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San Francisco Public Schools

In no sphere of Pacific Coast life has architectural improvement been so notable in recent years as in public-school design. The schools were still negligible architecturally at a time when sky-scraper construction was making swift advances in beauty, and when domestic architecture had definitely emerged from the prison-house of "mid-Victorian" taste. Today, however, the standards of school design and school construction on the Pacific Coast are safely and soundly placed on so high a plane that they are beyond the reach of cavil.

Owing to exceptional circumstances, San Francisco some twenty years ago faced the necessity of reconstructing a very large part of the physical equipment of its public school department. In the great conflagration of 1906 practically all the schools east of Van Ness Avenue on the north side of the city, and all the schools in the south-side area as far as the outskirts of the Mission district, were destroyed. And so that architectural renaissance in San Francisco, which was a most striking result of the city's great catastrophe, exerted its influence upon the public school department.

Naturally, the new schools that gradually arose from the ashes of the old offered an amazing contrast with the old school structures that had been spared by the flames. The community was aroused to the need of new buildings that would be worthy of the high purpose to which they
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were dedicated. The rapid growth of population called for greatly enlarged facilities. Out of these conditions has come San Francisco’s present public-school equipment, one of the most noteworthy in the United States. Of course, the financial problem has been ever-present, but progress has been not only orderly, but swift, and though no school-building program is ever completed in a city that grows as steadily as San Francisco, present conditions represent a splendid measure of achievement, amply sufficient to justify confidence in what is planned for the future.

The particular program of San Francisco school construction that is now all but complete, began in 1924, when school bonds in the total of twelve million dollars were made available, having been voted the year before. Three millions, in round figures, were allocated to the purchase of lands, leaving nine millions for school buildings. Sixteen have been finished: Alamo School, Miller & Pfueger, architects; Alvarado School, G. Albert Lansburgh, architect; Dudley Stone School, John Reid, Jr., architect; Edison School, G. A. Applegarth, architect; Galileo High School, John Reid, Jr., architect; Hawthorne School, Weeks & Day, architects; High School of Commerce, John Reid, Jr. architect; Horace Mann School, John Reid, Jr., architect; Lafayette School, Ward & Blohme, architects; Le Conte School, John Galen Howard, architect; Madison School Annex, Hyman & Appleton, architects; Mission High School, John Reid, Jr., architect; Portola School Annex, Joseph & Stone, architects; Raphael Weill School, Meyer & Johnson, architects; Sanchez School, Bakewell & Brown, architects; Sunnyside School Annex, S. Heiman, architect.

Three are still to be completed: Everett Junior High School, John Reid, Jr., architect; Hearst-Moulder School, John Reid, Jr., architect; Sherman School, John Reid, Jr., architect.

Immediate responsibility for the success of this huge building program has rested upon the shoulders of John Reid, Jr., the City Architect. Mr. Reid has been architect for a great many of the school buildings, and by virtue of his position has acted as consulting architect for all the others. This relationship, which makes the City Architect consultant for all schools designed by other architects, is important among the factors that have carried San Francisco’s school-building program to a successful issue. It represents the practical execution of a tested systematic procedure.
SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

School design is necessarily circumscribed by drastic conditions, all of them simple enough when worked out; but it must be remembered that there was a time when all of them were experimental limitations, no matter how obvious they may now appear to be. The experience of the City Architect simplifies the problem for every architect who designs a school, while at the same time artistic inspiration is in no way interfered with.

Study has dictated the ideal arrangement of classrooms, and the proper co-ordination of the school auditorium, the school offices, and other units of a given structure. Considerations of proper lighting and ventilation, adequate recreational facilities, and like conveniences, are paramount in the control of school design. It is true that no two school sites are alike either in situation or in terrain, and here architectural skill has its full play in taking advantage of opportunity or in overcoming natural obstacles. But the interior arrangement of the school itself has long since been dictated by certain demands of efficiency and of comfort that cannot be ignored. Hence, every architect is glad to have the co-operation of the City Architect’s office, and by the nature of this arrangement finds himself approaching the pleasant problems of design and ornament with a fresher and freer mind.

This applies also to engineering problems. In all questions of engineering principle and policy Engineer C. H. Snyder is consulted by City Architect Reid, and is in a position to render valuable advice, no matter how expert the other architect and his own engineer may be.

The San Francisco schools pictured in this issue of SHAPES OF CLAY indicate how wide the field is over which the architect may range in the matter of design and ornament, after he has accepted those technical factors which are basic in the working out of his problem. Accepting, as he does, the wisdom of a certain grouping of classrooms and other units, he may still unfetter his fancy and follow the lead of his artistic inclination in the pursuit of architectural loveliness. The results achieved show that in the planning of worthy surroundings for pupils the architects of San Francisco find a happy release for their noblest conceptions.

The Alvarado School, at Twenty-second and Douglas streets, is responsive to the Spanish influence in architecture. Mr. Lansburgh attained an
I - Mission High School, San Francisco. John Reid, Jr., architect; C. H. Snyder, engineer; McDonald & Kahn, general contractors. The trim is standard unglazed terra-cotta from Gladding, McBean & Co. kilns. It is buff in color, with light free-hand tooling, and has a velvety texture. The roof tile is Gladding, McBean & Co.’s Escalona in a lovely color range that includes buff, russet, brown, gun-metal, and rose.
II - Mission High School, San Francisco. John Reid, Jr., architect; C. H. Snyder, engineer; McDonald & Kahn, general contractors. The note of terra-cotta loveliness is accentuated in the entrance motive of the main elevation. The exquisite terra-cotta tower has its prototype in Mexican church architecture, but here there has been a very successful substitution of secular for ecclesiastical feeling.
admireable effect by his exuberant treatment of the entranceway, depending upon terra-cotta to express his boldly elaborated ornament.

For the Dudley Stone School, on Haight Street between Masonic and Central avenues, Mr. Reid went to Renaissance motives, applying ornament with a sparing hand—with, one might say, an expert economy of beauty. Terra-cotta fully met the measure of his restrained intention. A roof of Cordova tile reinforces the vivid personality of this structure.

The High School of Commerce, at Van Ness Avenue and Hayes Street, speaks to the student of French Renaissance architecture at its height. Thought wings back to the colorful reign of Francis I, and to that magnificent chateau at Blois to which Leonardo da Vinci lent his genius. Here again Mr. Reid called upon terra-cotta and Cordova roof tile to interpret for him, using the colors of burned clay to uplift the spirits of youth.

The Horace Mann School, at Twenty-third and Valencia streets, represents Mr. Reid in a classic mood, with terra-cotta striking the dominant chord of beauty. Attention is directed particularly to the terra-cotta vases that flank the entrance stairway. They are repeated in the school yard. Nothing could be less utilitarian, but it is the testimony of the teachers that they are constantly inculcating the precious doctrine of beauty.

The Mission High School, at Eighteenth and Dolores streets, was conceived by Mr. Reid in terms of Spanish Colonial architecture as developed in Mexico. The coarseness associated with this style has been successfully refined away without any surrender of the boldness that is the characteristic charm of the great old buildings reared for the conquistadores. The structure is reminiscent but not imitative. Witness the treatment of the tower, which in less subtle hands might so easily have been a cathedral tower. But it is quite appropriately secular in feeling. This tower, like all the ornament, is of terra-cotta, while the roof is of Escalona tile.

Messrs. Meyer & Johnson brought together in harmonious intimacy the influences of classic and of late Renaissance architecture in designing the Raphael Weill School, at Buchanan and O'Farrell streets. Must not the pulse quicken and the eye brighten as the student enters these portals? Here again the exquisite effect is produced by terra-cotta.
THE bond between education and architecture has always been strong. In
the golden age of Greek culture the philosophers taught their pupils in por-
ticos raised on pillars of marble. Rome, the pupil of Greece, added a new gran-
deur to the scholastic setting. In medi-
eval times the rise of the great uni-
versities in France, Italy, England, and Spain was coincident with the highest de-
velopment of Gothic architecture. The
Renaissance, with its passion for the
New Learning, provided splendid quar-
ters for the hosts of young men inflamed
with enthusiasm for knowledge.

In succeeding centuries, the great uni-
versities grew in size, and if they did
not increase in architectural signifi-
cance, at least they preserved the architectural
distinction that they had inherited. The
lesser schools, however, were not always
so fortunate. Architecture slighted them.
In reading English literature of the sev-
teenth, eighteenth, and the early nine-
teenth centuries, one is struck again and
again by the gloomy ugliness that sur-
rounded nearly all but university educa-
tion. The student who prospered in his
work did so without the stimulation of
beautiful surroundings.

The earlier schools of the United
States were no better. Only a few of the
oldest American universities were ar-
chitecturally attractive. But all that has
been changed in these later times. Ar-
chitecture has once more definitely and
beautifully allied itself with education.

Here on the Pacific Coast the rebirth
of this alliance has been strikingly illus-
trated. Universities like Stanford and
California possess an architectural dis-
 distinction that has made them outstanding.
And the lesser institutions of education
are conceived in a spirit of architectural
nobility that leaves nothing to be desired.

The architect exerts a widespread in-
fluence, much of it a silent influence that
permeates the community through spiritu-
al agencies. It would be hard to over-
estimate the spiritual influence that ar-
chitecture is impressing upon the rising
generation on the Pacific Coast by rea-
son of the lovely structures reared in
the cause of public-school education.
The highest ideals are embodied in these
buildings, and life is richer and fuller by
reason of this most arresting manifesta-
tion of the precious part that art may
play in the moulding of plastic character.

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The picture on the cover shows part of the great
Galileo High School, San Francisco—John Reid,
Jr., architect; C. H. Snyder, engineer; and Mon-
son Bros., general contractors. The roof tile of the
gymnasium is our red Escalona.
III - High School of Commerce, San Francisco. John Reid, Jr., architect; C. H. Snyder, engineer; Mahony Bros., general contractors. This large high school is trimmed with Gladding, McBean & Co. terra-cotta — a mottled gray Pulsachrome with polychrome color in brown and green. The roof tile also was produced by Gladding, McBean & Co.; it is medium Cordova in an appealing variegation of colors.
High School of Commerce, San Francisco, California – John Reid, Jr., Architect
High School of Commerce, San Francisco, California – John Reid, Jr., Architect
VI · HORACE MANN SCHOOL, San Francisco. John Reid, Jr., architect; C. H. Synder, engineer; Anderson & Ringrose, general contractors. Terra-cotta by Gladding, McBean & Co. was used for the entrances to this school. The body color is light tan, mat enamel, with a polychrome background in orchid color. Gladding, McBean & Co. also made these beautiful terra-cotta vases which are duplicated in the school yard.
VII - ALVARADO SCHOOL, San Francisco. G. Albert Lansburgh, architect; John Reid, Jr., consulting architect; L. H. Nishkian, engineer; Monson Bros, general contractors. This opulent façade is trimmed in Gladding, McBean & Co. terra-cotta, glazed and polychromed. The body color is cream enamel, while the background of the ornament is polychromed with tan, blue, and green. The Spanish influence is strong here, and the effect is admirable.
VIII - Alvarado School, San Francisco. G. Albert Lansburgh, architect; John Reid, Jr., consulting architect; L. H. Nishkian, engineer; Monson Bros, general contractors. Here a note of ornament cheerfully relieves the comparatively severe treatment of the neighboring window openings. This again is Gladding, McBean & Co. terra-cotta. The plasticity of the medium, no less than its color value, is strikingly emphasized by contrast with the surroundings.
IX • RAPHAEL WEILL SCHOOL, San Francisco. Meyer & Johnson, architects; John Reid, Jr., consulting architect; Maurice C. Couchot and Jesse Rosenwald, engineers; F. L. Hansen, general contractors. This terra-cotta from the kilns of Glad- ding McBean & Co. is Granitex, buff in color. Here there is emphatically in the architecture a classic spirit, gracefully allied to the influence of the late Renaissance. Terra-cotta fully met the demands of this concept.
X. Raphael Weill School, San Francisco. Meyer & Johnson, architects; John Reid, Jr., consulting architect; Maurice C. Couchot and Jesse Rosenwald, engineers; F. L. Hansen, general contractor. The architects relied on terra-cotta to yield the full measure of that dignity and loveliness which they wished to unite in their ornamental treatment of this window. That their reliance was properly placed must be apparent to all.
XI  (above) RAPHAEL WEILL SCHOOL, San Francisco. Meyer & Johnson, architects; John Reid, Jr., consulting architect; Maurice C. Couchot and Jesse Rosenwald, engineers; F. L. Hansen, general contractor. Granitex terra-cotta.

(below) DUDLEY STONE SCHOOL, San Francisco. John Reid, Jr., architect; C. H. Snyder, engineer; Anderson & Ringrose, general contractors. This Company supplied the mottled gray Pulsichrome terra-cotta trim, and Cordova roof tile.
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Garden Pottery: Vases, benches, urns, fountains, pedestals, sun chairs, and bird baths
Richly shadowed reveals help to make this
terra-cotta façade a poem of architecture. This is the entranceway of the
Mission High School, San Francisco. John Reid, Jr., is the
architect. The terra-cotta was manufactured
at our Lincoln kilns.

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Gladding, McBean & Co.