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GIRTON HALL: THE GIFT OF JULIA MORGAN

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JULIA MORGAN (B.S. '94, LL.D. '29) was described, in the citation for her honorary degree, as a "Distinguished alumna of the University of California; artist and engineer; designer of simple dwellings and of stately homes, of great buildings nobly planned to further the centralized activities of her fellow citizens; architect in whose works harmony and admirable proportions bring pleasure to the eye and peace to the mind." She is most frequently remembered as the architect of William Randolph Hearst's extravagant San Simeon castle on the central California coast.¹

Miss Morgan's long association with the University of California began in 1890 when she enrolled as a freshman in civil engineering. After graduation, she became the first woman in architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. She shared the excitement of the 1899 Phoebe Apperson Hearst international competition for the architectural plan of the campus when her former teacher, Bernard Maybeck, his wife, and Mrs. Hearst were promoting the competition in Paris. Upon her return from Paris in 1902, she worked with the campus architect, John Galen Howard, on the Hearst Memorial Mining Building (1902-1903) and the Greek Theatre (1903). She designed two sorority houses (Kappa Alpha Theta in 1908 and Delta Zeta in 1923) and Girton Hall (Senior Women's Hall) in 1911. She collaborated with Bernard Maybeck on the Hearst Women's Gymnasium in 1925-26, and they designed several other memorials to Phoebe Apperson Hearst that were never built.²

Girton Hall, formerly Senior Women's Hall, is the smallest and least known of Morgan's campus buildings, but it exemplifies those qualities of planning, harmony, and proportion which "bring pleasure to the eye and peace to the mind." In 1910 the Associated Women Students asked Morgan to design a small building for their activities on a wooded knoll just north of Strawberry Creek, east of what was then College Avenue, and about 500 feet south of the Greek Theatre. In 1946, when College Avenue was closed, it was moved about 160 feet west, to make room for the Gayley Road extension of Piedmont Avenue, across the east side of the campus, and is now in the shadow of Haas Business School. Its name was changed to Girton Hall in 1969 when it was given over to child care.

Two remarkable campus personalities are involved in the story of Girton Hall: Benjamin Ide Wheeler, president from 1899 to 1919, and Lucy Sprague, the first dean of women from 1906 to 1912. Wheeler presided over the development of the Phoebe Apperson Hearst campus plan, with John Galen Howard as architect, and over an unprecedented expansion of enrollment. He strongly believed in student government as a means of developing character and good citizenship among the students.³ Leadership fell to the senior class. This was a pioneering idea in his time, but one he felt was particularly important in a public univer-

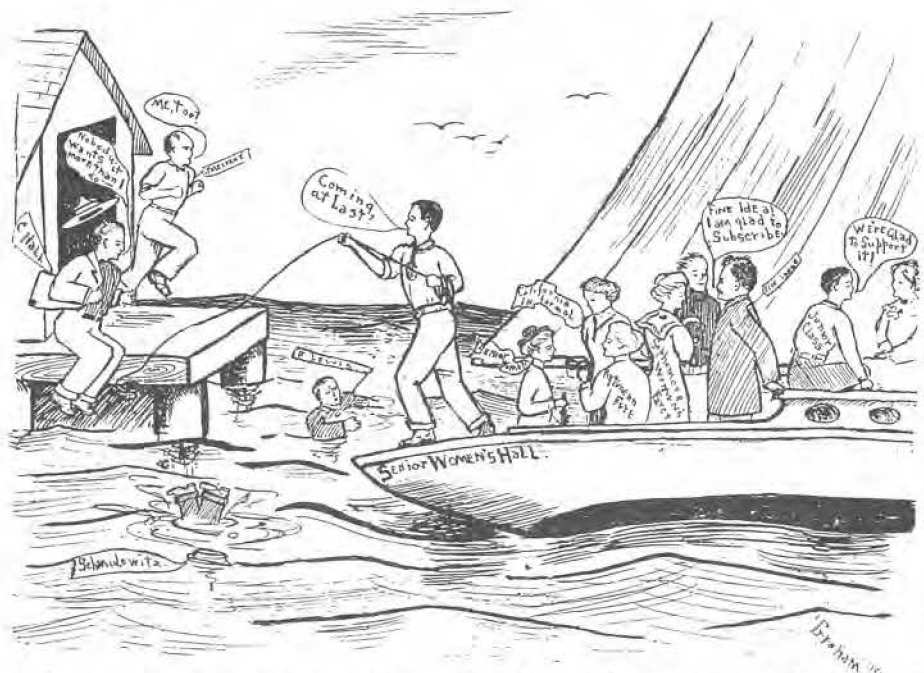


Julia Morgan, 1899. *Courtesy of Special Collections, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.*

sity. Towards this goal, Wheeler established an honor society, the Order of the Golden Bear in 1900, open only to senior men. In due course, money was raised for a Senior Men's Hall to accommodate their singing and other activities. Their rustic log cabin, near The Faculty Club, was completed in 1906. Howard, the campus architect, donated his services.

The Associated Women Students (AWS) was organized in September 1894, the semester after Morgan's graduation. At the time, when few activities and services were available for women, the AWS initiated debating, drama, music, and academic societies. Prytanean, the women's honor society, was established in 1900. Phoebe Hearst generously entertained the women students throughout the 1890s and donated Hearst Hall for their gymnasium and other activities in 1901. Wheeler saw a need for an administrator to address the needs of the women students, and, in 1903, asked the twenty-five-year-old, high-spirited Lucy Sprague, then secretary to the dean of Radcliffe College, to serve as the first dean of women at the University of California.⁴ At the time, her father was living in Pasadena; her sister Mary was married to Adolph Miller, professor of economics at the university. Lucy agreed to come to California and assist Wheeler in his mission to improve the lives and educations of women at the university but would not accept the position of dean until 1906, when she felt sufficiently acquainted with campus issues. She, too, was committed to student self-government and encouraged the women students' organizations. The popular Dean Sprague was called the "fairy tale princess" because the students thought she made dreams come true.⁵ This image was enhanced by the weekly student teas she held at Story Book House, her Ridge Road home, another Howard design.⁶

President Wheeler had initiated the Senior Men's Singings. Miss Sprague encouraged the Senior Women's Singings, inaugurated by the Class of 1910. The Thursday evening women's gatherings included singing college songs and discussing campus needs. Soon, they realized that Hearst Hall could not accommodate all the meetings and rehearsals of the



Fundraising underway for Senior Women's Hall. *Pelican Woman's Number*, February 1910.



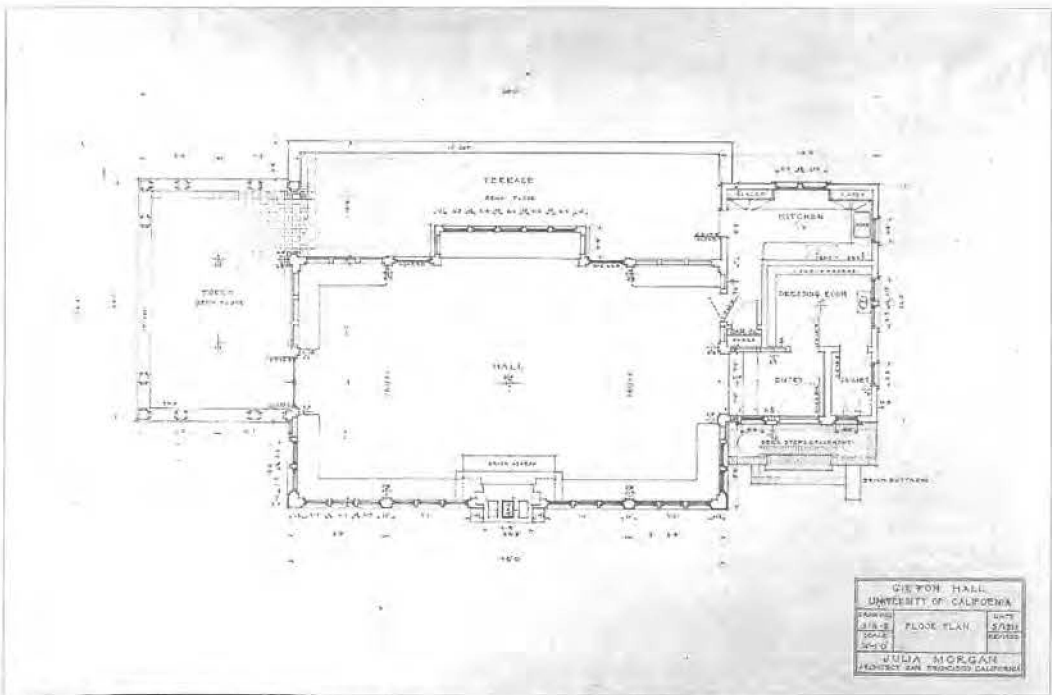
Front and rear elevations, Girton Hall (May 1911). *College of Environmental Design Documents Collection.*

women's musical and dramatic societies. During the spring term they began their fundraising for a Senior Women's Hall with enthusiastic support from Miss Sprague.⁷ The campaign included all four classes, as each would benefit once the building was completed. The young women staged programs and wrote letters to solicit funds. In the beginning, they referred to their project as Girton Hall, out of respect for the first women's college at Cambridge University, but by the time it was completed, it was officially known as Senior Women's Hall, a counterpart to the Senior Men's Hall.

The building committee, which included women from the classes of 1910, 1911, and 1912, selected a site overlooking Strawberry Creek, in an area already known as "Coed Canyon."⁸ They chose Julia Morgan to design their building. By 1910 Morgan was well known in the Berkeley community. In addition to her work with John Galen Howard on the Greek Theatre and the Hearst Memorial Mining Building, she had completed a house for her sorority, Kappa Alpha Theta, on Durant Avenue, two years earlier. She occasionally taught classes for Howard in the new architecture school when he was traveling during the school term. She had also designed numerous houses in the neighborhoods north and south of the university. One member of the building committee, Mabel Sadler, lived in her family's shingled 1905 Julia Morgan house on Benvenue Avenue, south of the campus.

Julia Morgan was a logical choice to design the women's building, and the students were clearly pleased with their building. There is no evidence that Lucy Sprague and Julia Morgan were close friends; however they had mutual friends and acquaintances in Berkeley. Morgan had traveled to Europe with her classmate, Jessica Peixotto, in 1896. Peixotto was the only other woman on the faculty when Sprague arrived, and the two shared a house in the Berkeley hills until 1906. Morgan's former employer, Howard, designed the Sprague house in 1906, the same year Morgan designed a house for Jessica Peixotto on College Avenue.

There were delays while the students raised money for Girton Hall, but in February 1911 the regents' Committee on Grounds and Buildings reviewed Julia Morgan's preliminary plans and recommended giving the Associated Women Students permission to build. The final revisions are dated May 1911. The regents authorized contracts in June, and agreed to advance up to \$1,500 over and above the \$3,300 raised by the students. It became clear that an additional \$1,000 would be required to complete and furnish the building. Miss Sprague agreed to donate \$500 if the students could raise the balance.⁹ She and the student building committee attended the regents' meeting on August 8, 1911 when the contracts were signed. Lucy Sprague guaranteed the repayment of the overdraft. Construction was completed in the fall of 1911, and the opening took place November 23. On March 12, 1912, the regents accepted the building from the Associated Women Students and carefully noted that Miss Julia Morgan had contributed her services as architect for the building. The faculty wives donated a set of dishes, and the women of the class of 1913 gave the draperies. Senior Women's Hall was, without question, a cooperative effort among the women of the university: students, staff, alumnae, and wives.



Floorplan. *College of Environmental Design Documents Collection.*

The engineer's survey shows the site of the Senior Women's Hall on a knoll about fifteen feet above Strawberry Creek with four existing oaks, spreading twenty-five to fifty feet, and a narrow footpath along the top of the creek bank. The site was approached by turning east from College Avenue, north of the Piedmont Avenue cul-de-sac, along the road to the dairy barn. When the road was realigned in 1922 to accommodate Memorial Stadium, the Hall was unaffected. The redwood siding perfectly complemented the wooded setting, and a brick terrace overlooked the creek on the south.

Julia Morgan's composition reveals the highly disciplined planning techniques she had learned during her years at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and, at the same time, fits the building into the rustic surroundings. The symmetrical, three-part building has a high central room, flanked by two lower pavilions. The central, biaxial hall was approached from the

vestibule in the west pavilion. After entering and turning to the left, three steps led up to the main room. This long axis continued through the hall to a covered porch on the east, symmetrical with the entrance pavilion. The focal point of the hall was the massive brick fireplace and chimney on the north. A short axis extended from the fireplace across the room past a window seat, across the brick terrace, and extended further, into the landscape, by the view down to Strawberry Creek. Doors on either side of the window seat opened onto the terrace. A second long axis, along the terrace and parallel to the one from the entrance, connected the covered porch on the east with the kitchen, behind the vestibule.

The central hall measured twenty-two by forty feet, and the lower side pavilions, both set back, measured fourteen by twenty-two feet. The north facade, with unadorned redwood clapboards and shingles above the eaves of the wings, is punctuated only by the entrance, a band of clerestory windows, and the brick chimney. The original roof was redwood shakes. The interior is finished with redwood paneling, exposed framing, and two exposed six inch by six inch redwood trusses, forming a square in the center of the main room. The highest point is fifteen feet; the building contains approximately 1,740 square feet, slightly more than half the size of Senior Men's Hall. The scale is domestic, yet the building accommodates large groups, spilling into the covered porch and onto the terrace. The only interior fitting known to be designed by Julia Morgan is the fire screen with the SWH monogram. This remains in use.

Senior Women's Hall combines the planning principles advocated by the *École des Beaux-Arts* with the simple ideals of the emerging San Francisco Bay Area arts and crafts tradition. It is important to recognize that the *Beaux-Arts* training was a method of approaching design, not a style.¹⁰ The teachings emphasized axial planning, symmetry, articulation of circulation, expression of structure, and the manifestation of the interior in the exterior form. The experience of space was always linked to the architectural promenade, the orderly movement through a carefully orchestrated series of spaces, large and small, bright and dark. Each transition, each doorway, each view inside and out, and each turn was considered. Amazingly, the little Senior Women's Hall followed these prescriptions.

Locally, a group of San Francisco Bay Area architects and designers were following the teachings of the English designer William Morris who had been advocating since the 1870s a return to the handicrafts of earlier times. The most fervent local advocates were the members of Berkeley's Hillside Club. In his 1904 tract, *The Simple Home*, the Hillside president, Charles Keeler, called for uncovered shingles, brick or plaster with open timber work and extremely simple finishes.¹¹ Senior Women's Hall followed these dicta as well.

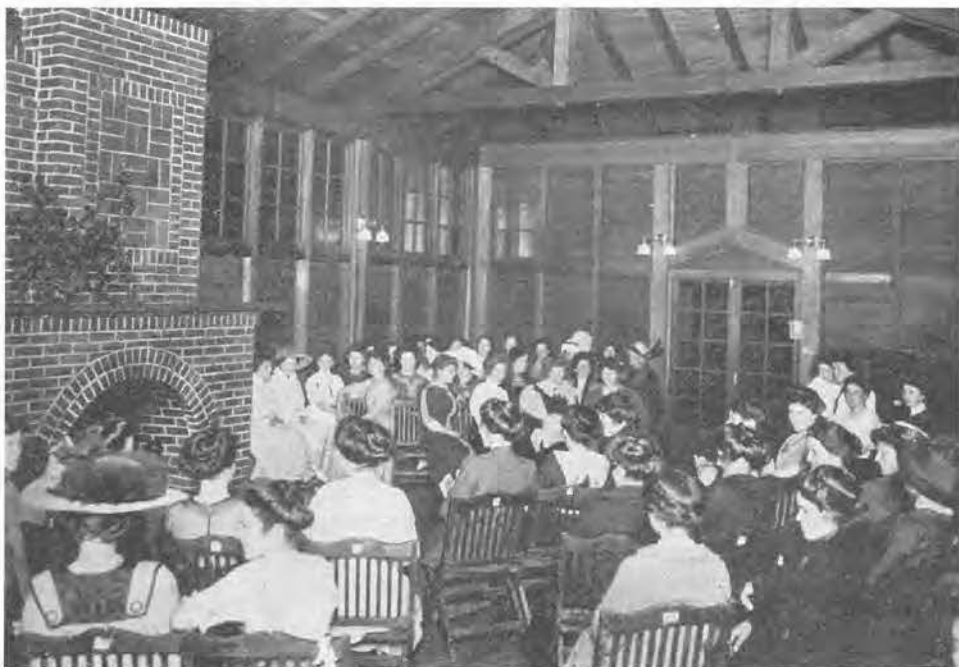
The 1913 *Blue and Gold* described the excitement of the opening festivities:

It was a happy event, the opening of Senior Women's Hall, and the women of 1912 feel themselves undeservedly fortunate . . . On November 23rd, the new bungalow in Strawberry Canyon, just south of the Greek Theatre, was formally opened. In the afternoon the Seniors were hostesses at a tea for graduates and faculty women, and in the evening, after the visitors had left, the girls gathered around the fire for a basket supper, which was followed by Senior singing and a very enjoyable musical program. The white dresses shone in the cheerful glow of the firelight and there was a buzz of happy voices. From the kitchen there came the rattle of cups and certain willing maidens carried in steaming coffee. Everybody was smiling. What friends they all were!

The Women of 1912 have been the first to enjoy Senior Women's Hall. If asked what had impressed them most they would probably answer, its possibilities. Each Senior Singing they have appreciated more and more what

opportunities it affords, this center of the California feminine—this second heart of the University.¹²

Professor Henry Morse Stephens had called Senior Men's Hall the "true heart of the University" in the same *Blue and Gold*.



Senior women singing in the new hall, November 1911. 1913 *Blue and Gold*.

The women were justifiably exuberant over their new building, so well planned and suited to their needs. In her July 1912 report to President Wheeler, Dean Sprague stated:

Self-government among the women students grows steadily in scope and in value. . . . All such work which naturally falls to seniors, will be made more effective through the charming little "Senior Women's Hall" which the women have built in Strawberry Canyon. Miss Julia Morgan, who planned the building and gave her services, has helped the women in a very genuine way.

This was precisely the sort of student undertaking that furthered Wheeler's educational goals of self-esteem, responsibility, and future citizenship. Its success was applauded repeatedly in the *Daily Californian* over the years. Initially, its use was restricted to the senior women. Later, it was opened to all women's societies, and it continued to be used by campus women's clubs until 1969 when it became the site of a university childcare center. However, since Senior Women's Hall was no longer an appropriate name, it was changed to Girton Hall, the students' original choice.

Within the scope of Julia Morgan's work on the Berkeley campus and elsewhere, the Senior Women's Hall is easily overlooked. The building was conventional and not a departure from the norms of the time. Her previous simple redwood buildings with exposed structure included St. John's Presbyterian Church, 1910, south of the university campus, and the original gymnasium at Mills College, 1909. It was a technique she used repeatedly in her later work, most notably in her work for the YWCA at Asilomar in Pacific Grove in the 1920s.

By the time she designed the Senior Women's Hall, Julia Morgan had established herself as an architect for women's schools and organizations. She had designed several buildings at Mills College, the Oakland women's college. These included El Campanil, the gymnasium, and the infirmary. She had also designed a building for the Friday Morning Club in Los Angeles (never built), the Kings Daughters Home in Oakland, the Ransome and Bridges School for Girls in Piedmont, and Miss Anna Head's house on the Berkeley campus of the Anna Head School. Her later practice included numerous buildings for women's schools and organizations throughout California and the West. The most prominent of these were the YWCA commissions and the Berkeley Women's City Club.

A small building on a large campus and a minor work in the scope of Julia Morgan's architectural practice, the Senior Women's Hall remains a resounding success. It was the product of a very young and enthusiastic building committee who were encouraged in their efforts by dynamic administrators, alumnae, and faculty wives. They were fortunate to have found a highly talented and skilled architect, sympathetic to their needs. The architectural integrity of Girton Hall is impeccable from both utilitarian and aesthetic standpoints.

The building was moved to the present site in 1946, at the time, north of Cowell Hospital. The area was still wooded and overlooked Strawberry Creek. A few changes were made to the building. The orientation shifted, and the south-facing brick terrace at the rear became a wood deck facing southwest towards the Women's Faculty Club. This part of the campus has since become congested with the new Minor Hall (optometry) and Haas Business School, and Strawberry Creek is in a culvert. Since 1969 the area immediately below the deck has been developed as an outdoor children's play area. The domestic scale has proved advantageous for its present use.



Senior Women's Hall, ca. 1944. 1945 *Blue and Gold*, courtesy of Ed Kirwan Graphic Arts.

ENDNOTES

- 1 I would like to thank the following for their help during the preparation of this article: the staff of The Bancroft Library, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, College of Environmental Design Documents Collection, Joan Draper, J. R. K. Kantor, William Roberts (University Archivist), and Anne Shaw (Office of the Secretary of The Regents).
- 2 The best general source on the life and work of Julia Morgan is Sara Boutelle, *Julia Morgan, Architect* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2nd edition, 1995). See also The Julia Morgan Architectural History Project, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
- 3 Monroe E. Deutsch, ed., *Benjamin Ide Wheeler, The Abundant Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1926).
- 4 Lucy Sprague Mitchell, *Two Lives: The Story of Wesley Clair Mitchell and Myself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953) and Joyce Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987).
- 5 Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell*, 105.
- 6 This house was lost in the Berkeley fire of 1923. See Joan Draper, "John Galen Howard," in Robert Winter, ed., *Towards a Simpler Way of Life: The Arts and Crafts Architects of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 34.
- 7 Mabel Sadler Ferrier, "History of Senior Women's Hall," University Archives, University of California, Berkeley, n. p.
- 8 The Associated Women Students' Building Committee included Miss Hazel B. Jordan (Chairman), Miss Ethel Lockhart, Miss Marion Gay, Miss Marguerite Ogden, Miss Edith Pence, and Miss Mabel Louise Sadler.
- 9 Ferrier, "History of Senior Women's Hall".
- 10 See, for example, Arthur Drexler, ed., *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 111-115.
- 11 Charles Keeler, *The Simple Home* (San Francisco: Paul Elder & Company, 1904). Keeler's other writings are discussed in Leslie Mandelson Freudenheim and Elisabeth Sacks Sussman, *Building with Nature: Roots of the San Francisco Bay Region Tradition* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1974), 33-74.
- 12 *1913 Blue and Gold*, 39 (1912), 165-166.



When She Enters.



When She Graduates.

1895 *Blue and Gold*.