

Authors - 1980

Lengthy research uncovers tale of woman architect

Sunday, Jan. 18, 1987 — Santa Cruz Sentinel—E-3

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Correspondent

THIS YEAR IS going to be the Year of Julia Morgan, thanks to Sara Boutelle, who "gumshoed all over California for 12 years" to make a dream come true.

It was Boutelle's dream, but it is Morgan's story.

Morgan was a slender, wide-eyed girl, who looked out at the world from under her wide-brimmed hat of the 1890s ... who dared to tread where women were not wanted into the world of architecture.

Boutelle came to Santa Cruz from Brearley School in New York where she taught architectural history and served as head of the upper school. She came west because her parents and sister, Mary Holmes of the UCSC staff, were here. One of Boutelle's sons took her on a tour of Hearst Castle — "I didn't really want to go," Boutelle says, "but when I got there, I was fascinated."

Particularly interesting to her was the fact that a woman — Morgan — had designed the buildings.

"I began to ask questions about her and I discovered that no one knew much. There just wasn't any material on her. I thought surely there would be at Bancroft Library at UC-Berkeley, but there wasn't much. She designed the women's gym there ..."

Boutelle became even more interested and more determined to do something about Morgan when she learned that Morgan had got into the Sorbonne as the first woman in its architectural program.

"It was even more important to me because I had studied architectural history there, myself."

FINALLY, she learned that a nephew of Morgan was living and she contacted him. He had a basement full of papers, pictures and material that he allowed Boutelle to examine.

"I worked there for three weeks," she said, "then one day I received word that he had dropped dead. His wife was not particularly interested in the material or in letting me comb through it. But she did give it all to Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo and I spent days and weeks and months down there, going through it."

Boutelle's search took her many places. She began a photographic collection of Morgan's buildings — not all have survived, but still there was an astounding number of them, ranging from Wynton, Phoebe

History at a glance



Pete Amos/Sentinel

Julia Morgan studied architecture at the Sorbonne.

Kings Daughters Home (hospital building) in Oakland are among the most accessible, along with Hearst Castle.

Morgan was a native Californian, born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. She entered the engineering program at UC-



Morgan designs for Hearst family included Cinderella House for Phoebe Hearst.

with Morgan in Paris and everyone pulling for her, she finally was admitted to the Section of Architecture. While studying there, she was awarded several medals and commendations.

In 1902, Morgan returned to the Bay Area to work as a draftsman with the firm of Galen Howard, who was working on a master plan for UC-Berkeley. Morgan worked on the Hearst Memorial Mining building and the Greek Theater.

According to Boutelle, Howard boasted that he had "the best and most talented designer whom I have to pay almost nothing as it is a woman ..."

In 1904, Morgan started her own firm in San Francisco with Ira Hoover. One of her early commissions was the bell tower at Mills College. She designed many private homes and did the structural repair of the Fairmont Hotel after the 1906 earthquake.

BOUTELLE said that Morgan was "physically fearless, got along with the roughest types of workers and had a special rapport with crafts people."



down there, going through it."

Boutelle's search took her many places. She began a photographic collection of Morgan's buildings — not all have survived, but still there was an astounding number of them, ranging from Wyntoon, Phoebe Hearst's fanciful castle near the Oregon border, down to Southern California, and Hearst Castle.

Boutelle's interest became an obsession. She took a year's leave of absence to eat, sleep and breath Morgan's career.

"I started with a list of her buildings, but there was so little to go on. It was discouraging."

Mills College, Asilomar in Pacific Grove, the Baptist Theological Seminary and St. John's Presbyterian Church and the Berkeley Women's City Club ...

Julia Morgan studied architecture at the Sorbonne.

Kings Daughters Home (hospital building) in Oakland are among the most accessible, along with Hearst Castle.

"Julia Morgan designed buildings from 1904 to 1957, but she left us without any primary sources beyond photos, letters and a few scattered building records," Boutelle explained.

HOWEVER, this year of 1987 will bring Morgan into her own well-deserved recognition. There is now a calendar, available at local bookstores; there will be an April house tour in Berkeley, sponsored by the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association; and in the fall, Boutelle's book on Morgan will be published.

Morgan was a native Californian, born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. She entered the engineering program at UC-Berkeley, but also attended informal sessions on architecture at the home of Bernard Maybeck, one of the state's foremost architects at that time. Maybeck was on the staff at Berkeley.

It was Maybeck who encouraged Morgan to try for the Ecole des Beaux Arts at University of Paris. He wrote a letter of recommendation, so did the American ambassador, according to Boutelle's research.

"But the Ecole did not give in easily to the idea of admitting a woman," Boutelle said.

After a year of "grueling efforts"

repair of the Fairmont Hotel after the 1906 earthquake.

BOUTELLE said that Morgan was "physically fearless, got along with the roughest types of workers and had a special rapport with crafts people."

However, a young artist who drew a fanciful stairway that could not function properly got this from Morgan: "Well, young man, I cannot deal with fiction writers." That finished him.

The private homes Morgan created were "woodsy crafts houses" fitted into the curving roads along the bay hills.

For more than 20 years, she built for William Randolph Hearst, who had come to her first in 1919. They worked together until his death in 1951. Of special interest are the calendar photos of two buildings at Wyntoon, McCloud: Cinderella House



Pete Amos/Sentinel

Sara Boutelle spent 12 years researching Morgan.

and Bear House, constructed in the 1930s.

Morgan left nothing to chance. Her thoughtful planning included such details as door hardware and special plaster moldings, tile work, passive solar heating in a day when that was almost unknown, privacy

and convenience beyond the grasp of many male architects.

She was one of a kind. And it took Boutelle 12 years to dig out the complete story of this woman who never married or had a family of her own, but who understood so well what a family needed in a home.