

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT-JULIA MORGAN & THE NORTH STAR HOUSE

by David Wright, Architect-September, 2012

The Arts and Crafts movement:

1. The Art and Crafts movement started in England in 1860 as an anti-industrialism lifestyle protest. The movement lasted from 1860-1910. Its architectural influence lasted into the 1930's. John Ruskin and William Morris were the main leaders.
2. It emphasized harmony with nature, a simple lifestyle, social and economic reform, hand-crafted arts and natural materials. The movement influenced landscaping, furniture design, wood carving, metal working, weaving, painting, literature and architecture--it was a lifestyle philosophy.
3. It spread quickly to the U.S. and particularly to California. California was the most open-minded and progressive place in the world at that time, due to the Gold Rush and economic opportunity.

It was the Silicon Valley of the time with much technical innovation including: long distance telephone, electrified buildings and systems, the Pelton wheel, deep shaft water pumping and air supply systems, massive construction projects, water supply systems and dams.

4. Berkeley was the locus of the movement then, and has long been a hot bed of social innovation and protest. Pasadena was the Southern California location of the movement--the Green brothers, architects and master builders and others adapted Craftsman styles to suit their environment.

The movement was first recognized in the Bay Area in 1868 with the construction of a house in Piedmont designed by Joseph Worchester-- it was a radical departure from the classical style of architecture common up until that time. It was simple in form using redwood shingles on the outside and planed redwood paneling inside. Redwood was the most economic and available wood in those days.

In Berkeley the movement advocated a back to nature theme that emphasized physical health, jogging, swimming, vegetarianism, vegetable gardening, reformed dress, ice-cold outdoor showers and sleeping outside.

5. Architects Bernard Maybeck and Charles Keeler became early champions and leaders. They started meeting in the 1880's to popularize the movement—the book by Keeler, "The Simple House", became sort of a bible. It defined a house as "landscape gardens with some rooms in case of rain".

They formed the "Ruskin Club" in 1898 to promote the movement. In the same year the women of Berkeley organized "The Hillside Club" to defend the environment of Berkeley. They allowed men to join in 1902.

6. The Arts and Crafts architecture movement was a broad cross-section of tastes enfolding the Prairie School, Mission Revival and the California bungalow styles. Some early buildings that represent the movement were the Unitarian Church in Berkeley by A.C. Schweinfurth, St. Johns Presbyterian Church in Berkeley by Julia Morgan, and later, Maybeck's First Church of Christ, Scientist—as well as many buildings for the Berkeley campus, Mills College and the surrounding communities.

Julia Morgan, architect

1. Julia Morgan was born in San Francisco in 1872. She grew up in Oakland and was influenced early in her life by the ideals of the crafts movement. She was a talented, headstrong and self directed young woman. In 1890, at the age of 18, she chose to enter the College of Engineering at U.C. Berkeley---this was the closest thing to an architectural school on the West Coast at that time.
2. She excelled at math and science, and was attracted to the arts and crafts movement going on around her. She studied under Bernard Maybeck in her final year at Berkeley. Graduating in 1894, she began working as an apprentice architect in local firms, helping to execute several buildings and learning the craft.
3. From 1896-1902 she attended the École des Beaux Arts in Paris ,which was acclaimed as the best fine arts school in the world, and which had a classical curriculum unchanged since the 1700's. She was the first woman ever to be accepted to the college of architecture at this prestigious school.

She became steeped in the classical form of architecture which deeply influenced her, and became a part of her professional style. In 1902, at the age of 30, she was the first woman to graduate in architecture from the École des Beaux Arts, a huge international honor. She learned architectural classicism, but was not dogmatic about it—using it when it suited her, her client or a particular site.

4. She returned to Oakland and worked for the popular architect John Howard. She also worked from her home on personal commissions (called moonlighting) until she received her California architect certification in 1904, at the age of 32. Mr. Howard was not pleased when she struck out on her own. She opened an office in San Francisco in 1906, which was promptly destroyed by the Great Earthquake.

The earthquake caused a desperate need for architects and engineers to rebuild the city; and her business and reputation evolved quickly. Julia always worked alone, but collaborated with several other architects during her career and training. She had many assistants (worker slaves) in her office as many as 9-10 apprentices in good times.

5. She practiced for 47 years having projects mostly in California: but that ranged from Hawaii, to Utah and Missouri. She designed over 700 buildings in her career. This was a huge body of work in those days, and still is today. Her work was always original, and

influenced by the natural environment; the sights, colors and materials of her native California landscape.

She enjoyed a choice of styles varying from the warmth of Mediterranean, the simplicity of the California missions, the woodsy charm of the California bungalow and even a wild fling with the Bavarian in some of the Sierra Nevada mountain sites.

She was a perfectionist using only the finest of materials, creating full-sized drawings of many details, studying many renditions of each project, and using highly developed craft elements.

Due to her engineering education, and because of her early experience inspecting construction in the field, she was more accomplished in the area of building technology than most men of her day. She was familiar with reinforced concrete, stone & brick masonry, wood framing, and even adobe construction. She developed a large following of craftsmen with ateliers, or workshops, throughout California specializing in wood carving, plastering, metal working, ceramics and glass working.

6. Much of her work reflected Arts and Crafts principles. Among her best known buildings are:
 - St. Johns Presbyterian Church (1908-1910) in Berkeley.
 - Fairmont Hotel reconstruction (1906-07) in San Francisco
 - Mills College campanile and library (1905), Oakland.
 - Asilomar YMCA center and other buildings (1913) in Pacific Grove
 - Wynton estate (1933-41) in Mc Cloud, Siskiyou County, California (she replaced Bernard Maybeck after the original estate burned).
 - Hearst Castle (aka "the Ranch") (1919-1938) in San Simeon, CA (she spent twenty years commuting from San Francisco supervising the construction).

Phoebe and William Randolph Hearst were her biggest fans and patrons, commissioning dozens of projects.

7. She never married and was a loner. She never entered competitions; nor submitted articles or projects for publication; she didn't teach, would not serve on committees or give lectures---she called those who did" the talking architects."
8. She was a dedicated architect who designed for her clients, not for fame or recognition. She designed buildings from the inside out, not from a predetermined vision of a facade, which was the norm of the day. She shared profits with her office staff, and treated them as family, which was not heard of in those days.
9. Like Polk, Maybeck, the Green brothers & other peers, she did not receive her due recognition from the Eastern architectural establishment. She worked until 1951, when she closed her offices. Most of her office files were burned at her direction.

10. She did not, as is rumored, destroy all of her drawings, but gave them back to many clients in the Bay Area who eventually donated them to U.C. Berkeley. The bulk of her records and work reside in the official Julia Morgan archives at Cal-Poly in San Luis Obispo..
11. She passed away in 1957 leaving a powerful legacy-yet she died alone and under-recognized at the time. Beginning in the 1970's there was a renaissance of the California Craftsman style and recognition of her legacy, which continues today.

The North Star House

1. The North Star House is an 11,000 square foot residence built in 1905 at a cost of \$23,000. It is located on 14.6 acres of land along with several other historic buildings. It was commissioned by Arthur de Witt Foote, mine engineer, and his wife Mary Hallock Foote as a residence and social/ -business center for the North Star Mine and its investors.
2. Design was begun in 1903, so it is recognized as one of Julia Morgan's first commissions as a licensed mature architect, her first project being a faculty building at the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO. She designed other buildings prior to this but usually in conjunction with other architects.
3. The North Star house is one of the finest examples of the California Arts and Crafts movement. It is built with local materials : mine rock and ponderosa pine logs from the site, and ~~cedar~~ redwood shingles on the outside, with Douglas fir flooring and planed ~~Western red~~ Western red paneling inside. It is a simple form, using the concept of forming around a court yard, and incorporating outdoor sleeping porches. It is organic architecture that feels like it grows out of the site

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It is very unique because it is one of the very few, if perhaps the only example of Julia Morgan's architecture that has not been reconstructed or destroyed.

4. The house lay fallow after the Foote family moved out in the 1960's. It was subjected to shoddy construction modifications, the weather and horrendous vandalism for nearly ~~forty~~ 30 years. It is now saved and protected from deterioration or destruction and is "our diamond in the rough"; the future is bright!
5. The North Star House has been recognized statewide and nationally as a significant historic building, and has been adopted by the California State Historic Conservancy as a special project. It is featured in a book "Julia Morgan-Architect" by Sara Holmes Boutelle published in 1988 as perhaps her first residential project

Thank you for listening-we ask you to join the North Star Historic Conservancy to help us reconstruct the house and grounds as a cultural center for the benefit of the people of Nevada County and the State of California.

<http://northstarconservancy.org>

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