McCaw, Martin, and White Architects

By Leland Roth and Edward H. Teague

McCaw, Martin & White was a prominent architectural firm active in Portland at the end of the nineteenth century. It was responsible for some of the most substantial Romanesque-style buildings in Oregon, some of which are still extant.

William Frederick McCaw, the son of an architect and builder, was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1850. In 1872, he immigrated to Toronto, Canada, where he was initially employed in the office of William Irving. In 1876, McCaw and Edward James Lennox established their own partnership, which lasted until 1881, when McCaw moved with his family to the United States.

In Portland, McCaw partnered in 1883 with architect E.M. Burton, and on different occasions worked for Warren H. Williams, for whom he superintended the construction of the R.B. Knapp house in Goose Hollow. In 1884-1885, McCaw teamed with Albert Wickersham. Together, they designed the United Presbyterian Church (1884).

Practicing alone after 1885, McCaw designed Portland's First Presbyterian Church (Southwest Alder) in 1886 (completed in 1891) and the Grace Methodist Episcopal Church (Southwest 11th and Taylor), completed in 1888 with interior alterations done that year by Richard H. Martin Jr. Those churches introduced to Portland the use of heavy, rough-faced masonry associated with Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson. McCaw also built the New Market Annex on Southwest Second Avenue in Portland (completed in 1889) in the Richardsonian vein.

Richard H. Martin Jr. was born in England in 1858 and came to Portland with his parents in 1874. His father, Richard Martin Sr. was a builder and stonemason. Martin worked as a draughtsman in the office of Warren H. Williams until Williams's death in 1888. From 1888 until his association with McCaw, Martin worked in partnership with Alexander M. Milwain. In 1888, he designed the Pacific Northwest Industrial Exposition Building. This exhibition hall, the largest such structure on the West Coast when it was built, burned in 1910.

In late 1888 or early 1889, the McCaw & Martin professional partnership was formed. Frederick Manson White joined the firm in 1889 as a draftsman, and from July 1891 to June 1892 he was a full partner in McCaw, Martin & White. Among their early works, the University of Portland's West Hall (now Waldschmidt Hall) of 1891 shows Richardson's influence; it has strong similarities with Richardson's Sever Hall at Harvard University (1878). Other distinctive works include the First Regiment Armory Annex (1891) in Portland, now called the Gerding Theater, an award-winning example of sustainable adaptive redesign.

Completed in 1892, the Portland home of Dr. Kenneth A.J. Mackenzie—a founder and dean of the University of Oregon's Medical School (now Oregon Health Sciences University)—demonstrates the firm's expertise in residential design. Perhaps their masterwork is the Dekum Building of 1892, a Portland landmark distinguished by distinctive stonework, elaborate carvings, and colorful masonry.

In 1897, McCaw moved to San Francisco, where he joined prominent architect William Curlett to form Curlett & McCaw, a firm that lasted until 1901. Meanwhile, Martin continued to practice in Portland, where he designed several significant buildings, including the Scottish Rite Center (1902), the Masonic Temple (1907), and the home of philanthropist Dr. Henry Waldo Coe (1906, destroyed). He also designed the Albert Sholes House in Cornelius, Oregon (1909). Martin died in Portland in 1950.

Sources

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