



International Archive of Women in Architecture

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
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IAWA Spotlight: Mary Rockwell Hook

When Mary Rockwell Hook completed her final examinations in 1906 at the Atelier Auburtin, a studio of L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, French male students hurled buckets of water at her as she fled through the courtyard of the famous school.

But when she reached her 100th birthday in 1977, she faced a different reception. Residents of Kansas City celebrated with a tour of the famous and magnificent homes she designed there, and the American Institute of Architects, which she had not been allowed to join because of her sex, presented her with a plaque for distinguished service.

A dedicated and creative architect, Hook's design abilities changed attitudes throughout her long, professionally productive life.

In 1902, two years after graduating from Wellesley, she accompanied her family on a trip abroad. "It was during this trip home from the Philippines that I decided someone needed to improve the design of the buildings used by our government abroad. I made up my mind to go home and study architecture," she wrote in her autobiography.

To prepare for her chosen field, she enrolled in 1903 in the architecture department of the Chicago Art Institute, the only woman in her class. "It was an era," the *Kansas City Star* later reported, "when male architects were openly antagonistic to women joining the profession."

In 1905, she went to France to study under Marcel Auburtin. Upon her completion of the French Beaux Arts examination, she faced the hostility of French male students.

After her training was completed in

1906, she experienced difficulties securing employment, again because of her sex. Her family had moved to Kansas City in 1906, and she eventually found work there as an apprentice for the firm of Howe, Hoit and Cutler.

Hook's father would not allow his daughter to accept a salary, but he purchased lots around town so she could design houses for them. One of her designs was the first in the city to have an attached garage, while another was the first to have a private swimming pool. Hook also was the first architect in Kansas City to incorporate the natural terrain into her designs and the first to use cast-in-place concrete walls.

Around 1913, Hook received a letter from Ethel de Long, asking her to provide architectural service for a school that Long and Katherine Pettit expected to build in the Kentucky mountains. "It sounded interesting and something impelled me to take the challenge," Hook later wrote.

Hook travelled to Hazard, Ky., where she was met "by a boy with two horses." After a 30-mile ride to meet the educators and two more days on horseback to reach Pine Mountain, the site for the new school, Hook spent a week "walking in deep grass, trying to formulate a comprehensive plan of all the buildings needed for a school of 100 students for the next 20 years," she wrote. She called the area "an 18th century world," where "there is no village to mar the peaceful landscape, where trains, motors, and chewing gum have not penetrated."

The land had been donated by William Creech, a local resident who had dreamed for 40 years of finding some means to educate the local people. Hook, Long, and Pettit determined, in Hook's words, "to treasure all the lower lands for agriculture as every inch would be

needed to feed the school, to use the steeper places for building, to concentrate all buildings of a public nature toward the center of the property, and to use the two flanking ends of our valley for cottages."

Hook's first project for the school was to restore a tumble-down log cabin, which was called Old Log House and later was listed as a Kentucky Historical Shrine. The second project was a log house for Pettit.

The architect used raw materials from the land in her designs: boulders and chestnut, oak, and poplar trees. With no mill available nearby, one was installed and operated on the property. A year was spent cutting trees and drying and sawing lumber just for the schools' dining room building, called Laurel House.

Hook maintained her association with the school, remaining on the board of trustees until well after her 90th birthday.

In 1921 at the age of 44, Hook married Inghram Hook, an attorney, and returned two years later to Kansas City, where



One of Hook's Pine Mountain Settlement School buildings



Hook's Old Laurel House.

she started the firm of Hook and Remington.

During her youth, she had taken a number of trips to Europe and the Far East with her family, where she was influenced by the charm and beauty of the great houses and palaces she saw. In Kansas City during the 1920s and 30s, "she translated those ideas into the Sunset Hill houses that serve as her monument," the *Kansas City Star* later reported. Many of the houses are Italianate, combining stone, brick, and antique materials with leaded panes, fresco painting, and tile work. Among them was her own home, designed in 1925, which became a showplace.

In 1935, Hook went to Sarasota, Fla., and purchased 55 acres of Gulf-front property on Siesta Key. She developed one area, Whispering Sands, as a haven for artists and writers. Subsequently, she designed an outdoor chapel at St. Boniface Church and a number of homes in Sandy Hook, a residential area that became a place where original ideas of innovative architects found expression. It was here that she designed an octagon-shaped house with pie-shaped rooms for herself and her husband.

Hook, who had established a pattern of incorporating the natural terrain in her designs while working in Kansas City, continued "bringing the outdoors in, and many of the homes she designed on Siesta Key reflected the trend long before it became popular," the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* reported. The contemporary houses were built of glass and wood. As early as 1937, she installed a solar system to provide hot water for a resort hotel on Siesta Key.

Although Hook became blind in her later years, she still imagined designs and offered suggestions for modifications to the White House. She wrote her autobiography, "This and That," in 1970, eight years before she died on her 101st birthday.



Hook's New Laurel House.

Today, as the materials in the International Archive of Women in Architecture indicate, Mary Rockwell Hook will be remembered, not because she was a woman working in a "man's field," but because she was a successful designer who made her mark in the field of architecture. **CBC**

Recent Acquisitions

Zelma Wilson, who was born in New York in 1918 and moved to Ventura County, Calif., when she was two years old, wanted to be an architect from the time she was 11.

"However, in those days, for a female to say she wanted to be an architect was like saying, 'I want to walk on the moon,'" Wilson said.

But she pursued her ambition, receiving a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Southern California in 1947 and studying at the University of California at Berkeley, L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, and the California Institute of Technology. Around 1956, she obtained her license.

Yet, she said, "it was difficult to convince employers to delegate important responsibilities to women. Sometimes I got lucky and would fall into a position to see the larger architectural process which had previously been released to me in tantalizing glimpses."

When she opened her own office in 1967 in Ojai, Calif., she got the opportunity "to view the total architectural experience" and "to fulfill my earliest aspiration: to build socially useful as well as aesthetically pleasing structures, to respect the tradition and values of the community, and to be concerned always with the rapport of the building and its surroundings."

Wilson, now a Fellow in the AIA, has designed some of Ventura County's most distinctive buildings, including the Ojai City Hall. **CBC**

"That Exceptional One: Women in American Architecture 1888-1988," a traveling exhibition organized by the American Architectural Foundation and the AIA Women in Architecture Committee, took its title from a 1955 brochure, "Should You Be an Architect," where Pietro Belluschi, FAIA, wrote: "I cannot, in whole conscience, recommend architecture as a profession for girls. . . . [T]he obstacles are so great that it takes an exceptional girl to make a go of it. . . ."

Yet, in 1891, Louise Blanchard Bethune (1856-1913) stated: "The future of woman in the architectural profession is what she sees herself fit to make it." Three years earlier, Bethune had become the first woman elected to AIA membership, and the exhibition marks the centennial of this event.

By 1955, numerous women had graduated in architecture, some practicing in the conventional manner, others finding new ways to apply their talents and skills. During the 1960s and 70s, the number of women studying architecture continued to rise in spite of Belluschi's advice.

The exhibition features women's early achievements: Sophia Hayden's design for the Woman's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago; Elice Mercur's 1895 design for the Woman's Building at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta; projects by Ida Annah Ryan and Florence Luscomb, who established their own firm in 1909; and by Anna Schenck and Marcia Mead, who formed a partnership one year later.

In view are works from the first half of this century by pioneers such as Julia Morgan, Eleanor Raymond, Lulah Maria Riggs, Katharine Cotheal Budd, Mary Colter, and numerous projects by the women of the generations that followed.

The exhibition portrays a century of achievements, documents the diversity and breath of women's contributions to the architectural profession, and provides a wide spectrum of models for future generations.

The IAWA will safeguard these materials, making them available to researchers and working with institutions willing to display them. **MTB**



International News

The Ninth Congress of the International Union of Women Architects (abbreviated UIFA from its French name, Union Internationale des Femmes Architectes) was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in August.

The theme of the Congress, "Identity in Architecture," was addressed in over 50 presentations that were followed by lively discussions.

The president and founder, in 1963, of UIFA, Solange d'Herbez de la Tour, pleaded for the preservation of national and regional identity in contemporary design to maintain the unique cultural

and architectural character of each part of the world.

UIFA members donated to the IAWA the entire 1984 exhibition entitled "On the History of Women Architects and Designers in the 20th Century" and "Women Architects in Austria." After the 1988 exhibition in Washington, D.C., and the 1991 exhibition in Copenhagen, Denmark, closed, several women also donated their panels to the IAWA.

Thus, the archive is becoming the largest collection that can provide models of women's work to future generations. Joining these models will be the UIFA's archive, which will be deposited in the IAWA as well. **MTB**

In the Archive

Anna Campbell Bliss. Artist, architect, and consultant on color and design in Salt Lake City, Utah. Partner of Bliss and Campbell, Architects. Founder and former president of the Contemporary Arts Group.

California Women in Environmental Design. Organization for women architects and designers in California.

Erdmute Carlini. Landscape architect in Berlin, Germany.

Olive Chadeayne. Architect in Walnut Creek, California.

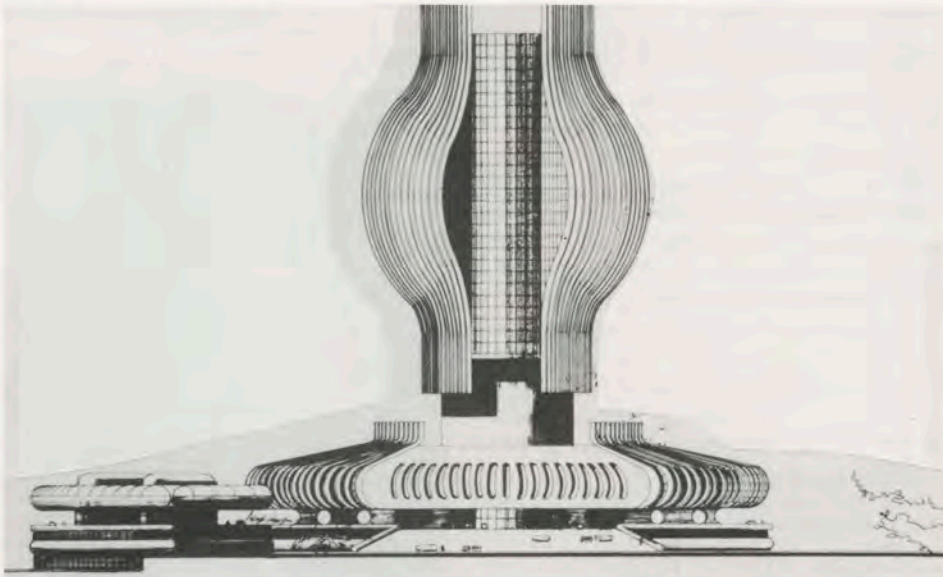
Wena Dows. Architect in Culver City, California.

Ilse Koci. Architect in Vienna, Austria.

Louise Mendelsohn. Champion of the formation of the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C., and wife of noted architect Eric Mendelsohn.

Lorraine Rudoff. Architect in Los Angeles, California. Life member and former president of the Association for Women in Architecture, an organization for women architects and designers based in Los Angeles.

Elise Sundt. Architect in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Director of the Center of Studies of Habitat and Housing sponsored by the Organization of American States and the School of Architecture, Design and Urbanism of the University of Buenos Aires. **LKS**



A Koci design

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Rudoff's design of the Beverly Hills Civic Center

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