

THE
WALPOLE SOCIETY
NOTE BOOK



PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY

2007-2008

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Graphic Design by Jeanette Huie

Printing under the supervision of The Printing Business, San Francisco

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The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco

In a residential area west of downtown San Francisco, a remarkable piece of church architecture was constructed in 1894-1895, the Church of the New Jerusalem, commonly called the Swedenborgian Church. It was the brainchild of its pastor, the Reverend Joseph Worcester (1836-1913), who aspired to be an artist or architect in his youth but eventually followed in his father's footsteps and was ordained a minister in the Swedenborgian Church.¹ The building represents a confluence of two forces in nineteenth-century American culture—the transcendentalist notion that the beauty of nature can inspire religious feelings and the arts-and-crafts philosophy that emphasizes simplicity, hand-made objects and collaboration among craftsmen. With extensive Douglas-fir paneling left unpainted and rafters of raw California madrone tree-trunks retaining their bark, the sanctuary resembles a lodge in the wilderness as much as it does a church, an impression furthered by the large hearth on its rear wall, whose fires impart a smoky tang to the atmosphere.

Worcester grew up in Massachusetts but journeyed to California in 1864, spending time in Yosemite, where he was entranced by the grandeur of the scenery.² The previous year he had been made a "licentiate" of the Swedenborgian church, which allowed him to act like a pastor on a temporary basis, baptizing the daughter of Yosemite pioneer James Hutchings during the summer of 1864.³ He also earned his keep, doing odd jobs for Hutchings in return for room and board. That summer Yosemite was visited by some distinguished citizens, including the recently-widowed Mrs. Thomas Starr King, the Rev. H.N. Bellows, head of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, as well as his predecessor,

Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of New York's Central Park, who had been hired to run John C. Fremont's mining operations at Mariposa. Worcester connected with the Swedenborgian congregation in San Francisco, some of whose members were less than inspired by their pastor, a lawyer with little theological training. This splinter group urged Worcester to go home to be ordained and come back to San Francisco to become their leader. Worcester returned to Massachusetts and attended the newly-founded New-Church Theological School in Waltham, run by his father, the Rev. Thomas Worcester. In 1867, he was ordained and ventured west again, becoming pastor of the "Second" Swedenborgian congregation in San Francisco.⁴ In the late 1860s, he revisited Yosemite, touching base with James Hutchings, whose Hutchings Hotel at the base of Sentinel Rock featured the Big Tree Room with a huge live tree growing through the roof. Worcester may also have seen John Muir's rustic cabin nearby that was built over a diverted tributary of Yosemite creek.

The sight of these handmade buildings that reflected their owners' reverence for nature would have impressed Worcester favorably. His architectural studies during his student years at Harvard in the 1850s had made him an acolyte of the English critic John Ruskin, a believer in the divine origin of nature, who maintained that building materials should retain their natural beauty and not be covered in paint. When Worcester was given the opportunity to build a modest house for himself in the suburb of Piedmont in the hills east of Oakland, he concocted an unconventional design that featured untreated shingles on the whole of its exterior—not just the roof—and unpainted redwood paneling inside. Finished in 1878, this house is considered the first arts-and-crafts bungalow in California and one of the earliest in the country. The young architect Bernard Maybeck rented a cottage nearby and called the sight of the beautiful warm-tinted redwood "a revelation." In planning the construction of this house, Worcester was fussy, a quality he would demonstrate during the building of his church: "I have given Theodore [the builder] much trouble about it," he wrote his nephew, Alfred

Worcester, "considering that it is to cost so little."⁵ Frugality was high on Worcester's scale of virtues. Not painting the wood saved money.

Around 1890, Worcester designed another house for himself, this one on Russian Hill in San Francisco. Once again, unlike the fashionable dwellings of the period with elaborate decorative flourishes in the Queen Anne style, it had a simple hipped roof, unpainted shingles on the outside and natural redwood paneling inside. A path through a little garden led to the front door. An extant photograph of the living room shows a sizable hearth decorated with pine cones and branches. Landscape paintings by his friend, William Keith, adorn the bookcase, adding to nature's presence in the room. The paintings are not displayed in the elaborate gold frames of the period, as ostentation of any kind was anathema to Worcester. The few modest pieces of antique furniture are haphazardly placed here and there in the room. No attempt at a coherent aesthetic plan is discernable. Worcester was uncomfortable with *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic theories that divorced beauty from moral and religious values.⁶ As in his Piedmont house, the most stunning feature of the room was its unobstructed view through a large bay window towards San Francisco Bay.

Because of his interest in art and architecture, Worcester became close friends with many cultural leaders in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1882, he consoled the artist William Keith after the death of his first wife, and they became the best of friends. Interestingly, Worcester urged Keith to take a sketching tour of the Franciscan missions of Southern California at a time when the missions were just beginning to find appreciation in California culture. Like John Ruskin, Worcester was constantly looking back to a time before the industrial revolution when men lived closer to nature, creating shelter and utilitarian objects with their own hands. One of the noticeable objects in his Russian Hill interior was a Native American rug.⁷

Worcester had a habit of clipping out articles relevant to architecture and pasting them in scrapbooks, one of which was



East (Lyon Street) façade and entrance.



South façade with bell tower seen from garden.

devoted to Boston's Trinity Church, an 1870s collaboration between the architect Henry Hobson Richardson and various artists and sculptors. Encouraging artists and craftsmen to work together as in a medieval guild was another of Ruskin's ideas that gained currency in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, seen first in the Trinity Church project, but then in huge undertakings like Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and California's Midwinter Fair, held in San Francisco in 1894. The California Building in the Chicago fair was designed by Arthur Page Brown, who had risen to the forefront of San Francisco architects after having been employed as a draftsman at McKim, Meade and White in New York. Brown's building was inspired by the early California missions and featured an approximate facsimile of the Santa Barbara Mission's façade at its front, arched windows along the side and a roof covered by orange tiles. Inside the building, upper walls were decorated with large murals depicting California scenery by Thaddeus Welch, who had briefly studied with Keith in the 1860s. Several of these elements would reappear in the Swedenborgian church, designed the following year.

In the early 1890s, Joseph Worcester started planning to build a little church for his congregation that had been meeting in the impersonal confines of a building called "Druid's Hall."⁸ But in contemplating this move, he ran up against a major obstacle. As the second Swedenborgian society in San Francisco, Worcester's flock numbered only about fifty members, and questions were raised among certain West Coast Swedenborgians about whether two societies of this small sect could be justified in an outpost like San Francisco. In August 1890, this issue almost came to a head at the first meeting of the Pacific Coast New-Church Association, organized to oversee all Swedenborgian activities on the West Coast. In an undated letter to his friend William Keith, Worcester wrote, "There is some feeling, roused by our Union meetings that we ought to be one society."⁹ And in a subsequent letter, Worcester reported, "There was very quickly shown a jealousy of the ministry [that] made it very difficult for me to keep

my place on the list of ministers.” But after receiving support from allies, especially from John Doughty, leader of the other San Francisco faction, he was allowed to continue as pastor.¹⁰ The issue did not go away, especially when the two congregations met as one during 1890 and 1891, while the First Society was building a new church. After they had moved into their new building in late 1891, Worcester wrote, “They have now expressed, with a cordiality for which we warmly and sincerely thank them, their wish that we might share their new home,” but concluded, “We are sure to share many things with them, if not their building.”¹¹

Construction of a second Swedenborgian church in San Francisco would render impossible any unity of congregations, but Worcester clearly had his heart set on building his church. In March of 1892, he wrote to his nephew Alfred Worcester about discussions he had had concerning the appearance of the new building. “I hope our plan will not be too aesthetic,” he wrote, implying that beauty was useless without moral content. “My artist friends are much bent on making it so... A pretty church I don’t think I could stand.”¹² In early 1893 he was already raising money for the project. Worcester was aware that his project would siphon off money that could be used in other ways. In January of 1894, he wrote Willard H. Hinkley, pastor of the Swedenborgian church in Brookline, Massachusetts, “Our Body is just about ready to build a very small church... I have not a certain understanding of the wisdom of it.” He then implied that his congregation was pressuring him to build the church, explaining, “I cannot question their right to provide them (sic) with a permanent house of worship.”¹³

When raising money for this project, Worcester declared that none of the benefactors would receive any public acknowledgement, a move that was couched in high moral language having to do with avoiding the worldly vanity that credit for generosity might bring on the benefactors.¹⁴ But hiding the source of the money also shielded the donors from remonstrations from those who thought it was a waste. For different reasons, the same obscurity surrounds aspects of the building’s design. Page Brown

was hired as architect of record for the project, but as was often the case with this popular architect, too many jobs came his way for him to manage on his own. The likelihood is that he delegated some of this commission to a subordinate, and scholars have debated which draftsman associated with his firm was the chief designer—Bernard Maybeck or Albert Schweinfurth (1864-1900).¹⁵ Drawing up plans for the outside of the little church was not a challenge, since Worcester had settled on using a drawing of a Romanesque church near Verona as the basis for its appearance. This drawing had been provided by Bruce Porter (1865-1953), writer, artist and designer of stained glass windows, recently returned from a period of study in Europe. A member of the congregation, Porter became intimately involved with the planning of the church, volunteering to contribute two stained glass windows of his own manufacture, as well as a little vertical leaded glass window that supposedly had once been installed in Westminster Abbey. How Porter came to possess such a window is a mystery. He may have gathered up shards of glass from a construction project at the Abbey and formed them into a window himself. In any case, inclusion of this window along with the church's Romanesque exterior demonstrates Worcester's desire to link his new church with hallowed, old world religious traditions. Porter was also known as a landscape architect and probably played a role in laying out the little garden adjoining the church.

Whoever actually drew up the plans for the church did so under the detailed guidance of Joseph Worcester. No one later claimed that it had been his work—because it was more Worcester's than anybody else's. Many years later, Bernard Maybeck told Worcester's successor, the Reverend Othmar Tobisch, that he had been the draftsman, a claim that was reinforced by the testimony of Maybeck's and Worcester's friend, the Berkeley poet and essayist, Charles A. Keeler.¹⁶ Mrs. John Baeck of Berkeley, the daughter of Timothy Reardon, another of Worcester's parishioners, remembered that Worcester had been "especially delighted in the young draughtsman [Maybeck], who

felt so keen an interest in his work."¹⁷

Maybeck was a charter member of the San Francisco Guild of Arts and Crafts, an organization of architects, artists, writers and musicians founded in 1894 to oversee cultural standards on the West Coast. The Guild was mostly the brainchild of Worcester's friend and neighbor, the architect Willis Polk (1867-1924), working with Bruce Porter. Page Brown along with Polk and Maybeck were three of only nine original architect members. The son of a craftsman who designed architectural decorations, Maybeck had studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and worked for the New York firm, Carrere and Hastings before landing in San Francisco. He was fluent in German and French and respected as a man deeply knowledgeable in world architecture. In 1894, he was hired as a lecturer on architecture at the University of California. As previously noted, he had been a Piedmont neighbor of Joseph Worcester.

Soon after the church opened in 1895, Worcester told an interviewer that the building was a kind of architectural sermon that would embody the virtues of honesty and humility while also communicating certain truths from Swedenborgian doctrine.¹⁸ Worcester had designed the layout so that the visitor would pass through a garden before gaining access to the church. The garden contained a birdbath, and the birds drinking from the water symbolized the human spirit drinking from the fountain of wisdom. The birds' ability to fly up to the heavens foreshadowed the human spirit's ascension after death. The birdbath metaphor was reinforced inside the church with Bruce Porter's stained glass window above the reading desk, depicting birds in a flower-bedecked birdbath.¹⁹

The garden figured prominently in Swedenborgian tradition, as Emanuel Swedenborg maintained one of the most celebrated gardens in Stockholm, surrounded by a wall, as was the San Francisco version. The walled garden was the earthly equivalent of the Garden of Eden, and city dwellers could escape from the noise and confusion of modern life by entering this place of beauty.



Interior view towards altar. Porter's birdbath window at top.



Interior view towards hearth with "Mission" chairs.

The healing power of nature for urban men and women was acknowledged by the English romantic poets and the American transcendentalist philosophers, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). This notion was also deeply ingrained in Joseph Worcester's belief system. Writing about his Piedmont house surrounded by open country, he noted that "friends will be glad to come to it for *relief from city life*" [emphasis added],²⁰ and in an earlier letter to Alfred Worcester, written from the Mountain House Ranch, he praised the natural beauty of this rural outpost, saying that "all things conspire to *rest and heal* a city-worn boy."²¹ [Emphasis added]. William Wordsworth (1770-1850), whose poems often celebrate the joy of nature, was one of Worcester's heroes. He wrote his college-age nephew, "I'll never forget the summer I began to read [Wordsworth]; it seems now like the brightest and most beautiful summer of my life."²² And later he wrote Alfred, "I want you to read... Wordsworth and Ruskin, and Lowell, and perhaps Emerson and such writers; they will stimulate your efforts to a noble life more than you now dream of."²³

During 1894 when he was ready to build the new church, Worcester had to overcome the additional obstacle of hard economic times brought on by the panic of 1893. "The general financial straitness has affected us," he reported. "The special lesson of the year to our Society has been in connection with our efforts to secure a little church building... We are learning through this... to see and love the terms upon which we may possess outward goods, and to fear almost more than want the gratification of our heart's desires."²⁴ Nevertheless, Worcester purchased a lot for the church at the corner of Lyon and Washington Streets on April 21, 1894 and signed a contract with a builder on August 20 of that year.²⁵ In June he traveled to the Santa Cruz Mountains in search of sturdy trees that could serve as rafters for the new church. He met "a young mountaineer farmer, a child of the forest," who became fascinated with the idea of using untreated logs as exposed supports in a church building. Worcester chose the most suitable of the trees—madrones, native to California, some with peeling bark and others with the bark intact as they grow in

nature, and in September the rancher, a Mr. Martin and his wife, loaded the trees on the back of a horse-drawn wagon and delivered them to San Francisco.

Worcester returned to town in July "brown as a nut and cheerful as usual."²⁶ He then took a trip to redwood groves north of San Francisco and under the guidance of the lumber dealer Thomas Richardson, one of his flock and husband of the portrait painter, Mary Curtis Richardson, selected several perfect redwood trunks. He accompanied them on a steamer back to San Francisco, unafraid of the perils of such a journey because he had come to feel that his building project was under divine protection.²⁷

In obtaining building materials in such an unconventional fashion, Worcester saved a considerable amount of money. Contemporary accounts indicate that Mr. Martin charged Worcester only a nominal sum for the madrones, and there is every likelihood that Thomas Richardson donated the lumber from which the church was built. This act of generosity was repeated in the artistic embellishments of the building, including the two stained glass windows and the Westminster Abbey window contributed by Bruce Porter and the four landscape paintings by William Keith. Although no attempt was made to hide the authorship of these paintings, they are not signed, an indication of the communal spirit with which all of the contributors to the building desired to maintain.

By July of 1894, plans had been drawn up for the church's design, "decidedly unique as far as America is concerned, being low and modest in the Italian style, its tiled roof and arched doors suggesting the California mission class of architecture."²⁸ On September 20, the madrone logs were delivered to a nearby site, and construction was well underway. Page Brown was reluctant to install the unmilled rafters, complaining to Worcester that their raw appearance would run contrary to the canons of architecture. Worcester countered that he did not concern himself with architectural conventions, that he wanted the building to reflect nature's purity rather than man's refinements. At the same time,

he acknowledged that if no way could be devised to use the madrone trees, they would not be wasted, because they would be useful as firewood.²⁹ A photograph of Page Brown in the foreground of the church under construction with the rafters already in place demonstrates that the resourceful architect was able to design a method of incorporating them into the structure with iron bands piecing them together.³⁰ After the church opened in 1895, Worcester was generous in his praise of Page Brown's involvement. "I could have done nothing without the architect," he told a reporter for the *San Francisco Examiner*, and added, "He was very patient with my suggestions."³¹

By September 1894, the main building materials of the church had been acquired. The outer walls were to be composed of "clinker bricks,"—"bricks burned black or a very dark red, bricks of a color that is usually rejected, though to one who knows how to use it a color singularly appropriate and beautiful for walls."³² Worcester formulated a way of positioning the bricks and mortar to cast distinctive shadows and give the building an aged appearance.³³ For the windows, plain industrial sash panes were installed on the south side of the building, and inside, exposed concrete with no covering of lath and plaster, constituted the high walls above the wainscoting on the east and west sides of the church. Use of this humble material in what was usually considered an unfinished state satisfied Ruskin's idea of honesty in revealing a building's structural elements, while it saved money. A newspaper reporter observed, "Indeed, in original cost, it is one of the cheapest churches in the city."³⁴

The exterior appearance of the building has a Mediterranean flavor, with its mixture of Romanesque Italian and Spanish mission elements, including the arched entranceway and the orange-tiled roof. The interior has a primitive Gothic feeling that impressed several observers who wrote complimentary articles on the church after it opened. The madrone rafters constitute a kind of primitive Gothic arch as they support the ceiling; in her article in *House Beautiful* published in 1901, Mabel Clare Craft pondered, "Who was it that said that the first Gothic idea

was conceived in the forest-aisles where the interlacing branches formed the groined roof? This idea has been most perfectly carried out in this church.”³⁵ Worcester was aiming to create a basic, fundamental environment that would strike a deep chord in the emotions of the congregation. In his remarks made at the church’s dedication in March of 1895, Worcester revealed this intention when he said, “If this building...expresses in some degree the common, the universal, the childlike religious feeling, we may be humbly grateful.”³⁶

Worcester’s interest in returning to fundamental values may have been reinforced by his exposure to the ideas of Bernard Maybeck. In 1891, the short-lived periodical *Architectural News*, founded by Willis Polk, announced that Maybeck’s translation of Gottfried Semper’s treatise *Der Stil* would be published in a future issue. With his ability to read German, Maybeck was the only person in San Francisco’s community of architects who could disseminate Semper’s ideas. Semper singled out four universal fundamentals of architecture that had existed since the beginning of civilization—the mound, the roof, the hearth and the enclosing wall that keeps out intruders. All of these elements are present in the Swedenborgian church, whose garden is surrounded by a wall, and whose building site is on a hillside. Most unconventionally, the interior includes a hearth, almost unique in church architecture, the most basic source of warmth and domestic comfort. Worcester’s Piedmont house and his dwelling on Russian Hill featured prominent fireplaces in brick surrounds as in the church. Semper’s ideas complemented Worcester’s desire that his church offer the same homelike environment that delighted and relaxed his guests in Piedmont and San Francisco.³⁷

At this point, we have no way of making a decisive judgment as to whether Maybeck influenced Worcester, or vice versa, but it is striking how the interior of the Lyon Street church reflects Maybeck’s ideas and future designs. In October of 1894, while the church was being built, Maybeck gave a lecture on classical architecture at the First Unitarian Church, in which he criticized Gothic cathedrals for being overly embellished with



North wall with Keith's Spring and Summer murals and madrone rafter.



North wall with Keith's Winter mural.

ornament. At the same time, he conceded that “the Gothic church... is full of a meaning so clear that every barbarian feels himself in the presence of God when he enters a cathedral.”³⁸ With its fundamental Gothic atmosphere and restrained decorative program, the Swedenborgian church would have represented the best aspects of ecclesiastical Gothic design in Maybeck’s scale of values.

Design features that reappear in future Maybeck architectural projects include the off-center placement of the hearth and Westminster Abbey window, an idea that may have originated with Joseph Worcester, who criticized Page Brown’s penchant for balance. The off-center hearth is found in Maybeck’s design of the fireplace in Mill Valley’s Outdoor Art Club of 1904. The use of exposed concrete in interior walls can be seen in St. Augustine’s Ponce de Leon Hotel (1888) designed by Maybeck in association with Thomas Hastings. The great hall at Wynton (1902-1903), the Gothic fantasy castle that Maybeck designed for Phoebe Hearst in the wilds of Humboldt County, displays exposed bark as a means of bringing nature into an interior space. Maybeck installed a Gothic interior inside a Mediterranean/mission style building in his Faculty Club (1902-1903) at the University of California at Berkeley and drew up plans for six “Gothic” houses in Berkeley in the 1890s. Mission chairs identical to those in the Swedenborgian Church are present at Wynton and Maybeck’s Rieger house in Berkeley, and the distinctive “S-shaped” ends of the benches flanking the church’s hearth are repeated in the bench Maybeck constructed for the Bohemian Club’s Grove Clubhouse as well as a wing chair in the Isaac Flagg house.³⁹

As unusual and eccentric for church architecture as the ecclesiastical fireplace are the four murals by William Keith depicting California landscapes during different seasons of the year. The Thaddeus Welch murals in the California Building at the World’s Columbian Exposition may have suggested the idea of installing landscapes in the church’s interior. In 1875 Keith had painted a set of four seasons that captured the seasons of California, rather than those of Eastern climate zones. For

“Winter” Keith chose to paint Ocean Beach, San Francisco, where snow never falls, making a conventional winter view impossible. The “Spring” of that set portrayed Mount Tamalpais in Marin County north of San Francisco and “Autumn” a scene in Tuolumne Meadows in the mountains above Yosemite, where aspen trees provided the artist with vivid fall colors.⁴⁰ By the 1890s, the mountain scenes favored by the Hudson River school artists were out of fashion, and Keith’s murals in the church substitute generic Coast Range and Valley subjects for the more sublime topographical scenes of the earlier series.

Since California seasons are governed by precipitation rather than fluctuations in temperature, Keith’s paintings dramatize the coming and going of the rains. Three of the murals depict the cycle of rain and drought typical of California weather—the *Spring*, also known as *Seedtime*, shows the light green tonality and pools of water of the rainy season; *Summer* or *Harvest* hay wagons at work during the dry season; and *Autumn* or *Early Rains* the clearing clouds that have initiated a new cycle of fertility.⁴¹ This last painting is an illustration of Keith’s conviction that art does not need to provide explicit conventional signposts to embody a mood. No autumn foliage is present in this mural, or dramatic storm clouds. The purity of the patch of blue sky in the middle of receding clouds is the only evidence of recent rain. When explaining how to project a mood of innocence in a painting, Keith stated that no conventional props like lambs or children were needed, only a quality of light—“that if the painter should show only the sky, it would impress the spectator with a sense of the painter’s own feeling, viz., of innocence.”⁴² An autumn mood is similarly portrayed in the mural without the presence of prominent autumn attributes.

Keith’s friend Charles Keeler alluded to the “allegorical” nature of the murals, and an anonymous author of an article in *The Craftsman* connected the images to biblical phrases: e.g. *Summer* conjured up “Thrust in thy sickle and reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe;” and the receding road in *Autumn*, “An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The Way

of Heaven.” Keith was also aware of the fact that California seasons, with their pattern of autumn and winter rains preceding summer drought, repeated the seasons as they occur in the Holy Land. In 1886, he had exhibited two paintings of California scenery with the Biblical titles, *Early Rain* and *Late Rain* that evoke this parallelism.⁴³

Considered to represent *Winter*, the fourth painting is larger than the other three and stands apart from the cycle of rain and drought. The favorite of both Keith and Worcester, this dour transcription of California live-oaks owes a debt to the famous Barbizon wood interiors of Pierre-Etienne Théodore Rousseau.⁴⁴ When Keith was painting this work in January of 1896, word came to him of the death of thirty-five year old Page Brown, the result of a carriage accident. A newspaper account in the *San Francisco Call* tells us that upon hearing the sad news, Keith made the composition “more dreamy, putting thought and feeling and even a bit of sadness in his work, with just a tiny patch of hopeful blue sky in the far, far distance, at the end of that long somber path through the woods.”⁴⁵ The dark passageway, flanked by gnarled and tangled oaks, may have represented the spiritual struggles that mankind has to overcome in this world. Towards the end of his life, Keith painted a Christ figure in the foreground of a similar stand of oaks, and titled the work, *Gethsemane*, the garden where Christ faced his spiritual agony before the crucifixion.

The *Call* article mentions that the work was “particularly designed for mural decoration,” and that strategy is present in the other three paintings that show broad open foregrounds with a minimum of illusionistic detail. The stylized murals of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) were influential in 1890s America. Puvis’ murals are almost cartoon-like in their simplification of images, making little attempt at verisimilitude. Keith’s murals compromise in the direction of realism, because their purpose was to increase the presence of nature in the church’s interior.

Instead of pews, the Swedenborgian church features

rows of specially designed square back chairs inspired by furniture found in the Franciscan missions of early California. Once again, the designer of these chairs is unknown, but in his first years in San Francisco, Bernard Maybeck worked for the Charles M. Plum Company, a firm that designed furniture. He is also known to have built furniture during these years for his home in Berkeley. We do know who built the chairs—the Scotch craftsman, Alexander J. Forbes, who was a friend of Keith. Forbes constructed the chairs by hand in the old-fashioned way with mortise and tenon joints instead of nails and made the rush seats and accompanying floor mats from Sacramento River reeds.⁴⁶ Once again, we see Joseph Worcester's preference for the old craftsman's way of doing things. The chairs remind the churchgoers of the mission period of early California, while the rush seats and mats are further manifestations of California nature.

Construction of the church proceeded during the winter of 1894-1895 and its dedication occurred on March 17, 1895. Its decorative scheme was completed with the installation of the Keith paintings in February 1896. Newspapers started to take notice of "the most peculiar specimen of sacred architecture which this city affords."⁴⁷ Over the next decade glowing descriptions of the church appeared in newspapers, Sunday supplements and magazines, calling attention to the church's humble, honest beauty and its celebration of nature. One article compared the workmen to "those cathedral builders of the Middle Ages who made their statues perfect in back as well as front because God sees everywhere."⁴⁸ The church's decorative restraint as well as its espousal of natural beauty influenced home decoration as the arts-and-crafts movement made deeper inroads into California culture. Charles Keeler noted the new taste in architecture and interior design that disdained the elaborate Victorian "painted ladies" with their interiors cluttered with rococo revival furniture and bric-a-brac: "To find this [new] spirit, which would have been a delight to William Morris," he wrote in 1902, "...is one of the most remarkable features of a civilization so new as that of modern San Francisco."⁴⁹ Four years after the 1906 earthquake and

fire that destroyed virtually all of old San Francisco except the western fringes where the church is located, Louise Weick noted that it was “well worthy [of] a place of honor in the list of those things that we point out as the city’s most splendid achievements.” Nevertheless, she went on, “it would seem a desecration to call it a ‘showplace.’ It seems more like a splendidly preserved relic out of an era more warmly human, more poetic.”⁵⁰

As modernism ushered in a revolutionary era of design in the second decade of the twentieth century, the backward-looking gurus of the nineteenth century like Ruskin and Emerson became historical figures, and their aesthetic acolytes like Keith and Bruce Porter sank into obscurity when they weren’t actually ridiculed and denigrated. Joseph Worcester’s little church survived the dark ages of depression, World War and Cold War, becoming the only Swedenborgian church in San Francisco and the site of many non-Swedenborgian weddings and baptisms. In the late 1960s, a new generation started to look with favor on early California’s arts-and-crafts movement, spurred on by rebellion against the empty corporate culture of the bland 1950s. Hippies went back to nature and built things with their own hands. Ruskin, Emerson and Thoreau achieved new relevance, and ground-breaking scholars like Leslie Freudenheim publicized the achievements of arts-and-crafts activities in the West. Even non-religious citizens of our secular culture—“barbarians” in the eyes of men like Joseph Worcester and Bernard Maybeck—feel themselves to be in the presence of God when visiting the Swedenborgian church, that “splendidly preserved relic out of an era more warmly human, more poetic.”

Alfred C. Harrison, Jr.

1. The best source of information concerning the Swedenborgian Church is Leslie M Freudenheim, *Building with Nature Inspiration for the Arts & Crafts Home*, Gibbs Smith, Salt Lake City, 2005. This book expands the discussion initiated in Leslie Mandelson Freudenheim and Elisabeth Sacks Sussman, *Building with Nature Roots of the San Francisco Bay Region Tradition*, Peregrine Smith, Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City, 1974. Much of this article is based on Freudenheim's treatment of the subject, including her discussion of the arts-and-crafts influence on the church's architecture. Another source is Edward R. Bosley, "A.C. Schweinfurth," in Robert Winter, ed., *Toward a Simpler Way of Life*, Norfleet Press, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997. Bosley credits A.C. Schweinfurth as the church's draftsman, a notion that is called into question by Freudenheim. A third source is Richard Longstreth, *On the Edge of the World, Four Architects in San Francisco at the Turn of the Century*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983, especially pp. 273-277.

2. For the 1864 visit to Yosemite, see "Visitors at the Yo-Semite Valley to June 12th, 1864," *Mariposa Gazette*, June 18, 1864, p. 2. This citation was discovered by Amy R. Harrison.

3. For Joseph Worcester's ordination as a "licentiate," see "Reports of Ministries, Report of Rev. Thomas Worcester," *The New Jerusalem Magazine*, volume xxxvi, Boston, 1864, p. 36. For Worcester's baptism of Hutchings' daughter, see Brother Fidelis Cornelius, *Keith Old Master of California*, Vol. II, St. Mary's College, Moraga, CA 1956, p. 102.

4. For visitors to Yosemite, see *Mariposa Gazette*, op. cit., note 2, July 16, 1864, p. 2, and August 13, 1864, p. 2. For dissatisfied San Francisco congregation, see Alfred Worcester, "Rev. Joseph Worcester: A Memoir and Extracts from His Letters to His Nephew, Alfred Worcester," unpublished manuscript, n.d., a copy of which is available at the Swedenborgian Church Library, p. 4. Also, *A Brief Account of the Institution of the San Francisco Society of the New Jerusalem*, Edward Bosqui and Company, San Francisco, 1870, p. 4. For Worcester's ordination as Pastor and return to San Francisco, see "The Massachusetts Association," *The New Jerusalem Magazine*, September 1868, pp. 188-189.

5. For detailed discussion of the building of the Piedmont house, see Freudenheim, op. cit., pp. 8-13.

6. As noted by Freudenheim, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

7. See photos of Russian Hill interiors in Freudenheim, op. cit. pp. 24-25.

8. See "Swedenborgians," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 12, 1887, p. 7. This article claims that the second society had fifty members.

9. undated letter from Joseph Worcester to William Keith, "1030 Vallejo Street, Monday morning," in *Keith Miscellany*, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Box 3.

10. undated letter from Joseph Worcester to William Keith "1030 Vallejo Street, Wednesday morning," written in early August 1890, in *Keith Miscellany*, Box 3. Also quoted in Brother Fidelis Cornelius, *Keith Old Master of California*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1942, p. 364, where "Doughty" is wrongly transcribed as "Dayletby" and Thielsen, the pastor at Portland, OR, as "Thielam." Doughty and Worcester had a cordial relationship, and Worcester gave the eulogy at Doughty's funeral that reduced the audience to tears, as reported in the *San Francisco Bulletin*, October 3, 1893, p. 6.

11. "San Francisco Society of the New Jerusalem," *The New-Church Pacific*, volume IV, No. 12, December 1891, p. 209.
12. Letter from Joseph Worcester to Alfred Worcester dated March 1, 1892, "letter 43" in "Rev. Joseph Worcester, A Memoir and Extracts from His Letters," note 4. Quoted and discussed in Freudenheim, op. cit., p. 35.
13. For fund-raising efforts in 1893, see letter from Joseph Worcester to "Mr. Warren" dated February 21st 1893, "Thank you for your kind offering toward our contemplated building." In archives of the Swedenborgian church library and quoted in Freudenheim, op. cit., p. 38. Letter from Joseph Worcester to "Mr. Hinkley" dated "Jan. 9th 94." In archives of Swedenborgian Church library.
14. See *San Francisco Examiner*, September 20, 1895, p. 12 for Worcester's account of the fund-raising.
15. See Freudenheim, op. cit. pp. 56-57.
16. For Maybeck as draftsman, see Othmar Tobisch, *The Garden Church of San Francisco*, San Francisco Society of the New Jerusalem, San Francisco, Twentieth Printing, 1974, p. 3. For Charles Keeler's claim that Maybeck was draftsman, see Charles Keeler, "Friends Bearing Torches," unpublished manuscript, n.d. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
17. For Mrs. Baeck's letter, see *Berkeley Gazette*, November 5, 1964, p. 16.
18. *San Francisco Examiner*, September 30, 1895, p. 12.
19. See Tobisch, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 6-7, for explication of Swedenborgian symbolism.
20. quoted in Freudenheim, op. cit., p. 11.
21. quoted in Freudenheim, op. cit., p. 17.
22. Letter from Joseph Worcester to Alfred Worcester dated June 13, 1869, letter 4 in "Rev. Joseph Worcester a Memoir etc." in Swedenborgian Church library (note 4).
23. Letter from Joseph Worcester to Alfred Worcester dated January 10, 1873, letter 17 in "Rev. Joseph Worcester" op. cit.
24. "San Francisco Society of the New Jerusalem," *New-Church Pacific*, volume 7, no. 3, March 1894, p. 174.
25. As noted in Tobisch, op. cit., p. 9 (note 16).
26. For Worcester's trip to the Santa Cruz Mountains, see *The New-Church Pacific*, volume 7, no. 7, July 1894, p. 226 and "Notes and Comments," *New-Church Messenger*, August 29, 1894, p. 136 (for "brown as a nut"). The madrone trees were delivered to San Francisco on September 20, 1894, as noted in Tobisch, op. cit. (note 16), p. 9, which inspired a detailed article on the madrones, and their delivery in the *San Francisco Examiner*, September 30, 1894, p. 25.

27. As recounted by Mrs. John Baeck, op. cit., (note 17). Whether it was redwood trees or Douglas-fir that Worcester selected is open to question. Several sources state that the church's wainscoting was made out of "Oregon pine," now known as Douglas-fir, an observation confirmed by the description of the building written for the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form compiled by Bridget Maley and Jody R. Stock, Architectural Resources Group, dated January 24, 2002, p. 6.

28. *The New-Church Pacific*, volume 7, no. 7, July 1894, p. 226.

29. *San Francisco Examiner*, September 30, 1895, p. 12. For the madrones' possible use as firewood, see Alfred Worcester's handwritten account titled "Uncle Joseph's Madrone Tree Rafters, as told by him Dec. 11, 1912," in Swedenborgian Church library.

30. reproduced in Freudenheim, op. cit., p. 60.

31. *San Francisco Examiner*, September 30, 1895, p. 12.

32. *San Francisco Examiner*, September 30, 1894, p. 25.

33. See typescript of letter to "Dear Susie" from Mackinac Island, dated July 24, 1901, which explains the special positioning of the bricks (archive of the Swedenborgian Church library). Also letter signed "Benj." [Joseph Worcester's brother Benjamin] to "Dear Brother Joseph" dated "Sept. 23/95" that reads, "I understand now what your brick pointing is... It gives the effect of age and, I imagine, softens the texture and color." In Carton 9, Keith-McHenry-Pond Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

34. *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 7, 1901, p. 35. In Mabel Clare Craft, "A Sermon in Church Building," *House Beautiful*, February 1901, p. 125, the author states, "The building cost only seven thousand five hundred dollars, and the lot the same."

35. Craft, op. cit., p. 128.

36. "Remarks Made by Joseph Worcester at Dedication of the Lyon Street Church," typescript available at Swedenborgian Church library.

37. Polk's *Architectural News* folded after several issues—before Maybeck's translation was published. No Maybeck translation of Semper's treatise has come to light. A discussion of Maybeck and Semper can be found in Sally B. Woodridge, *Bernard Maybeck, Visionary Architect*, Abbeville Press, New York and London, 1992, pp. 26-27. The similarity of the church design to Worcester's home environment is discussed in Freudenheim, op. cit., p. 41.

38. see *San Francisco Call*, October 28, 1894, p. 19 for description of Maybeck's lecture.

39. As seen in various illustrations in Freudenheim, op. cit. and Woodbridge, op. cit.

40. Keith's "Four Seasons" are unlocated today, but are described in *San Francisco Bulletin*, May 1, 1875, p. 4; *San Francisco Post*, May 13, 1875, p. 1; and *Alta California*, May 15, 1875, p. 1.

41. The titles come from the article, "Unique Church Edifice," in the *San Francisco Call*, February 10, 1896, p. 7, published shortly after the murals were installed. Keith was still working on the *Winter* when the *Call* printed an article on it on February 1, 1896, p. 16. On March

25. 1896, the *New-Church Messenger* noted that the church had “recently been enriched by four large oil paintings by... the widely-known artist, William Keith.” (p. 249).

42. As explained by Keith in his lecture to the Sorosis Club in San Francisco, reproduced in Brother Fidelis Cornelius, op. cit. (note 10), pp. 272-273.

43. For Keeler’s characterization, see Charles Keeler, *San Francisco and Thereabout*, The California Promotion Committee, San Francisco, 1902, p. 4 For the biblical allusions see “A Departure in Church Building—the Second New Jerusalem Church in California: by a Stranger:” *The Craftsman*, June 1906, p. 334. For a review of Keith’s “Early Rains” and “Late Rains,” see *San Francisco News Letter and California Advertiser*, May 1, 1886, p. 3. For biblical allusion to early and late rains, see Epistle of St. James, chapter 5, verse 7.

44. For comparison with landscapes by Théodore Rousseau, see Rousseau’s “Edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau at Sunset,” [Louvre] and “The Forest of Fontainebleau, Morning,” [Wallace Collection] illustrated in Jean Bouret, *The Barbizon School*, New York Graphic Society Ltd., Greenwich, CT, 1973, pp. 162 and 163.

45. *San Francisco Call*, February 1, 1896, p. 16.

46. For a discussion of the chairs, see Freudenheim, op. cit., pp. 62-65 and Anna Tobin D’Ambrosio, “The Distinction of Being Different,” in “The Distinction of Being Different,” exhibition catalogue, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York, 1993, p. 18, A copy of this catalogue was kindly provided the author by Tim Hansen of Berkeley, CA.

47. *San Francisco Call*, April 1, 1895, p. 7.

48. *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 7, 1901, p. 35.

49. Keeler, op. cit. (note 43), p. 42.

50. *San Francisco Examiner*, December 4, 1910.