Joseph Worcester Collection 1920-01

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March 1999
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The Joseph Worcester collection consists of 14 bound volumes of scrapbooks containing purchased photographs, clippings from the Architectural Review, and other magazines. Some volumes contain photographs of Italian artwork, including one volume of Venice. Two of the volumes are architectural monographs of the Ames Memorial Buildings in North Easton, Massachusetts, and Trinity Church in Boston.

Biographical Note
Joseph Worcester (1836-1913)
The Reverend Joseph Worcester was a Swedenborgian minister who arrived in San Francisco from Boston in 1869. He had considered becoming an architect, and maintained a strong interest in architecture for the rest of his life. Worcester believed in an architectural style that incorporated a harmonious relationship between nature and design. His ideas included the expression of raw materials in simple, hand-crafted design. After the 1890s, he became spiritual leader to many young artists and professionals. He was a strong influence on architects of the late 19th century, including Earnest Coxhead, Willis Polk, A. Page Brown, Bernard Maybeck, and Albert Schweinfurth.

Worcester designed his own house (1876) in Piedmont, California with strong rustic qualities that embodied his architectural ideas. He influenced the design of houses on San Francisco’s Russian Hill by encouraging a member of his congregation to build a house that enhanced the natural environment of the hill. Worcester is also credited for initiating the use of unstained redwood in interior paneling, although architects Coxhead and Polk were already utilizing abundant and inexpensive redwood for interiors before they came to San Francisco.

While his design skills were strictly amateur, the ideas behind the designs influenced prominent architects of the day. Worcester relied on architects for assistance with his designs, and commissioned A. Page Brown to design the Church of the New Jerusalem at 2102 Lyon Street in San Francisco (1894-1895). Worcester was called “a catalyst who offered a conceptual promise” for rustic simplicity. He was committed to the correspondence between nature and extremely simple expression, and his ideas influenced the evolution of architectural design in Northern California.

Worcester, Joseph, 1836-1913