

# E. A. HERMANN

## Architect

(1867-1936)

Emil Arminias Hermann was born in San Francisco in 1867, the eldest of six sons and one daughter born to Peter A. and Caroline Hermann. Emil's father was a German craftsman from Hesse-Darmstadt, working as a contractor in San Francisco. His mother, Caroline, originated from the Duchy of Holstein, of Danish ancestry. After graduating from high school in San Francisco, Emil started work as a draftsman, for architect J. H. Littlefield, among others. In 1891, Hermann opened his own practice with an office at 120 Sutter Street (room 46).

In common with most architects of his time, Hermann designed a variety of buildings, but his masterpiece was the 1894 house at **2724 Pacific Avenue** for Captain Hermann Meyer and his wife Annie. It is a fine house, Queen Anne in style due to its shape (asymmetrical, with a tower), but with ornament that is mainly classical (columns, pilasters, the gable treated as a pediment, oval and circular windows with profiled moldings). The house exhibits skilled composition and overall treatment. It was featured 90 years later, after restoration from a French Provincial conversion, as the San Francisco University High School Decorator Showcase House.



In 1895 Hermann linked up with fellow architect and prominent local sailor, Clarkson Swain, and they practiced as a partnership for almost three years, designing two houses on Belvedere for builder William Hinkel in 1896, and others, such as 2714 Steiner in Pacific Heights and 3553 Clay in Presidio Heights, both in 1897. Their major project was a new meeting hall for the Mission Lodge Masonic Association at 2664-68 Mission Street (appropriately a 'masonry' building), still owned today by Lodge #169, but now remodeled out of all recognition to the original structure into a commercial store.

From 1899 on, Hermann practiced alone and in the 1910's worked as the in-house architect for builder O. E. Evans. A sampling of his single-family homes and apartment buildings would include:

- Presidio Heights - 3516 Clay (1899) and 3969 Washington (1905);
- Nob Hill - 1625-31 Washington (1908, 4 apts.);
- Parnassus Heights - 310 Parnassus (1915, 10 apts.);
- Mission Dolores - 162-64 Clinton Park (1918, 4 apts.).

In 1901, when licensing of California architects was first legislated, Hermann was awarded one of the first State Architects Certificates ever issued, with the prestigiously early number of A23. One-half of the architects issued licenses with lower numbers were from Southern California. He renewed his license in 1908 (B491).

Hermann wound down his practice after World War I and died on November 14, 1936 at the age of 69, survived by his wife Augusta.

## HISTORY OF THE HOUSE

This year's Decorator Showcase house is truly unique! Built in 1894 for the family of Captain Hermann E. E. Meyer whose household included eight children and four servants, this magnificent Pacific Heights mansion comprises some thirty rooms.

Captain Meyer was born in Germany in 1840 and his wife, Annie, was of Austrian descent, which may account for some of the Germanic-style paneling and moldings used by architect E. A. Hermann in his plans for the original house. Although Captain Meyer died shortly after moving into the house, his widow continued to live there until her death in 1944 at which time the property was sold to the Countess Suzanne de Tesson.

The Countess was the daughter of Gaston Verdier, founder of the City of Paris, one of San Francisco's earliest and finest department stores, specializing in French imports. Her husband, Count Francois de Tesson, was a French diplomat and author who died in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944; he had insisted that his wife take one of the last boats to safety in the United States, fleeing Nazi-occupied France.

To suit the then popular "international style of the 40's;" Madame de Tesson stripped the house of much of its original exterior and interior moldings and trim, and the facade was stuccoed-over. The huge sunporch, complete with marble floors and a sunken pool, was ex-

tended into the west garden. Property bordering the house was acquired and the enormous carriage house at the rear was decked-over making this one of the largest residences in the city with grounds consisting of 26,000 square feet.

The Countess succeeded her brother as Chairman and President of the City of Paris until it closed in 1971. As the representative of the French community in San Francisco her residence was considered a base for visiting diplomats. It was used as a home for the Free French during the 1945 United Nations Conference attended by President Charles de Gaulle. The Countess continued to entertain visitors until her death at age ninety-eight in 1982.

Although it has undergone considerable structural changes over the years, the Showcase house has recently been extensively and carefully renovated by its new owner, Engmann Options, Inc., a family owned enterprise with antecedents in Australia dating back to 1849. The family has named the home "Castleberg" in remembrance of the family estate in Melbourne, which, like 2724 Pacific Avenue, was a Victorian mansion.



Before and after images of 2724 Pacific. Restoration implemented by Jim Mannix of San Francisco Restorations, Inc.