



UTILITAS • FIRMITAS • VENUSTAS

Northern California Chapter
Society of Architectural Historians

The Newsletter

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Chinatown Tour to Kick Off Two-Part Program Honoring Julia Morgan's Posthumous AIA Gold Medal

In observance of the AIA's posthumous Gold Medal award to Bay Area architect Julia Morgan, in long-overdue recognition of her distinguished career, the NCCSAH will present a two part program of events. The first of these, taking place this spring, will recognize her works in San Francisco's Chinatown.

These are the Chinese YWCA, 965 Clay Street, now home to the Chinese Historical Society of America Museum; the YWCA Moon Residence (940 Washington St.). We will view these within the context of historic architecture.

We are pleased that San Francisco Chinatown, will lead our program. Mr. Choy, a retired architect and historian, is author of *San Francisco Architecture* (2012). After service during WW II, he earned a degree in architecture at UC Berkeley and in a commercial design.

Mr. Choy has devoted much effort to and telling the history of Chinese American college-level Chinese American history State. He vigorously advocated the preservation of Angel Island Immigration Station, the point of entry for thousands of Asians, between 1910 and 1940, and produced the case report that resulted in its designation as a National Historic Landmark (1997). Mr. Choy has served five times as president of Chinese Historical Society of America and served on the San Francisco Landmarks Board and the California State Historical Resources Commission. Awards he has received include the Oscar Lewis Award for Western History (2011).



We are offering identical programs on two successive Saturdays, May 30 and June 1, in order both to limit each group to a size that can be easily managed in a dense and busy neighborhood and meet what we expect will be a high level of interest. We are grateful to Philip Choy for generously agreeing to lead both tours. See page 6 for additional information and registration form.

Photo: UC Berkeley CED Archives

Western Architects Create an “Oriental” Fantasy; Miss Morgan Tones it Down

Early accounts show that the historic core of Chinatown emerged quickly in Gold Rush San Francisco. The *Annals of San Francisco* (1854) reports that while individual Chinese lived and did business “in every quarter of the city, the chief district in which they are located is the upper part of Sacramento street, the whole length of Dupont street [now Grant Avenue],” and parts of adjoining streets.

A generation later, in *Lights and Shades in San Francisco* (1876), B.E. Lloyd described a larger district that conforms closely to our understanding of the historic Chinese settlement, consisting of “sections of two blocks each of Sacramento, Clay, Washington, Jackson and Pacific Streets, between Kearny and Stockton Streets; and Dupont Street from Sacramento to Pacific Streets, the whole comprising about nine blocks.”

Lloyd observed that the Chinese had “chosen well the territory they occupy.” The development of the city around this district—business, commercial and downtown retail centers to the south and east, and mansions of the super rich on the uphill side—confirmed its strategic location. Not surprisingly, then, leaders of the city’s white establishment long contemplated removal of the Chinese community to some outlying district. The 1906 earthquake and fire, which devastated Chinatown, seemed to offer the ideal opportunity, and Hunters Point was to be the new Chinatown. Only swift action by leaders of the Chinese business community headed off this proposed relocation.

The architecture of pre-quake Chinatown was, for the most part, indistinguishable from the rest of Victorian San Francisco, where city fire regulations dictated masonry construction. This is no surprise,

since, typically, the property owners and the architects were not Asian. The vivid and atmospheric photographs by Arnold Genthe (e.g. shown here) confirm

written descriptions from the 19th century. Most buildings were brick, two or three stories over a basement.



Lloyd probably best characterized the typical streetscape:

“The additions they frequently make to houses, together with signs, placards, and various gaudy ornaments with which the outer walls, windows, and doors, are bedizened, almost conceal the architectural style of the buildings; but when the attention is called to it, the handiwork of the Caucasian mechanic is discovered through the semi-transformation, and the delusion that this is an oriental city, *in the Orient*, is dispelled.”

Even the finest Joss house, or temple, Lloyd notes, appeared no different from “the ordinary dingy business block of the Chinese quarter. . .”, excepting a bit of tinsel on the balcony and “a pair of artificially animated dragons” on the balustrade. Some restaurants, on the other hand, “have a small balcony in front, in the construction and ornamentation of which is displayed about the only examples of Chinese architecture that is seen in the city.”

If there was any truly “Chinese” architecture in the 19th century Chinatown, it found expression in pre-fab houses shipped from China. Several observers confirm the existence of such buildings. The *Annals* refers to dwellings, “some of which are brought in frames direct from China, and erected by themselves, [and] are small and incommensurable. . . .” The only “Chinese” feature observed was “the common colored paper lantern of China.”

A Chinatown supplement to the *Heritage Newsletter* (XIV, 1) quotes an anonymous observer cited in *History of the State of California* (1856), by John Frost:

“The houses they brought with them from China, and which they set up where they worked, were infinitely superior and more substantial than those erected by the Yankees, being built chiefly of logs of wood, or scantling, from six to eight inches in thickness, placed one on the top of the other, to form the front, rear, and sides; whilst the roofs were constructed on an equally simple and ingenious plan, and were remarkable for durability.”

According to historian Philip Choy, there were hundreds of imported prefab wooden Chinese houses erected by Chinese carpenters. He notes, in his book, *San Francisco Chinatown: A Guide to Its History & Architecture* (2012), that no direct evidence of such buildings existed until, in 1990, research by an archaeologist led to Calaveras County and “the discovery of two Chinese houses in tandem”. They had survived to serve as the county courthouse and later as a post office. Part of this building, restored, is now on view at the Calaveras County Museum.

Any of these houses that may have remained in San Francisco did not survive the devastation of 1906. While white property owners, contemplating relocation of the Chinese, turned their attention to reconstruction of buildings elsewhere, the Chinese businessmen conceived a plan that would ensure the community would remain in its historic neighborhood. Chinatown would be reborn, on its old foundations, as a new “Oriental City” of “veritable fairy palaces filled with the choicest treasures of the Orient. . . .”

Realization of this Asian fantasy did not begin timidly. It began, rather, in 1907, with a bold statement, the construction of two large buildings that still dominate the intersection of California and Grant: the Sing Fat and the Sing Chong Bazaars. The *Heritage Newsletter* described these buildings as the “first self-consciously Chinese-style buildings designed by Western architects, in this case Ross and Burgren.” In fact, the style is a “hybrid. . . really neither Chinese nor Western but unique to San Francisco,” characterized by “the tiered corner pagoda roofs, Mission-style fringe tile roofs, curving eave and trigram and dragon decoration.”

From its beginnings, Chinatown had been a draw for visitors to San Francisco. It was exotic and mysterious to most westerners and had the image as a place of sin and forbidden pleasure. Post-quake San Francisco, on the road to recovery, seized upon the opportunity to promote the new Chinatown,



Sing Chong (also in inset) and Sing Fat at Grant and California set the example for rebuilding Chinatown as an “Oriental City”. 743 Washington Street, built for the Chinatown telephone exchange (1909), illustrates well the adaptation of pagoda elements on a small-scale structure. Glass front and entry replaced original wood in 1960 remodel for a banking office. Photos: Don Andreini



"Where buildings abutted each other, the contiguous pattern gave the illusion of an 'Oriental' streetscape. Waverly Place, with its concentration of buildings, demonstrates this deception best." Philip Choy, San Francisco Chinatown. Photo: Don Andreini

reborn in the imagery of a "true" Oriental city. The San Francisco Real Estate Board passed the following resolution (cited in *Heritage Newsletter*): "...whereas the Chinese style of architecture will make it picturesque. . .and attractive to tourists. . .the San Francisco Real Estate Board does hereby recommend to all property owners, to have their buildings re-built with fronts of Oriental and artistic appearance."

Some owners quickly took the cue from the gateway buildings at California and Grant and engaged architects, many from the "A" list of early 20th century San Francisco practitioners, including A.A. Cantin, John Bakewell, Frederick Meyer, Albert Pissis, Sahlfield & Kohlberg, the O'Brien Bros., Charles M. Rousseau, Sr., and Julia Morgan.

AIA Recognizes "First Great Female American Architect"

On December 12, 2013, the board of directors of the American Institute of Architects voted to award its coveted Gold Medal to California architect Julia Morgan. The AIA bestows its highest honor upon individuals *"in recognition of a significant body of work of lasting influence on the theory and practice of architecture."*

While making posthumous precedent—the previous winner, have honored—Miss first woman recipient since the AIA instituted the award in 1907. Other Bay Area architects who have received the Gold Medal are Bernard Maybeck (1951), William W. Wurster (1969), Joseph Esherick (1989) and Charles Moore (1991).



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Morgan is the recipient since the award in 1907. Other Bay Area architects who have received the Gold Medal are Bernard Maybeck (1951), William W. Wurster (1969), Joseph Esherick (1989) and Charles Moore (1991).

In announcing the 2014 Gold Medal, the AIA described Julia Morgan as "the first great female American architect." While this pronouncement comes as no surprise to Californians, who have long admired her and her large body of work, there is a certain vindication in having acknowledgement from the national professional organization.

Modest and reclusive, Julia Morgan sought no publicity and gave no interviews. She spoke with mild contempt of self-promoting architects as "talking architects." She would let her work speak for itself. As for leading the way for other women in the field, "Morgan was mostly apolitical, so there is no extensive record of how she saw herself in the context of a discriminatory society that repressed ambitious women like her. But by taking advantage of the specific time and place of her birth, Morgan ripped open a door that had been shut for others." ("Julia Morgan, FAIA 2014 AIA Gold Medal Recipient," By Zach Mortice, Managing Editor, *AIArchitect*)

To view a video of the presentation of the Gold Medal at the AIA convention in Chicago, 2014, go to:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78LG42LNxWY&feature=youtu.be>

A walk through Chinatown will show that not all property owners embraced the “Oriental” style in rebuilding, perhaps because of the added costs it would entail, perhaps just as a matter of preference. As the *Heritage News-letter* observes, “most of the buildings were typical early twentieth century Edwardian brick buildings, just as those they replaced had been typical nineteenth century Italianate brick buildings. In their material, scale and massing they continued the tradition of not only nineteenth century Chinatown, but also San Francisco of the 1850s through 1870s.”

The build out of the “new” Chinatown was well advanced by the time Julia Morgan received her first commission in that district. Predictably, she would take a different tack from that of her colleagues.

The Methodist Church began its work among the Chinese in San Francisco on Washington Street, in 1868. Soon



after, it expanded its work from preaching to providing a home for Chinese orphans and women rescued from prostitution. In 1912, Morgan designed the present structure at 940 Washington that replaced the facility destroyed in 1906. It would take the



Gum Moon House (left), Chinese YWCA (above). Photos: Don Andreini

name, The Oriental Home and School.

At the time of World War II, the mission provided a home for young Chinese women whose parents sent them to America for their safety. The institution changed its name to Gum Moon (The Golden Door). Operated by the United Methodist Church, it continues as a residence for Chinese women making the transition to a new life in a new land.

Although the free-standing structure of richly hued red brick would have lent itself readily to the construction of a pagoda-like tower, similar to those at Sing Chong and Sing Fat, Morgan avoided such obvious features. Rather, in Philip Choy’s words, she “used Chinese motifs in her design conservatively, avoiding stereotypical images.” There is but a “hint of Chinese design” in such features as the terra cotta frieze at the top of the building and a large copper lantern at the entrance.

More than fifteen years later, Julia Morgan turned again to Chinatown, at the invitation of the YWCA, to design a recreation facility and a residence club. By that time, she had ample experience working for the association in many communities, thanks, in part, to

her connection with Phoebe Hearst, who was a benefactor of the YWCA.

In his history of Chinatown, Philip Choy notes that Morgan studied Asian architecture carefully in preparation for the job at hand. In fact, discussing her fee for both the Chinese and the Japanese YWCA facilities, whose design she had undertaken at the same time, she said, "You can't afford to pay for it; it has required so much research, I would like to give it as a tribute to the contributions of those two countries to architecture."

In the design of the YWCA, at 965 Clay Street (1930), in particular, Morgan employed a light touch in achieving a sophisticated expression of Chinese style. No pressed tin pagoda, no curled eaves. It speaks of Asia in subtle accents.

The Chinese Historical Society of America purchased the YWCA, in 1996, and, following renovation, opened it as a museum in 2001. Initially segregated housing, the Residence Club (1929), at 940 Powell Street, was opened to all races, in 1953. In 1980, it became housing for seniors.

Chinatown has come down to us, today, in a physical form remarkably unchanged, at least in gross details. There is, however, concern among preservation proponents over alterations that have replaced virtually every historic storefront with aluminum framed show windows and entries, and identifying awnings that are not consistent with the historic facades. Yet, these are not permanent and irreversible changes. Perhaps a new generation will consider that a return to the original character is possible without turning Chinatown—still very much a living community to the Chinese and all San Franciscans—into a museum that is frozen in time.



YWCA Residence. Photo: Don Andreini

Morgan - Chinatown Tour Registration

The cost, \$35 per person for NCCSAH members, includes an introductory overview by Mr. Choy, beginning at 9:30 a.m., at the CHSA Museum, and an approximately four-hour walking tour with time out for dim sum lunch at City View Restaurant, at 662 Commercial Street. A charge of \$55 for nonmembers also includes a one-year NCCSAH membership.

Driving and parking in and around Chinatown are challenging. We recommend taking public transportation. Muni lines 1, 8X, 10, 12, 30, 45, and the Powell and California Street cable cars all will take you within easy walking distance of our meeting point, at 965 Clay. If you do choose to drive, best choices for parking are the Sutter-Stockton Garage and the garage at Portsmouth Plaza.

Registration for Chinatown Tour

[please print]

Name _____

Affiliation _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email address _____

Registration: \$35 members / \$55 nonmembers

Check preferred date:

____ May 30 ____ June 6

Total Enclosed _____

Please make checks payable to NCCSAH and mail to:

Ward Hill
NCCSAH Chinatown Tour
3124 Octavia Street, #102
San Francisco, CA 94123

For more information please contact Ward Hill at whill@pacbell.net.

Nonmember cost also includes one year's membership in NCCSAH.

Space is limited; reserve your place now!

An e-mail notice around May 1 will provide registrants with additional tour information.

Please use the form on this page to sign up for the Chinatown Tour and the form on the last page for membership dues.

Photo Gallery: Fall Tour of Fortress San Francisco



Golden Gate National Recreation Area historian, Steve Haller, greets early arrivals at Fort Point before start of fortifications tour. Photo: Richard Brandi



GGNRA volunteer enlists NCCSAH members in loading drill at Battery Godfrey, Ft. Winfield Scott. Photo: Richard Brandi. Historic photo at right shows crew that manned the twelve-inch when in active service. Photo: Smith Collection.



Looking down the barrel of 16-inch gun outside Battery Townsley, Ft. Cronkhite Marin Headlands. Photo: Phil Bellman



Other Events Of Interest

NCCSAH Fall Installment: Julia Morgan -

Part two of the Year of Julia Morgan, now in planning for this fall, will be a bus tour ranging widely over San Francisco neighborhoods to view a diverse selection of Miss Morgan's buildings, both residential and institutional. We anticipate being able to offer lunch at the Zen Center. Members will receive more detailed information on the fall event during the summer.

Sister Chapter in Northwest Announces Conference

SAVE THE DATE!

The date and location for the annual conference of the Marion Dean Ross/Pacific Northwest Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians has been set! The conference will be held in Ashland, Oregon, October 23-25, 2015.

The theme of this year's conference will be Artifice and Authenticity in Architecture: To Play or not to Play? Ashland is home to one of the greatest Shakespearean festivals in the U.S. but the area is also a mecca for heritage tourism. We plan to look at the architecture of both realms during our three day conference.

Current information can be found on the SAH MDR website at:

<http://www.sahmdr.org/> And on the SAH MDR blog:

<https://sahmdr.wordpress.com/>

SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

68th Annual International Conference, in Chicago, April 15-19, 2015, explores the theme "Chicago at the Global Crossroads.

<http://www.sah.org/conferences-and-programs/2015-conference-chicago/welcome>

THE 40TH ANNUAL CALIFORNIA PRESERVATION CONFERENCE

Gateways to Preservation: New Frontiers

Naval Training Center at Liberty Station, San Diego

Wednesday, April 29th – Saturday, May 2nd, 2015

<http://californiapreservation.org/conference.html>

California Historical Society

Exhibition: *City Rising: San Francisco and the 1915 World's Fair*

678 Mission St., San Francisco

Now through December 6, 2015, Palace of Fine Arts

Now through January 10, 2016

http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/exhibitions/current_exhibitions/

Berkeley Historical Society

Spring 2015 Walking Tours

<http://www.berkeleyhistoricalsociety.org/Walks-Temp.html>

NCCSAH Toured Historic Bay Area War Installations

Members got a chance to survey some of the many historic sea-coast fortifications that embraced the Golden Gate. GGNRA historian Steve Haller led the group, which gathered at Ft. Point, completed in 1855. After a brief tour of the site, the group proceeded to other nearby installations in the Presidio. The event continued with a bus ride to the Marin Headlands Visitor Center, where we broke for a bag lunch. Afterward, the tour continued with stops at several artillery positions in the Headlands.

Our thanks to Steve Haller for sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject.

Photo Gallery of the day's activities appears on page 7.

Berkeley Architectural Heritage Alliance

40th Spring House Tour & Garden Reception, Elmwood Park, Sunday, May 3, 2015
1 to 5:00 p.m.

http://berkeleyheritage.com/house-tours/2015_spring_house_tour.html

The Victorian Society in America

49th Annual Meeting and Tour
A Southern Sampler

Savannah, May 6 - 10, 2015

<http://www.victoriansociety.org>

Vernacular Architecture Forum

35th Annual Conference
Neighborhoods in Transition

Chicago, June 3 - 7, 2015

<http://www.vafchicago.org>



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The mission of the NCCSAH is to further the objectives of the Society of Architectural Historians of which the Northern California Chapter is an affiliate; promote the study and discussion of our region's architectural history and its related fields; visit significant works of architecture; and increase public awareness and appreciation of our architectural heritage. Membership is open to anyone interested in architectural history and its related fields who agrees to pay the annual dues and subscribe to the bylaws of the organization.

NCCCSAH Officers

President, Rich Brandi
Vice President, Paul Turner
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Secretary, Don Andreini
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**Remember you do not have to be
a member of the National SAH to
become a member of NCCSAH**

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Make checks payable to NCCSAH

Please send your ideas or comments
concerning The Newsletter to:

Don Andreini

NCCSAH Newsletter Editor

dandreini@sbcglobal.net

To become a member of the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians

or to renew your dues return this form
and your dues check for \$20 made out to NCCSAH
to

Ian Berke, NCCSAH
Ian Berke Real Estate
2824 Clay Street
San Francisco, CA 94115

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Affiliation _____

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Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

Fax Number _____

E-mail address _____

For your convenience: Renewing members who sign up for
The Chinatown Tour may include their \$20 membership dues
in a single check with their payment for the tour. In that case,
use the address on the tour registration form shown on page 6.