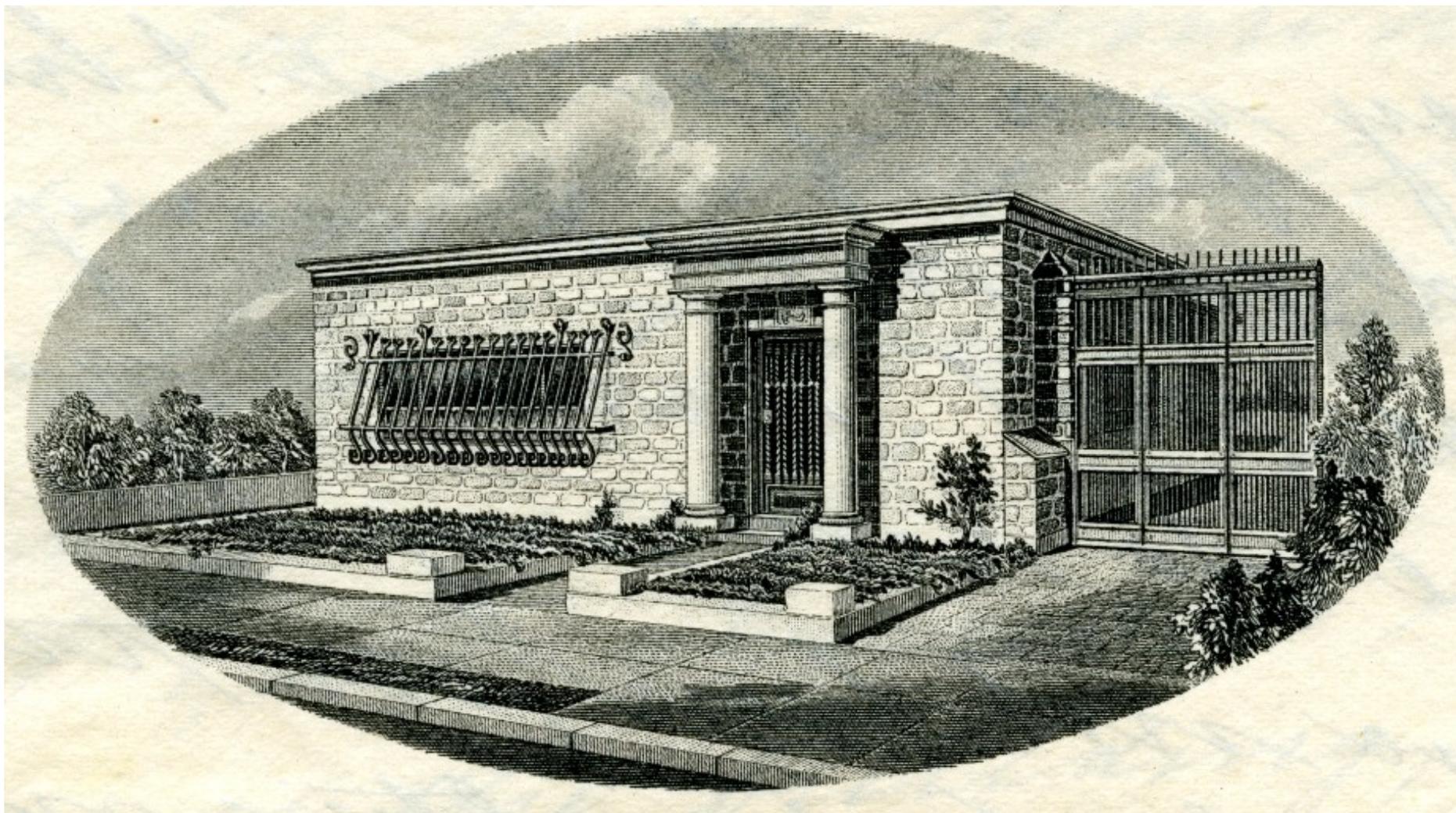
[146] A Chinese store in Monterey! G.T. Marsh and Sons or *Marsh's Oriental Art Store* was built in 1928 by Japanese craftsmen and includes Szechuan Chinese architecture to mimic (rather loosely) a Chinese mercantile compound. The landmark store operated in Monterey until 1998; and in 2005, a new owner restored the historic building. Now on the National Register of Historic Places and a City of Monterey Landmark, you may once again shop for oriental art at 700 Camino El Estero in Monterey!



[147] **A Lighthouse on Santa Clara Street!** Between 1924 and 1929, Grace Baptist Church at the northeast corner of Santa Clara and Seventh Streets featured a lighthouse atop the roof, with a red light —symbolizing *darkness-sin* and the *blood of Jesus* — and a white light — signifying *purity and heaven* — followed by the question: *Are you going there?* Architects Binder and Curtis designed the building’s Mission-style auditorium in 1921. Bereft of its lighthouse, the building now houses the *Bistro Noodle Restaurant*, featuring Vietnamese cuisine.



[148] **Cutsie in Carmel!** By the mid 1920s, Carmel was already a tourist destination, replete with Storybook architecture. Examples like *Jane's Cake Shop* on *Fairy Tale Court* contrived to create what would later be called *Kodak Moments*. The sandwich board dates this photo as the film, *You Can't Take it With You*, was released in 1938!



[149] **Bauhaus Botanical!** By the end of World War I, German architects, designers and artists had rejected Victorian complexity. The Bauhaus movement toward simplicity saw the most modern residential structures reduced to box-like cubes. German botanist, Herman Knoche, built his laboratory (shown here on his 1933 stationery) at 694 Miller Street in that tradition — except for the incongruous, patched-on, classical pillars framing the entry.



[150] **A Scottish Castle in Ben Lomond.** Inspired by childhood memories of Scottish castles, in 1927, stonemason Robert Howden (who manufactured ceramic tiles in Oakland) handpicked each stone for color and texture in order to build his castle at Ben Lomond, shown here during construction. Want to own your own fortress overlooking the San Lorenzo River? Howden Castle was recently listed for \$1.6 million!



[151] **A Byzantine Museum.** Rosicrucian Park was established in 1927 as the American home of AMORC — *The Ancient Mystic Order of the Rosy Cross* — committed to the preservation of a tradition of esoteric knowledge and learning going back thousands of years. The Oriental Museum, influenced by Byzantine style architecture, was completed in 1930. Its facade featured arched windows, keyhole doorways, a crenellated roofline, and large ancient-looking cracks. It was demolished in the 1960s to make room for a new museum.



[152] **A Moorish Planetarium.** The Planetarium at Rosicrucian Park, completed in 1936, was built in Moorish style to honor the contributions of ancient Arab astronomers. It housed the first American-made star projector designed to screen the constellations of the night sky onto the hemispheric underside of its domed ceiling.



[153] **Circles and Curves.** Lest you think that architectural flights of fancy ended in the 1920s, we remind you that the Mid-Century Modern designs of the late 1950s-1970s pushed the architectural envelope to new levels of excess. Consider, for example, San Jose's 1972 Center for the Performing Arts, a building formed from a pattern of circles and arches with a colonnade coiling its way up the side. This masterpiece, designed by William Wesley Peters in the tradition of Frank Lloyd Wright, was one of several similar structures built in other cities. (Photo by Tom Layton)