George W. Marston House
3525 Seventh Avenue
San Diego
San Diego County
California

HABS No. CA-1960

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS, CAL, 37-SAN DI, 10-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY CA-1960

GEORGE W. MARSTON HOUSE

Location: 3525 Seventh Avenue, San Diego County, California.

USGS Point Loma Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 11.485280.3622430.

Present Owner and Occupant: Mary Marston, 3525 Seventh Avenue, San Diego, California 92103.

Present Use: Residence.

Statement of Significance: This house was designed by Irving John Gill, and is a notable example of work from his formative years. The design of the house reflects the influence of both the Prairie School and the Arts and Crafts movement. The house was built for George W. Marston, a prominent citizen of San Diego, and is surrounded by landscaped grounds designed by Kate O. Sessions

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The construction began in 1904 but took well over a year to complete. Irving Gill, the architect who designed the house, made a year-long visit to the East Coast which held up the construction on the house.

2. Architect, Landscape Architect: Irving John Gill of Hebbard and Gill, an architectural partnership in San Diego, designed the George Marston House in 1904. He was somewhat restricted in his design freedom by having a strong-willed client. Kate Olivia Sessions designed the landscaped canyon and formal gardens of the Marston House. Miss Sessions operated a nursery at the corner of Balboa Park for twelve years (1892-1904), and was influential in the formation and planning of Balboa Park.

3. Original and subsequent owners: Lots 1-10, portion Lots 40-41, Lots 42-50, Block 9; Lots 1-12, Block 10; and Lots 1-3, Block 11; and Lots 109, portion Lot 10, Block 12.

   George W. Marston, built the house in 1905 for his family of nine. Mary Marston, daughter of George Marston, has lived in the house since it was built. Upon her death, she has offered the house and grounds to be dedicated to the City. The house is to be utilized by the San Diego Historical Society as its headquarters and as a center for the development of recreational, educational, cultural, social, and historical activities beneficial to the general public.

4. Builder: Ernest Pefley, general contractor in San Diego, California.

5. Alterations and additions: There have been few changes or alterations to the George Marston house. Any changes that have been made are compatible with the original work, and were executed by another prominent San Diego architect, William Templeton Johnson. With the exception of limited window enlargements on the south side, the house retains its original appearance.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

1. George W. Marston: For three-quarters of a century George W. Marston was identified with the history of modern San Diego. He arrived from Wisconsin in 1870, a few years after Alonzo E. Horton laid out "New Town." Beginning his San Diego career as a clerk in the Horton House, he opened a successful dry goods store known as "Marston's", eighteen years later.

   Marston's contributions to the City of San Diego are countless. In 1872, he along with Charles Hamilton (his early business partner), opened a free reading room, the forerunner of the San Diego Public Library. In 1873, he organized the Benevolent Society of San Diego, a prototype of a modern social agency. He helped start the YMCA in 1882 and was President of the Board for twenty-four years. He was active in the Presbyterian Church and in 1886, he helped to organize the Congregational Church.

George Marston served the Chamber of Commerce starting from 1878, as Secretary, Vice-President, and President. In 1902, he aided in organizing the San Diego and Eastern Railroad Company with the object of securing for the city a direct connection to the east. He also took a leading part in organizing the Park Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, a forerunner of the City's Park and Recreation Board. In addition, he underwrote the expense for the layout of Balboa Park, a 1400 acre park in the heart of the City. He also brought the celebrated planner, John Nolan, to San Diego and commissioned him to prepare what is known as the Nolan Plan for the development of the City (1908). In 1929, on the 160th birthday of San Diego and the anniversary of Father Serra's service on the hillside, Marston presented the Presidio Park (John Nolan, Landscape Architect) and the Junipero Serra Museum (William Templeton Johnson, Architect), home of the San Diego Historical Society, to the City.

2. Irving John Gill: Irving John Gill was born in Syracuse, New York, in 1870. The son of a building contractor, his formal schooling extended only through high school. His early architectural training was through the family business and from a short term in a local architectural office. In 1890 he moved to Chicago and joined the architectural firm of Adler and Sullivan (one of his fellow draftsmen was Frank Lloyd Wright). Gill's major assignment during his two year stay with Adler and Sullivan was the Transportation Building for the Columbian Exposition. In 1892 Gill went to California for a vacation and decided to stay.

   In 1893 Gill formed a partnership with W.S. Hebbard, producing such large half-timbered houses as the George W. Marston House. Gill's partnership with Hebbard ended in 1906, and may formally mark the beginning of his transitional period. In 1907 he formed a brief partnership, lasting only a year, with Frank Mead. The buildings of this period, an example being the Melville Klauber House (HABS No. CA-1962), look forward to his mature style in their increasing simplification of forms. With the design of the Holly Sefton Memorial Hospital for Children, and the Scripps Building at the Scripps Scripps Institute of Oceanography, in 1908-09, Gill moved into his mature period. Both these buildings were constructed of concrete, a material that became

Gill's favored building medium. He was fascinated by the Aiken Tilted concrete method of construction and, in 1912, bought the necessary equipment for construction from the United States Government. His first use of the equipment was in the Banning House (1912, Los Angeles), and then in the La Jolla Woman's Club (HABS No. CA-1957, 1913, La Jolla). He tried to start a company, the Concrete Buildings and Investment Company, to develop and popularize this method, but the venture was not financially successful. Gill's mature work is summarized by the Dodge House (HABS No. CA-355, 1914-16, Los Angeles), and the Scripps House (1916, La Jolla). Unfortuately the Dodge House was demolished in 1970, and the Scripps House remodeled beyond recognition. Gill himself provided the best summary of his building aesthetics:

> There is something very restful and satisfying to my mind in the simple cube house with creamy walls, sheer and plain, rising boldly into the sky, unrelieved by cornices or overhang of roof...I like the bare honesty of these houses, the childlike frankness and chaste simplicity of them (The Craftsman, May 1916, pages 147-148).

When he first moved to San Diego, Gill was an extremely popular architect. His nephew, Louis J. Gill (with whom he formed a partnership in 1914), reported that his office was fairly large, employing six draftsmen, one outside supervisor and a secretary (McCoy, Gill p.20). However, after 1915, his popularity began to wane, and in 1916 he closed his San Diego office and moved to Los Angeles. He produced few buildings in the twenties, and by his death in 1936 he was largely forgotten.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Original drawings: A set of six of the original blueprints from the Hebbard and Gill office, drawn in September and October of 1904 by Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Walker. These blueprints are from the collection of the San Diego Historical Society. Photocopies are included in the photo-data set.

2. Old views: A 1905 photograph by H.R. Fitch, shortly after the completion of the house. The original photograph is in the collection of the San Diego Historical Society. A photocopy is included in the photo-data set.

3. Bibliography:

a. Primary and Unpublished:

San Diego, California, City of San Diego Historical Site Board Register. Site Number 40.

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b. Secondary and Published:

Clinton, Hubert. The Education of George W. Marston. Claremont, California: Pomona College, 1946.

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Gill, Irving John. "The Home of the Future: The New Architecture of the West." The Craftsman, May 1916, pages 140-151, 220.

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Heilbron, Carl H., editor. History of San Diego County. San Diego: The San Diego Press Club, 1936.

Jordy, William H. American Buildings and their Architects: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972.

Marston, Hamilton. "A Tribute to George Marston," The Journal of San Diego History 15:33-44.

Marston, Mary Gilman. George White Marston: a Family Chronicle. 2 volumes, San Diego: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1956.

McCoy, Esther. Five California Architects. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1960.

_____ Irving John Gill, 1870-1963. Los Angeles: Los Angles County Museum in collaboration with the Art Center of La Jolla, 1958.

Shields, Wilmer B. "A Young Man Comes to Town." San Diego Historical Society Quarterly 3:1-3.

Prepared by John D. Henderson, AIA
Historic American
Buildings Survey
December 4, 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Description:

1. Architectural Character: The George W. Marston House, designed by Irving John Gill of the Hebbard and Gill architectural partnership, in 1904, is a noteworthy example of Gill's work during his formative period. This large residence, overlooking Balboa Park, reveals Gill's use of traditional eastern United States building forms plus the introduction of design details which would be refined and employed in buildings of his mature architectural style. As such, the house is an important link in the evolution of Gill's architectural style in Southern California.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-and-a-half story, L-shaped house measures 66' (four-bay front) x 64'.

2. Foundations: The building is set on 12" poured concrete walls, with 16" square concrete piers within the plan. There are 13" brick walls around the terraces and building where exposed to view.

3. Wall construction, finish, color: There are 11" brick veneer walls of single brick coursing backed by a 2"x4"

frame wall for the first floor. Flat brick arches span the openings on this level. The walls for the second floor and gable ends of the attic level are of 6" frame construction with lath and stucco surfacing. The first floor brick is deep red; the plaster is off-white (Gill's original drawings indicate that the building was to have a half-timber motif in the upper levels; the owner rejected this idea).

4. Structural system, framing: The foundation walls and piers support 8" x 10" wooden girders which in turn support 2" x 10" joists. For the upper levels, the 2" x 10" joists are carried on the walls.

5. Porches, terraces, bulkhards: On the west end of the building is the porte cochere and entranceway. Along the south flank is a large terrace with a loggia at its east end. There is also a wooden stairway and small porch providing access to the service entry on the north end of the east wing. On the second level there is a balcony over the porte cochere, a balcony on the north side, and a balcony over the southeast corner loggia.

6. Chimneys: There are four brick chimneys on the house. One chimney is situated midway along the south facade projecting through the roof overhead. A second chimney is 16' from the southeast corner on the east side. The third is located 18' from the northwest corner on the north side of the house. The last is 12' from the north wall in the center of the northeast wing.

7. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: The main entry to the house is on the west side through the porte cochere. The door is of wood with a square glass panel. The service entrance is through the screen porch at the north end of the wing; the door is wood and glass.

   b. Windows: There is a variety of window types and sizes. They include casements, French windows, double-hung, and fixed panels flanked by casements. Most casements and French windows are topped by multi-light transoms. Slight changes have been made in the openings along the south side of the house. The windows of the living room and dining room have been enlarged to bring additional light into the

house. The new windows are in keeping with the spirit of the original work.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The building plan is L-shaped and the roof form is gable with the major ridge running east to west. A secondary ridge on the northeast wing runs north to south and connects to the north slope of the main roof about 6' below its ridge. At the eaves there is a slight flare to the roof. The roofs of the porte cochere and the southeast loggia are of similar shape. The roofs were originally covered with redwood shingles, and are now finished with wood shakes.

b. Cornice, eaves: There is a 3' overhang around the building. Wooden brackets extend from the building to support the rafters and beam projections of redwood.

c. Dormers: There are two flat roof dormers on both the north and south slopes of the main roof. They have shingle siding and composition roofs.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: There is a central hall plan with three rooms to the south, two to the north, and the kitchen in the northeast wing. The first floor plan is essentially unchanged.

b. Second floor: There is an irregular L-shaped plan with a corridor going into the northeast wing. There are six chambers on this level.

c. Third floor: The third floor can only be reached by the service stairway in the northeast (service) wing. At the top of the stairs one enters a large attic room. To the west there are two chambers, and at the east end there is a single room. A complete bathroom is adjacent to the stairway.

2. Stairways: The main stairway is located at the center of the house and only provides access to the second floor.

The stairway is an important element within the central hall. Light floods the stairway from the large north windows at the upper level. The stairs are a generous 6' wide; details are simple, with an unmolded railing and square balusters.

The wooden rear service stairs are composed of a dogleg stair of fourteen risers between the basement and the first floor, and a dogleg stair of seventeen risers between the first and second floor, with a straight-run stair of fourteen risers between the second and third floors.

3. Flooring: Wooden floors are used throughout except in the bathrooms, which have ceramic tile of a later date. The floors for all closets and bathrooms are raised 4" above normal floor level. This design feature is typical of Gill's later work.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Lath and plaster walls and ceilings; plain redwood wainscoting is used in the main rooms.

5. Doors: There are sliding doors and double doors to all major first floor rooms. Standard doors with a single recessed wooden panel are also employed. On the third floor the doors are flush paneled (this is the first instance of Gill's use of this door type; he used it exclusively in his later works).

6. Decorative features, trim, cabinet work: A flat board trim was used around all openings and at a chair rail height. On the main floor, built-in cabinets, window seats (later removed) and shelving are found. The dining room has a wall of cabinets on the north side; the library and music room have shelves and cabinets. The butler's pantry and kitchen retain much of their original carpentry. There is a fine wooden board wainscot on the first floor which has simple butterfly splices. All rooms have a picture molding at the ceiling. The woodwork throughout the house is notable for its simplicity of the detailing and the fine craftsmanship.

7. Notable hardware: Simple hardware is used throughout; some of it is standard and other pieces were designed by the architect.

8. Mechanical equipment:

   a. Heating: There are fireplaces in the living room, along the south wall; dining room along the east wall; and library along the south wall. Originally, there was a coal burning furnace in the basement. Presently there is a forced-air heating unit in the house.

   b. Lighting: Gas and electricity were originally provided for lighting; however, the electricity is now used exclusively.

   c. Plumbing: Standard plumbing fixtures are used.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The building is situated on the east side of Seventh Avenue just to the north of Upas Street. To the east is Interstate route 395, which cuts through the canyon of Balboa Park. To the south is Balboa Park. The site is spectacular, with large trees, expansive lawns, and a formal garden. The upper site, occupied by the house, is flat; the site slopes away from the house downward to the freeway. The house is L-shaped with the two legs of the "L" on the south and east sides. Entrance is on the west end (the top of the "L"). To the north are the formal gardens. At the northwest corner of the site is a garage and other sevice buildings.

2. Historic landscape design: The house was built on a site largely devoid of major vegetation. The landscaping was developed in subsequent years by Kate Session. A formal garden was laid out to the north of the house, composed of a large rectangular green lawn with flatstone walks around it. To the north of the house and garden are terraces. The eastern portion of the site has paths winding down through heavy vegetation.

Prepared by Robert C. Giebner
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
August 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the San Diego Historical Society, the San Diego Historic Sites Board, the County of San Diego and the American Institute of Architects. The recording project was completed under the direction of James C. Massey, chief of HABS. The George W. Marston House was measured and drawn the summer of 1971, by Professor Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona), project supervisor, with student assistant architects Jashina A. Tarr (University of California at Berkeley), Ronald J. Lake (Ball State University), and Phillip P. Wisley (Ball State University), at the San Diego, California field office. The drawings were edited by William Klein in the HABS office. The historical data was prepared by John D. Henderson, AIA in December 1970; the architectural written data was prepared by Robert C. Giebner in August 1971. The data was edited and in some cases expanded in January 1979 by Mary Beth Betts in the HABS office. Photographs were taken in September 1971 by Marvin Rand for HABS. Photocopies of blueprints of the original drawings and a 1905 photograph are courtesy of the San Diego Historical Society.