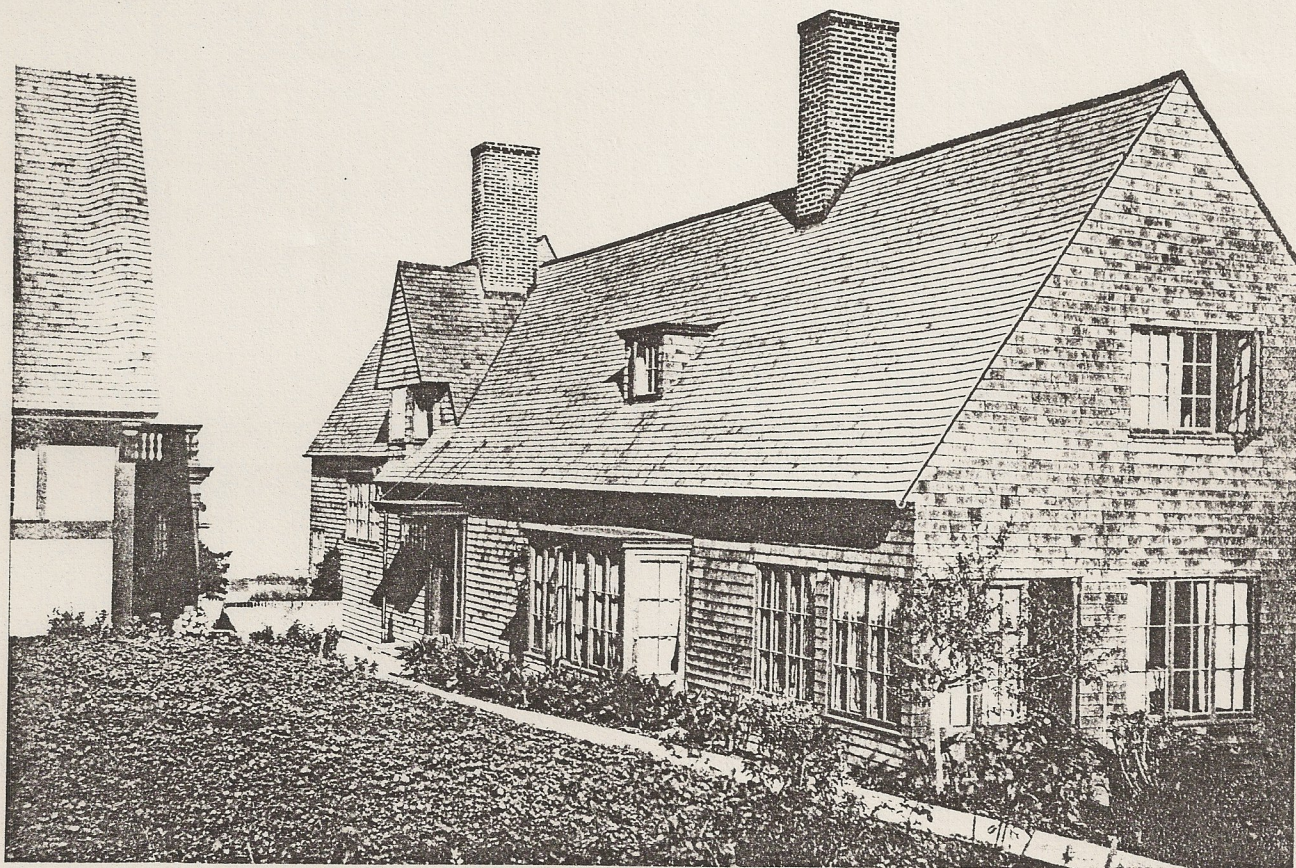




Original photographs (circa 1895?)



## ERNEST COXHEAD

Ernest Coxhead was born in Sussex, England, in 1863.<sup>1/</sup> His father was an Episcopalian minister at Brighton, England.<sup>1/</sup> This gives early influence on his future in church architecture. He received his training at the Architectural School of the Royal Academy, and was a member of the Royal Academy prior to 1885. He was foreman of a leading architectural firm<sup>2/</sup> in London specializing in ecclesiastical work.

At the age of 22, in 1886, Ernest Coxhead migrated to Los Angeles, where he continued his works on ecclesiastical architecture in his office in the California Bank Building. His works in Southern California include several private residences, the Church of All Saints in Pasadena, the Santa Paula Academy, and the Memorial Church of the Angels. The latter building reflects the very English character of Coxhead's training. It was completed in 1890 at a cost of \$25,000! Coxhead did the Y.M.C.A. building in San Diego. This commission seems to have led to the commission for the Los Angeles Y.M.C.A. in 1888. This might have been the end of his California career, for in November of 1890 it was discovered there were "structural problems in the building leading the board of directors to lose confidence in the architect E. A. Coxhead whose services they terminated."

In 1889, Ernest received a commission for the building of St. John the Evangelist in San Francisco. He seems to have maintained connections in both Los Angeles and San Francisco until he moved north permanently in November or December of 1890.

Ernest Coxhead established his offices in the Flood Building. It is possible that young Bernard Maybeck worked for this firm for a time after coming to California from Florida.

The following year, Almeric Coxhead, Ernest's younger brother, arrived in San Francisco. The brothers resided on Ellis Street.<sup>3/</sup> They joined together to form the architectural firm of Coxhead and Coxhead, moving to 63 Flood Building.<sup>4/</sup> Almeric is said to have had the business acumen and generally did supervising of projects, while Ernest was the designer.

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1 Telephone conversation with Mrs. E. Coxhead.

2 Anonymous, Illustrated History of Los Angeles Ca. p. 725.

3 San Francisco Directory lists 810 Ellis.

4 San Francisco Directory 1891.

The firm of Coxhead and Coxhead lasted about ten years, moving in 1893 to Sutter Street.<sup>5</sup> The fire of 1906 forced a temporary move to 2323 California Street,<sup>6</sup> and to more permanent quarters at 787 Market.<sup>7</sup> In 1910 the firm was established at 533 Grant Avenue<sup>8</sup> in their own designed Home Telephone Building. In 1914, Ernest had a brief association with William F. Knowles, who built the Sudmiller House.

The brothers worked on several churches, a school, and many residences during their years as a successful architectural firm. One of the most famous buildings was the original St. Luke's Church on Clay Street at Van Ness, which was destroyed to help contain the fire of 1906.<sup>9</sup> The firm was well known for fine residences, including several distinctive homes on Pacific Avenue at the Presidio Wall.

One of the loveliest of the Coxhead residences is the architect's own home at 2421 Green. This dramatically simple shingled house was built by the brothers as their own residence. The brothers lived at 2419 Green while supervising the construction. They moved in about 1893. Later, Ernest brought his wife, Ellen Browning Haas, the daughter of a sea captain<sup>10</sup>, to his new home. They had three children - John, Ernest and Mary.

In 1903, Ernest built his family a house on Santa Inez Street in San Mateo (he later sold the house to the Arthur Pope family). Ernest became the suburban commuter to his San Francisco firm, while Almeric and his wife Joyce, daughter of an Episcopalian minister, occupied the residence on Green Street.

The death of his young wife forced Coxhead to move to Arch Street in Berkeley where an aunt could care for the children. Ernest Coxhead did many of the lovely brown shingle buildings for which Berkeley is famous, including the original Anna Head School (built 1895), and the Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of California, formerly the Beta Theta Pi Fraternity.

The first years of the Twentieth Century were very difficult for Coxhead. He had not only the personal tragedy of the death of his young wife, and the destruction of much of his work in the fire and earthquake of 1906, but he faced still another setback. Following the holocaust of 1906, the public desired more fireproof bungalow style with stucco walls instead of Coxhead's shingle style. Coxhead tried to adapt to the new style in such works as the Home Telephone Company buildings (9 in number), all done in 1909, but he was generally unsuccessful in the new style. Perhaps the best work of this low period is the Golden Gate Library on Green Street, a neoclassic building with Spanish tile roof. Coxhead must have sensed his growing depression and attempted to enlist in the army to get away from his problems.

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- 5 San Francisco Directory 1893.
  - 6 San Francisco Directory 1906.
  - 7 San Francisco Directory 1907.
  - 8 San Francisco Directory 1910
  - 9 Plans exist at California Historical Society.
  - 10 According to daughter-in-law Mrs. Ernest Coxhead of Berkeley.

During the First World War, Ernest Coxhead went to France with the Y.M.C.A. He settled after the Armistice at Le Mans, on the Sarthe River, south-west of Paris. Here the architect taught a three-week course for the troops of the American Expeditionary Force serving in France. The course ran from January 6 to January 25, 1919. The first week consisted of "talks and illustrated lectures on painting and decoration.<sup>11/</sup> The second week was also held at Le Mans, with talks on painting, decoration, and stained glass.<sup>12/</sup> The third week consisted of a tour to distant points, including the chateaux of the Loire Valley and Chartres Cathedral. The course was intended as a culturally uplifting experience for the raw American troops. At the conclusion of the very successful course, an exhibit of the soldier students' work was held in Le Mans.

The lecture series and his travels in the South of France had a profound effect on Ernest Coxhead. His vistas had included the simple stucco buildings of the Mediterranean style. When he returned to the United States, he adopted a Mediterranean villa style. One example of this period is the 1926 residence of Donald Smith on Florio Street in Berkeley. Once more the architect was a success!

Ernest Coxhead died in San Francisco on March 27, 1933. He was survived by two sons, John (who died in about 1971), Ernest (who died about 1966, and is survived by his Berkeley widow), and a daughter, Mary, who is living in Oakland. Ernest's brother Almeric died November 30, 1928.

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11 Poster of E. Coxhead of lecture schedule.

12 Poster.

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Interviews:

July, 1973	Mrs. Ernest Coxhead (daughter-in-law) 76 Codornicea Road Berkeley, California
July, 1973	Miss Mary Coxhead 452-1043 Oakland, California
August, 1973	Mr. John Beach 917 Hearst Ave. Berkeley, California
August, 1973	Mr. and Mrs. Francis Carroll 1050 North Point Street San Francisco, California