

Insight on W.H. Weeks offered by local writer

CANDACE ATKINS
STAFF WRITER

SURELY, MOST FOLKS know by now of William Weeks who designed Watsonville High School, the Tuttle Mansion and dozens of other business and residential structures in the area.

But do they know Weeks was a Sunday school teacher? Or that in 1902 he designed Hazel Hawkins Memorial Hospital in Hollister for a man who'd just lost his 7-year old granddaughter — at about the same time Week's own daughter died? Or that he was an avid reader and bicyclist?

Betty Lewis, who does research and writing on local history, offers readers insights on the man, William Weeks, as well as information on his many building designs in her biography "W.H. Weeks Architect," published by Panorama West Books.

The architect's record of accomplishments don't need restating. His regal and lyrical designs require no further adjectives or praise.

What has been missing is description of his personality, family life and values — and this is what Lewis provides. After 12 years researching county records, old newspapers and correspondence, Lewis gives readers a better idea about the architect as a person.

Weeks, Lewis says, was a tall man with blue eyes and dark hair. A family man, he had a subtle sense of humor and was extremely honest in his profession and relations.

Photographs in the book underscore her descriptions. Posed with his family in two pictures, he has his arm around his son in one, and has a young boy, probably a nephew, leaning on his shoulder in another. In the early part of the century, even family pictures were usually more formal; people didn't show affection as Weeks chose to with his relatives.

In a photograph with his wife, who didn't come up to his shoulder, he gives the impression of success — a big man used to getting his way.

In the book's illustrations, Weeks is almost always wearing a vest and hat, as was the custom, and has his hands stuck casually in his pockets in a relaxed, confident stance.

Weeks didn't take criticism lightly. In 1921,

his design for the foundation of Bishop High School was criticized in the Inyo Register.

Weeks was quick to respond, saying, "I notice where one of your papers refers to your building (high school) as an inferior building. Where this man gets his information is a puzzle to me...Your building, in material, equipment and finish will be superior to anything in the state at the present time and will be equal to the very best that are now under construction...I am waiting patiently

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until such time as you have to exhibit a beautiful High School to confuse all your critics."

Bishop High School, completed in 1921, still stands.

Lewis fills the first part of her book with stories about the architect as well as a chronology of his professional work. Her writing, though it could have been tighter, makes for enjoyable reading and contains as much information on William Weeks as one might want.

Her five pages of references are useful for people interested in local history.

Especially good are Lewis' captions that tell the fate of both local buildings and Weeks' structures in other parts of the state, many still used for their original purposes.

She is to be commended for her dedication to historical research and her determination to find out about the man, William Weeks.



Sam Vestal

Above, the Tuttle Mansion, an example of William Weeks' residential designs, was built in 1899. It was converted to five apartments in 1948, and in 1974, was purchased and restored by Ralph A. Oliver and Anthony Campos for an office building. Right, Watsonville's Betty Lewis, author of "W.H. Weeks Architect."

