Ralph Wyckoff and Peter G. Wuss Collection

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Ralph Wyckoff and Peter G. Wuss Collection

Dates: 1902-1985

Collection Number: 1989-187

Creator/Collector: Wuss, Peter G.Wyckoff, Ralph (1883-1956)

Extent: Approx. 400 square feet (33 flat file drawers)

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Abstract: The collection comprises original architectural plans, specifications and photographs documenting the full span of Ralph Wyckoff's career as an architect.

Language of Material: English

Access

The collection is available to the public for research by appointment with the Curator of Library and Archives.

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

The papers were donated to History San Jose in 1989 by Dorothy Wuss, wife of Peter G. Wuss.

Biography/Administrative History

Specializing in schools and public buildings, Wyckoff had a career that was characteristic of the period when California architecture was coming of age. Born and raised in Watsonville, Wyckoff began his training as a draftsman for the firm of William H. Weeks. After the San Francisco earthquake, he was transferred to Week's northern office in San Francisco, where he earned a scholarship to the famous Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He became a licensed architect in 1914 and set up office in Berkeley. Shortly thereafter he returned to Watsonville to take over the business of architect H. B. Douglas. During the next four years he designed a number of distinctive buildings in that city, including several schools and the Watsonville Women's Club. In 1919 Wyckoff moved his office to Salinas and went into partnership with Hugh White. The building boom of the 1920s in San Jose encouraged Wyckoff to move his firm in 1921. He got started in San Jose just as the Great Depression was sweeping the country, so his major contributions to the architecture of the area were the WPA work-inspired buildings, one of which was the new Post Office on St. James Square. Built on the site of the old St. James Hotel, the Post Office is one of seven buildings surrounding St. James Park that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Built in the popular Spanish Colonial style with lavish use of terracotta facing and ornamentation, the Post Office was constructed in 1933. Wyckoff's downtown commercial buildings include the Moderne Drugstore Building at Second and Santa Clara Streets and the San Jose National Bank Building at Market and Santa Clara Streets. Wyckoff was consultant on the City's plans to develop the Civic Center on North First Street, and he designed the County's jail facilities there. Wyckoff worked in many styles over the expanse of his career, from Craftsman to Period Revival Spanish Style and the Moderne Styles of the 20s and 30s, and lastly to the stark functional buildings of the 1950s. Ralph Wyckoff's family can be traced back to Peter Claeson Wyckoff, an early settler who built a home in Brooklyn, NY in 1638. Wyckoff's grandfather came to the Pajaro Valley from Illinois in 1867. Wyckoff married his childhood sweetheart, Nellie M. Cornell (daughter of Watsonville rancher), on August 30, 1905 in Watsonville, and they later adopted a daughter Frances (later Mrs. Orville Jack). After moving to San Jose they lived in their home at 310 Sequoia Avenue. Ralph was an avid photographer who co-authored a text on How to Build and Equip a Modern Darkroom. Active in professional circles, he served as chairman of the Central Coast Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1946 & 1947, and he was also a member of the San Jose Rotary and the Elks Club. He was elected treasurer of the State Association of California Architects in 1943 and 1944, and served on a California committee in 1948 to aid the State Architect in facilitating backlog of school plans. He died on August 16, 1956.
and is interred at Oak Hill Cemetery. Biographical details excerpted from Historical Highlights of Santa Clara Valley by Jack
Douglas (San Jose: History San Jose, 2005)

**Scope and Content of Collection**

The collection comprises original architectural plans, specifications and photographs documenting the full span of Ralph
Wyckoff’s career as an architect, from his early work designing schools for the Watsonville and Salinas areas, to his
commercial and residential work in San Jose and surrounding areas both with Hugh White and on his own, and his later
work with partner Wuss. A range of architectural styles is also represented, from Arts & Crafts, to Spanish Colonial, to
Moderne. Included in the collection are a small number of designs by Peter Wuss completed after his partnership with
Wyckoff. In addition to architectural plans, publications related to mid-century modern architectural design and local
architectural firms are included.

**Indexing Terms**

Architecture--California--History--20th century
Architecture, Spanish colonial
Architectural firms
White, Hugh C.
Wyckoff & White
San Jose (Calif.)
Salinas (Calif.)
Watsonville (Calif.)
Gilroy (Calif.)
Santa Clara County (Calif.)
architectural drawings (visual works)
renderings (drawings)
photographic prints
commercial specifications
blueprints (reprographic copies)

[Inventory of the Ralph Wyckoff and Peter G. Wuss Collection]