

First Unitarian Church
685 Fourteenth Street
Oakland
Alameda County
California

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

**Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107**

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF OAKLAND

HABS NO. CA-2670

LOCATION

685 - Fourteenth Street (southeast corner of Castro Street)
Oakland, Alameda County, California

USGS Oakland West Quadrangle (7.5')

Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10.563750.4184400

SIGNIFICANCE

The First Unitarian Church of Oakland is an early example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style in California, which is applied to a u-plan complex consisting of an auditorium, a Sunday School, and a Parish House. The interiors of the three wings are linked by sliding doors in a modified version of the wide-spread Akron plan for churches. The structure is a complex hybrid of timber framing, common brick, and stud-framing, clad in a veneer of face brick, sandstone, and stucco. Altogether, the imagery of the building mixes the elite, in its style and materials, with popular culture, in its plan. The church was designed by the Oakland architect, Walter J. Mathews, under the direction of the Rev. Charles W. Wendte. Wendte was a leading Unitarian minister on the Pacific Coast in the 1880s -1890s. The church, with its well-to-do congregation, was a center of intellectual and cultural life in the East Bay, especially in the 1890s. Among many prominent speakers and artists to appear at the church were William Howard Taft, Herbert Hoover, Julia Ward Howe, Alexander Graham Bell, Jack London, and Isadora Duncan. The building was damaged in the earthquake of 1989, and is presently (1996) undergoing renovation.

DESCRIPTION

Overview

The First Unitarian Church of Oakland is both stylish in its appearance and a common type of Protestant church in its plan. With its main auditorium and attached Sunday School and social spaces connected by large sliding doors, its plan is derived from the widely built late nineteenth

century Akron-plan type of the Methodist Church. Its auditorium and Sunday school arrangement is associated with the similar spaces for a similar form of worship practiced in Unitarian, Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, and Christian Science churches in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With its corner tower and Richardsonian Romanesque style rendered expensively in brick, stone, stucco, and stained glass, its imagery is associated with Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches which characteristically place more importance on style, image, and architectural embellishment. The following description and history focuses on the Parish House (east wing) and includes an overview of the whole church property (see Project Information section at the end of this report).

Setting

The First Unitarian Church of Oakland is located at the southeast corner of Fourteenth and Castro Streets on a rectangular lot whose original dimensions were 150 by 100 feet ¹ (along Fourteenth and Castro Streets, respectively). The church was built a few blocks west of downtown Oakland in a well-to-do residential neighborhood. During construction of the church in 1890-1891, and for at least a few years afterwards, the minister lived in a house on the opposite side of Fourteenth Street. From 1893 to the 1950s, there was a palm tree in the quadrangle. From sometime after 1904 until the 1950s, there was a street lamp at the corner. Iron hitching posts were originally placed along both street frontages; while those along Castro Street were removed in the 1960s, three remain on the Fourteenth Street side. ²

Over the years, the neighborhood changed dramatically. The Oakland Public Library was built next door in 1904. By 1910, when an apartment building was built across the street at the northeast corner of Fourteenth and Castro Streets, the original neighborhood of single family houses was changing into a working class neighborhood of subdivided houses and apartments. By 1951, there was a police garage and fire station on Grove Street (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Way) a block away. ³ In the 1960s, the route of the Grove-Shafter freeway was established west of the church across Castro Street. Many buildings in the neighborhood were demolished. In the 1980s, Preservation Park, a group of moved and restored houses, was established for office and commercial uses on the south end of the same block.

Today, the First Unitarian Church sits between the Grove-Shafter freeway and an expanding downtown. The neighborhood includes apartment buildings, houses, vacant lots, a vacant

library (proposed for reuse as the African-American Museum and Library at Oakland), and Preservation Park.

Plan

In plan, the First Unitarian Church of Oakland consists of three wings in a U-shape open to the north, facing Fourteenth Street. The auditorium wing and tower, oriented north-south, are on the west side at the corner of Castro Street. The Sunday school wing, called Wendte Hall (since after the time of Rev. Wendte's departure in 1898), is oriented east-west and runs across the rear. The Parish House oriented north-south, is on the east side. The three wings frame a central courtyard or "quadrangle" which originally contained a circular entrance drive with access to Fourteenth Street. The circular drive passed under a porte cochere at the northeast entry to the auditorium wing. The porte cochere was demolished in the 1950s. The variety of functions served by the church was accommodated both by segregating primary functions in the three wings, each of which had its own entrances, and by simultaneously providing for the flexible use of several spaces by sliding doors. When all the sliding doors were closed, the three wings and various spaces within them could function independently for a variety of purposes. When all the doors were open, spaces in all three wings were linked.

The rectangular auditorium wing is in three parts with small spaces at either end of the main, open auditorium (55 by 68 feet). Curving rows of folding wood seats facing the south end originally accommodated 500 people. At the south end is a central semicircular "rostrum and pulpit" flanked by an enclosed minister's ante room on the west and a space originally designated for choir and organ on the east. At the north end are square entrance vestibules (14 by 14 feet) on either side of a central "lobby or reception room". Circular stairs in projecting bays lead up from each vestibule to a second level gallery across the north end of the auditorium, originally with 100 seats. Folding doors between the auditorium and the rear lobby, and slide-up doors between the auditorium and the Sunday school wing on the east side make it possible to expand the main space for large crowds. Upstairs in the tower is an office floor at the third level and an open deck at the fifth level, under the roof. The auditorium wing is entered in several places. The main public entrances are at the north end, up a few steps from Castro Street into the west vestibule at the base of the tower; and into the east vestibule from both Fourteenth Street and the circular drive. A secondary entrance from Castro Street into the minister's ante room was at one level, to accommodate wheel chairs.⁴

At a right angle to the auditorium wing is an open rectangular space (44 by 54 feet) originally designated "Sunday School Room and Social Hall", now called Wendte Hall. At the west end of Wendte Hall, three large doors can slide up to link Wendte Hall with the auditorium, adding 250 seats. The south side wall of Wendte Hall is in a line with the rear main interior wall of the auditorium, so that when the two spaces are linked, Wendte Hall is oriented toward the choir and pulpit area of the auditorium. At the east end of Wendte Hall are openings at two levels. At the ground level are two large sliding doors into what were originally two parlor spaces in the Parish House wing. In the second level are two large openings into the dining area. Access to Wendte Hall is through the sliding doors from adjacent wings at either end, and from entrances from the courtyard at the corners: at the east corner there is an exterior porch, and at the west corner there is an interior vestibule (now called the flower room). In addition, a door in the southwest corner leads to a janitor's room from which stairs descend to a furnace room. Wendte Hall is a rare surviving Sunday school space in the tradition of the Akron plan, with its open space and its sliding door linkages to adjacent spaces surviving intact.

Parish House

On the east side of the property, at a right angle to Wendte Hall is a rectangular two-story wing, 27 feet wide, originally designated as the Parish House and now referred to as the east wing. The east wing is divided about one-third of the way back by an entry area and stairwell which rises through both stories. The covered veranda leads to a principal entrance into this area in the angle between the Parish House and Wendte Hall. From the entry area on both floors is access to rooms at either end of the east wing and to the stairs. There is a small toilet room on the ground floor under the stair landing. At the top of the stairs are two more toilet rooms in a space above the entry porch, inside the southernmost of two gabled dormers. On the ground floor, the "Starr King Fraternity and Young People's Club, Library and Reading Room" is located at the north end. This is a rectangular space measuring 27 by 30 feet, with a semicircular bay window at the front. At the south end were originally two parlors in a space measuring 27 by 45 feet. The parlors were of unknown but unequal size. The parlors could be linked to each other and to Wendte Hall by means of sliding doors. At the rear of the parlor area in the southwest corner is a service stairway to the kitchen above. At the southeast corner is an alcove under the stairs.

Upstairs, the Pastor's Study is located north of the stairwell above the Starr King Room. This is a rectangular space with a semicircular bay window projection at the front, and a rectangular

dormer on the west side. In front of the dormer in the northwest corner of the wing is a small room, whose ceiling is shaped by the sloping roof above. At the south end of the stairs was originally a dining room and kitchen. This area overlooks Wendte Hall through two openings with sliding doors, and railings.

About 1950, numerous partitions were added and other modifications made to the east wing. The partitions were removed in 1996, before the photographs were taken for this report. On the ground floor, the two parlors at the rear of the wing were repartitioned into four spaces. In 1987 these were classified as a hallway at the northwest corner; a small office at the northeast corner; a nursery along the center of the east side; and a new kitchen at the rear. Upstairs, the kitchen was removed and the space reclassified as a workroom and tool room. The former dining area was renamed the Bertha Shafter Room. At the front, the Pastor's Study was repartitioned into four spaces -- two offices, a conference room, and a reception area.

Structure and Materials

The primary exterior wall materials of brick, sandstone, and stucco obscure the actual structure of the church which is different in each of its three wings, and more complex than it appears.⁵ The first floor of the church is clad in an eight- to twelve-inch wide veneer of gray rock-faced, random-coursed, sandstone ashlar to varying heights, except on the rear south wall of the building and approximately the southern two thirds of the east wall. At the side and rear, and above the sandstone base is a veneer of red face-brick laid in running bond, except in a band defined by windows in the second story of the Parish House wing, which is clad in gray stucco. Window framing is wood. Window mullions are of molded brick or wood, depending on their location. Sills, lintels, transom bars and other trim elements are of red cast stone. The cornice, including the brackets on the Parish House wing are wood. The roof was originally clad in slate shingles but now is in asphalt shingles.

The primary supporting structure of the auditorium wing is not masonry, as it appears to be, but wood. A frame of massive timber columns supporting round wood arches rests on a perimeter foundation of brick, with sandstone blocks under the columns. The columns are twelve inches square and 24 feet high. The round arches spring from notches in the columns about 16 feet from the base. The round arches support the straight rafters and purlins of the gable roof at two points -- at a point half-way up the arches and at the tops of the arches, with the aid of king posts to the ridge. The floors are laid on three-by-twelve-inch joists, twelve

inches on center. The heavy wood framing of this structure has much in common with industrial buildings of the period.

The wood frame of the auditorium wing is enclosed by sixteen-inch infill walls of common brick, laid in common bond. The 100-foot corner tower and stair turrets are of brick construction, although the upper portion of the corner tower was rebuilt in wood after 1906. All brick walls are clad in finish materials as described above on the exterior. Inside, walls are finished in a plaster coat on wood lath.

Wendte Hall is also a wood-frame structure, but it is designed differently, with lighter members. Here, eight-inch square columns rest on brick foundation walls. These columns carry king-post trussed rafters, with purlins above. Iron tie rods have been added at the tops of the columns. The infill walls of this wood frame are also common brick, clad in finish materials on the exterior, and in plaster on the interior, with wood wainscoting.

Parish House

Construction of the Parish House is of a third type. Except for the interior partition between the Parish House and Wendte Hall, which is of wood-frame construction clad in plaster, this wing is of brick masonry construction up to the level of the sills of the second floor windows, and is brick and stucco-clad, wood-frame construction above that. The masonry walls are of common brick, thirteen-inches thick, clad in finish materials on the exterior, as described above. The interior stairwell, stairs, interior partitions, and floors are of wood construction.

All interior walls and ceilings are finished in plaster, except for a wainscoting of tongue and groove boards in the stairwell and a wainscoting of lincrusta walton in the Starr King Room. Baseboards, chair rails, and picture moldings are wood. Stair railings consist of turned wood balusters with turned newell posts. Interior doors are of two types: side-hinged, five-panel wood doors; and top-hung sliding doors of paneled wood construction in larger openings.

As built, the church was provided with electrical wiring, plumbing for water and gas, and a furnace for hot water. Light fixtures were designed to provide gas light and electric light but, although electrical wiring was in place, there was no electricity available at first. Heat was provided in the east wing by gas fireplaces in the Starr King Room, the Pastor's Study, and the original upstairs dining room.

Image and Decoration

The image of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland can be described from two perspectives -- from its overall composition and massing of volumes, and from its architectural style.

As a composition, the u-plan of differently designed wings including the larger auditorium wing with its corner bell tower presents an image of a certain type of Protestant church developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this type of church, not all activities take place in the principal church space and therefore not all activities were forms of worship. Sunday school, social and educational activities are provided for and represent an expansion of the traditional function of a church. The principal church space in the auditorium wing is clearly an open rectangular hall instead of a cruciform or aisled space. As such, it is a place where there is an emphasis on hearing music and the spoken word over the practice of ritual. The use of the term auditorium implies a space for hearing, in contrast to the term sanctuary for a similar space in an Episcopal or Roman Catholic church, meaning a holy place. Altogether, the form of this building conveys an image of a liberal Protestant congregation with an educated, middle-class membership.

The familiar form of this church was clothed in the Richardsonian Romanesque Style. It was an early example of the style in California after Stanford University and may have been the earliest Richardsonian Romanesque style church in the state.⁶ Features of the style present here include wall surfaces of rough sandstone in contrast with smooth red brick; the recurrence of round forms both in elevation (arched openings, including arcades) and in plan (projecting bays housing stairs and windows); broad roofs with minimal eaves, and short towers; and bands of windows divided by straight stone mullions and transom bars. Interiors are characterized by natural woods, exposed trusses and other structural features, and light filtered through stained glass. These features of the style and the way they were put together, revealing structure, workmanship, materials, plan, and function, display qualities of clarity and rationality on the one hand, and the beauty of individual craftsmanship on the other. The exposed roof structures in the auditorium and Wendte Hall may have been a deliberate choice to create a visual impression at the expense of acoustics, which a smooth ceiling would have rendered sharper.⁷

The Richardsonian Romanesque Style conveyed an association with the stylish architecture of H.H. Richardson, including the Brattle Square Church (Unitarian) in Boston. It may also have conveyed an association with the Romanesque Revival style All Soul's Unitarian Church in New York led by Henry Whitney Bellows, depicted in a window in the reception room of the auditorium wing. Perhaps most of all, as an early example of the style in California, associated with libraries and liberal Protestant churches in New York and New England, it was an appropriate choice for a congregation which took pride in its leading role in local intellectual life and in its openness to artistic innovation.

Parish House

The Parish House is a generally rectangular two-story volume with a projecting round bay at its north end, and an articulated section along its west bay facing the quadrangle. The west bay consists of an open arcaded veranda on the ground level and enclosed spaces above. This portion of the building is covered by a hip roof with an apsidal roof over the round projecting bay and an extension of the main roof downward over the west bay. There are two gabled dormers in the west side roof, facing the quadrangle and two chimneys rise above the parapet on the east side.

The walls are veneered in bands: sandstone covers the ground floor in those areas most visible to the public (west side, north end, north portion of east side); between the top of the ground floor and the sills of second floor windows is a band of brick; from the sills of second story windows to the eaves is a band of stucco. The bands are bordered by moldings, and there is a cornice of quarter-round blocks at the eaves. In the sandstone band, sills, lintels, mullions, and transom bars are of cast stone.

As an element in a larger whole, the design of the Parish House contains elements which link it to the whole and other elements which distinguish it from the whole. The Parish House is linked to the rest by its style, materials, banding of elements, repetition of forms, and the heights of various elements. The eaves of the roof which extends over the west bay line up with the eaves of the roof of Wendte Hall, as do the moldings between bands of wall materials. The arcade of the veranda is echoed in the arches of Wendte Hall and in the arched openings of the auditorium wing. At the same time, the eccentric shape of the roof, the unique dormers, and the fenestration distinguish this wing and its interior arrangement and functions from the others.

Inside, apart from standard finishes, there is an absence of architectural embellishment except in the Starr King Room and fireplaces in two other rooms. Original frescos in the parlors have been painted out. At the time of the dedication, the Starr King Room was described as follows: "With its velvet carpet, large oak mantle and massive oak tables, its antique copper chandeliers and tasteful frescoing, it makes one of the most charming rooms in the building."⁸ In the Starr King Room, today, which was originally furnished with \$1200 raised by its members, there is a wainscoting of lincrusta walton between a baseboard and top molding. Transoms in the bay window are art glass. The fireplace is faced with green marble and framed in golden oak with a cyma recta molding as a mantel. The outer hearth is of red and black tile. A copper chandelier has been altered by removal of the original gas lamps. The original frescoed decorative band has been painted out.

In the pastor's study the fireplace is faced with two tones of tile -- green tile bricks and tan bas reliefs in the comers. This is framed in oak with turned columns supporting a bracketed mantel and an Eastlake style carved block at the center. The outer hearth is in green and black tile.

In the original dining room the fireplace is faced in rose colored tile in a diamond pattern, with seashell motifs in the comers. This is framed in oak with an Eastlake style order. The outer hearth is black and brown tile.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Design and Construction History

The building site was purchased in November 1888 from Jane K. Sather, a patron of the University of California. Preparation of a design for the First Unitarian Church of Oakland appears to have begun in 1889. The first illustrations of the proposed church were published in the *Oakland Enquirer* on 19 October 1889, and in a brochure distributed by the First Unitarian Society of Oakland dated 1 November 1889.⁹ According to another brochure published at the time of the dedication of the church, "The ground plan of the church was prepared by Rev. C.W. Wendte, and Walter Mathews was the architect in charge".¹⁰ Wendte was a strong leader who had been sent from the Unitarian headquarters in Boston to the Pacific Coast to organize congregations. Wendte wrote in his autobiography: "Resolutely the church faced the serious problem of purchasing a site and erecting a suitable structure for its many

activities. This involved the raising of quite a large sum of money, and this task, as well as the general charge of the building enterprise, largely devolved upon me.”¹¹

Unlike Unitarian leaders in earlier generations, Wendte felt that artistic and architectural embellishments were appropriate in Unitarian churches. He spent time with the art critic James Jackson Jarves in Florence and admired European art and architecture.¹² A year after the dedication of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, Wendte gave a sermon in which he discussed the kind of art appropriate to a Unitarian church: “A congregation of religious free-thinkers like ours, in employing art to adorn its sanctuary or enrich its services, should not be content with merely copying the traditional ecclesiastical forms. It should choose types and employ symbols that truly express its intellectual convictions and spiritual trusts”.¹³ Wendte was speaking specifically of the stained glass in the church, but his ideas apply equally well to the choice of the Richardsonian Romanesque style for the building as a whole. This was a new style in California, associated both with the importance of individual craftsmen in Romanesque architecture, and with the clear and therefore honest expression of structure and function. These ideas had clear parallels in Unitarian beliefs in the dignity of labor, confidence in rational thought, and direct access to God. A building whose basic functions and structure were evident to anyone (e.g. in the auditorium, one could see the columns in the side walls, supporting open trusses) was an appropriate setting for Unitarian worship.

In addition, Wendte may have been concerned with the theological disputes then threatening Unitarianism. While Wendte was friends with the radical leader, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, and personally agreed with him, he may have wanted to remain neutral in the controversy.¹⁴ (see following sections). As money was raised for the church, an early decision was made to build an expensive, imposing structure: “It had been resolved in a spirit of civic pride to erect a stone edifice, the first church of this material to be constructed in our young community.”¹⁵ The most expensive feature was the facing of sandstone, chosen because it made a “more impressive architectural effect;” it would “aid in the improvement of local architecture”; and it would produce a result which the congregation would be “proud to show to visitors”.¹⁶ Because of the cost of the building, Wendte recommended building in stages as money became available. However, the building committee decided to build all at once.

Estimates were received and in May and June 1890, contracts were signed for construction of the church; on 3 May 1890, Peter Remillard signed a contract for brick work and on 6 May 1890, F.W. Knight and Charles Littlefield, contractor, signed a contract for \$17,973 to erect

the church. Other contractors included Alfred Fitzjohn and Ernest Ransome.¹⁷ The total cost of the building was \$77,000.¹⁸ In August 1890, the cornerstone was laid by the California Grand Lodge of Masons, many of whom were in the congregation.¹⁹

During the course of construction, there were numerous "trying...building experiences" causing Rev. Wendte to move temporarily into a house across the street "in order to keep constantly in touch with the building operations".²⁰ Wendte wrote, "Irresponsibility, and an unusually wet winter, protracted and embarrassed the operations. Our employment of stone led to vexatious complications. Quarrymen were unable to deliver this material in sufficient quantities, workmen struck for higher pay in handling it. Contracts were broken or remade."²¹ Another problem arose when it was discovered that the property was slightly smaller than city records showed, causing a bay window to encroach on the sidewalk. On 18 March 1890, the City Council granted the church the right to encroach. In December, this action was criticized by the Grand Jury.²²

Beginning in March 1891, while still unfinished, the church began to be used for various activities.²³ On 6 September 1891, the completed church was dedicated.²⁴

In the years between completion of the church in 1891, and the earthquake of 1906, several minor additions were made. In the annual report for 1893-1894, it was reported that a palm tree was planted in the Quadrangle during the Harvest Festival, and that a new stage was built in Wendte Hall at a cost of \$45.08.²⁵ In 1899, "a new organ" was installed in the church.²⁶ A furnace was installed with ducts to the auditorium and Wendte Hall at an unknown date.

The earthquake of 18 April 1906 damaged the church but did not destroy it. The seriousness of the damage is not known, although photographs show both the tower and the top of the south gable of the auditorium collapsed. Speaking of the arches in the auditorium, Wendte recalled in his autobiography that the building was "so finely constructed that even the terrific strain of the earthquake of 1906 failed to stretch them an inch."²⁷ Dr. Arnold Crompton, pastor from 1945 to 1984 and a historian of Unitarianism in the west, wrote that the Oakland Church was "more or less disabled",²⁸ and later recalled hearing that the only damage to the church was to the tower. The building inspector ordered the tower removed; during demolition, bricks fell through the previously undamaged roof of the auditorium; the church obtained an injunction to stop the demolition; and independent engineers inspected the tower

and devised a means for rebuilding it.²⁹ The top of the tower was rebuilt to the original plans in wood.

After 1906, few major changes were made until 1950. At some point, chimes were installed above the ceiling with speakers in the tower.³⁰ In December 1937, a new organ was dedicated, built with a \$15,000 bequest from Mrs. Abbie Grant Wendte, widow of Rev. C.W. Wendte.³¹ Maintenance was neglected and improvements generally were not made in the 1930s and 1940s.³²

Then, beginning in 1950, many changes were made to the church. Under Garfield Russell, a retired architect and builder, and member of the church, the original pulpit on wheels was fixed in a permanent position; the slide-up doors between the auditorium and Wendte Hall were closed off; the folding doors at the back of the auditorium were walled up; the seating plan in the auditorium was altered so that the center aisle ran from front to rear; the lower rear wall of the auditorium was clad in acoustical tile; a new heater was installed; new carpeting was installed; the kitchen was moved downstairs; the south end of the Parish House was partitioned upstairs and down; and three chandeliers, donated by Pacific, Gas and Electric Company from a demolished building in San Francisco, replaced two old chandeliers in the auditorium and one in Wendte Hall.³³

In the 1950s to 1980s, wiring, light fixtures, and plumbing were modernized. After the 1989 earthquake, the auditorium was temporarily closed.

Walter J. Mathews, Architect

Walter J. Mathews (1850-1947), a member of a prominent family of architects and artists, maintained a practice in Oakland for more than 50 years. His father, Julius C. Mathews, brought the family from Wisconsin in 1866. Walter and his younger brothers, Arthur (b. 1860) and Edgar (b. 1866) trained in the office of their father, described in different sources as "a contracting builder" and an architect. Arthur later became a painter and craftsman who with this wife Lucia was a leading figure in the Arts and Crafts movement in California. Walter began practice with his father under the firm name J.C. Mathews & Son in 1874. In 1875 he joined Ezra F. Kysor in Los Angeles in the firm of Kysor and Mathews. In 1877 he returned to his father's Oakland office where he stayed until 1883-1884 when he traveled in Europe. According to various biographies he began practicing independently in Oakland in 1884 or

1886.³⁴ The first Oakland project listed for Walter Mathews in the index to the *California Architect and Building News* was 15 March 1888. While establishing his practice, he evidently maintained close ties with his father's office. In the 1889-1890 city directory published 1 January 1890, two months after plans for the First Unitarian Church of Oakland were first published Walter J. Mathews was listed not as independent, but still as a partner in the firm of J.C. Mathews & Son at 969 Broadway, with Edgar Mathews as a draftsman.³⁵ In the 1891 city directory, Walter and J.C. Mathews, were listed separately but at the same address, with Edgar a draftsman in his father's office.³⁶ In the 1892 city directory, Walter was still at 969 Broadway, and J.C. Mathews and Son (J.C. and Edgar, partners) were at 1004 Broadway.³⁷ Walter remained in practice in Oakland until at least 1940, when he was ninety years old.³⁸

Walter Mathews had a typically general practice of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including office buildings, hotels, theaters, clubs, commercial buildings, churches, and houses. While most of his work was in Oakland, a substantial amount was in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and elsewhere in California. His clients included successful businessmen and mainstream institutions. Among Mathews' best known works are the Union Savings Bank, the Orpheum Theater, the Elks Club, the Athenian Club, the Key Route pier, and residences for F.M. Smith, Thomas Crellin, and Senator Perkins in Oakland; the Crellin and Marye Buildings and residences for Moses Hopkins, Henry T. Scott, and John A. Hooper in San Francisco; and the Hall of Records in Colusa.

Mathews also designed numerous churches for various denominations, beginning in 1875 with St. Vibiana's Cathedral for the Roman Catholic diocese of Los Angeles. In his partnership with Ezra Kysor, Mathews' role was the design of the facade, which was remodeled in 1922 when the church was enlarged.³⁹ He also designed a Methodist Church in Los Angeles, about which nothing is known.

The first Bay Area church with which Mathews may have been involved was the First Universalist Church on the west side of West Street, between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets in Oakland (about four blocks from the First Unitarian Church). According to a notice published 15 March 1888, it cost \$2,000 and the architect was J.C. Mathews & Son.⁴⁰ While Walter Mathews may have been practicing separately at that time, he was also listed in his father's office at the same address. From Sanborn maps, this was a square, one-story 16-foot high wood structure with a small entrance porch, a two-story steeple, and a one and one-half story

wing.⁴¹ From the limited information available, it appears that with its square plan, it was associated with the New England tradition among Unitarians, Universalists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians to build non-axial meeting houses. The wing may have housed a Sunday school or minister's residence.

The First Unitarian Church of Oakland, begun in May 1890, appears to have been among the first large projects of Walter Mathews' independent practice, in the year when he first maintained a separate office address from his father. This was followed in 1892-1893 by a smaller Unitarian church in Alameda, also designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style and in a variation of the Akron plan with sliding doors to a large Sunday School area

For other denominations, in 1893, Mathews designed the Pacific Theological Seminary in Oakland. He also designed St. John's Episcopal Church at 8th and Grove streets in Oakland, completed in 1897. St. John's was a wood, Gothic Revival style building. After 1900, he designed the First Christian Church in Berkeley.

History and Life of the Congregation

The First Unitarian Church of Oakland had its roots in the independent Protestant Church of Oakland, which was formed after the heresy trial of the Rev. Laurentine Hamilton in 1869. Hamilton was a popular and well-known Presbyterian minister who had been superintendent of schools in San Jose and after whom Mt. Hamilton was named. According to a history of Unitarianism in the west, "Laurentine Hamilton was one of the leading ministers of the state. Now that Starr King was dead, there were those who considered Hamilton to be the greatest minister in the West. He was loved, honored, and respected."⁴²

As minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Oakland in 1868, whose congregation included liberal Christians of several denominations, including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Unitarians, his preaching reflected the influence of Darwin's *Original of Species* (1859) and other scientific developments which conservatives feared contradicted the Bible. After his expulsion from the Presbyterian Church, Hamilton and his followers formed a new church, first called "The First Independent Presbyterian Church of Oakland", later changed to "The First Independent Church and Society of Oakland", or "The Independent Protestant Church of Oakland". On 9 August 1881, another effort was begun to reorganize as the First Unitarian

Church of Oakland. Before that was carried out, Hamilton died in the pulpit on Easter Sunday 1882.⁴³

Hamilton's congregation dwindled under his successor and disbanded early in 1886. Later that year when the American Unitarian Association in Boston sent Charles Wendte to the Pacific Coast as the Superintendent of Unitarian Church Extension, Hamilton's old congregation was a natural target of Wendte's efforts. Although Wendte's assignment ranged from San Diego to Seattle, he settled in Oakland and made his strongest effort there. On 3 October 1886, the first Unitarian meeting under Wendte was held in Oakland. On 16 January 1887, the First Unitarian Church of Oakland was organized with Wendte as pastor.⁴⁴

For the first eighteen months of its existence, the new group met at the Odd Fellows Hall, "the best public auditorium in the city".⁴⁵ Afterwards, it met in Hamilton Hall, a larger space, until the new church was completed in 1891. Even before its formal organization, the first of many sub-groups was formed within the congregation. A week after the first meeting in 1886, "a branch of the Women's Alliance...was formed."⁴⁶ The Starr King Fraternity was established by 1889 when plans for the new church included a prominent room for them. The Ladies Auxiliary was active by May 1890.⁴⁷

The early use of the church is illustrated by the dedication on 6 September 1891, "To the Worship of God and the Service of Man," as frescoed in Wendte Hall,^{47a} and by news items in the first few years of its existence. In the morning of the dedication day, all the sliding doors were open, expanding the capacity of the church to its maximum: "At the appointed hour the auditorium, and the Sunday School wing opening into it, were crowded with 1300 friends and well-wishers of the church, while hundreds were disappointed in obtaining ingress."⁴⁸ The service included a prayer; hymns; "a responsive act of dedication" by the congregation and pastor; a sermon "delivered entirely without notes in the earnest, direct, searching manner of this noted pulpit orator";⁴⁹ a brief history of the congregation; and the raising of \$12,000. In the evening "another great audience gathered" for a service that included a prayer, a hymn, and several "addresses".⁵⁰ A hymn written for the occasion by Rev. Wendte began:

The forests gave their oak and pine,
The hills their stone and clay,
And fashioned by the builder's art,
Our temple stands today.⁵¹

On a typical Sunday, 200 children attended Sunday School, "one of the most important adjuncts of church life",⁵² in Wendte Hall for nine months of the year.⁵³ Children were grouped by grades for readings from the Bible and study of lessons from the Unitarian Sunday School Society of Boston.⁵⁴ Following Sunday School was the morning service⁵⁵ with an average attendance of 300, and an evening service every other week with an attendance of 335.⁵⁶ Substantial income was derived from the rental of seats in the auditorium from regular members of the congregation of "generally well-to-do people" at \$16 to \$25 per year, with some free seats for visitors or members who could not pay. In 1893-1894, \$5,405 came from seat rentals, out of a total annual income of \$8,378.⁵⁷

According to the Annual Report for 1893-1894, "the usefulness of our church edifice is not confined to the Sunday." It was open from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. daily, with the sexton "usually in attendance" and the pastor in his study. The reading room of the Starr King Fraternity was open from 9:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. daily for its 150 members, each with a key. "The main auditorium, chapel [Wendte Hall], and rooms in the Parish House are in constant use, not only for the requirements of the organizations within our Church, but for various public purposes, such as lectures, concerts, recitals, etc. Our church edifice is thus an oft occupied and useful piece of property in the high causes of human culture and improvement."⁵⁸

Among the most active areas was the attractive room at the front of the ground floor of the Parish House, the Starr King Fraternity. After one evening event, "Supper was served later, at flower-laden tables by the young ladies."⁵⁹ The 1892-1893 program for the Starr King Fraternity included "a series of chamber musicales", public lectures; and classes in languages (German and French), English literature, art, science ("practical microscopy of ordinary textures", physiology, and evolution), history, and history of music.⁶⁰ In 1893-1894, activities included a watercolor exhibit; lectures by the influential artists Bruce Porter and Arthur Mathews, and by Stanford president David Starr Jordan (on evolution); and classes in French, German, and on Shakespeare.⁶¹ In addition, the reading room was stocked with "all the best magazines and periodicals, both American and foreign."⁶²

Other groups without their own rooms used different spaces as needed. Bible classes were held in the Pastor's Study, which also housed his 3,000 volume library.⁶³ A whist game was held in October 1892.⁶⁴ The Women's Auxiliary met one evening a month for a social and held occasional special events; the Unity Club met one evening a month in the parlors of the Parish

House for "dancing parties" and other socials; the Yule Club met for "charitable, literary, and social" purposes; the Lend-A-Hand Club met to furnish a room at Fabiola Hospital; and the assistant minister, Mrs. Eliza Tupper Wilkes, was "at home" in the parlors on Tuesdays from 2:00-9:00 P.M.⁶⁵ For a reception for a visiting minister, "The parlors were prettily decorated, the prevailing colors being green and gold. About seventy-five persons were present, and a very pleasant informal social reception took place between the hours of 8 and 10. Light refreshments were served in the handsome dining room during the evening."⁶⁶ At another reception by the Berkeley Literary Club for a visiting minister, "Fifty ladies and gentlemen sat down at table on March 23. In the evening Prof. Eliot read to a great audience, which crowded the church and flowed over into the adjoining rooms, a charming paper on 'The Sources of Happiness, from a Scientific Standpoint'. After the lecture, the club reassembled in the church parlors and discussed the paper for an hour longer."⁶⁷

In addition to the more-or-less routine activities of the church, and the prominent visitors already mentioned, many other famous people spoke or performed at the church. Especially in the period between 1891 and 1898, the First Unitarian Church of Oakland was a center of intellectual life in the East Bay and a popular forum for visiting artists, scholars, and scientists, as well as ministers and church figures. The role of the Oakland church declined in this area with the resignation of Rev. Wendte in January 1898 and following the dedication of the new First Unitarian Church of Berkeley on 10 November 1898 and the increased public presence of the University of California under President Benjamin Ide Wheeler beginning in 1899. Among notable speakers were William Howard Taft, Herbert Hoover, Joaquin Miller, Bret Harte, Julia Ward Howe, Alexander Graham Bell, and Jack London (who also was married in the church). The composer Edward MacDowell, and the dancer, Isadora Duncan performed in the church.⁶⁸ Among nationally prominent Unitarian ministers to speak were Horatio Stebbins, Minot J. Savage, Jabez Sunderland (later minister at the church), and Thomas Lamb Eliot.

Membership in the church declined in the early twentieth century. Under Rev. Clarence Reed (1919 to at least 1937), the church began to grow again. In 1927, the congregation was "as large as at any time in its history". Reed ascribed "much of his success in Oakland to constructive newspaper advertising", and he sought to make the church "an educational center" focused on the 150 member Booklovers group. In 1927, Reed formed a new Artlovers group "under whose auspices he will give lectures on the masterpieces of art which he will illustrate with pictures that he has obtained on his visits to Europe."⁶⁹

After Reed, the church declined in the 1940s to the point that serious consideration was given by the congregation to leaving the building for new quarters. Few members still lived in the neighborhood and the building was in need of repair. Although the church school left for Hayward in 1957, by 1958 a decision was made to stay.⁷⁰ The church remained active and occupied until the 1989 earthquake when it was closed for repairs.

Unitarianism and Architecture

Unitarianism had its beginnings in Reformation Europe, rejecting “the doctrine of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ in favor of the unipersonality of God”⁷¹ and was a type of thought which arose in various Protestant denominations. In the early United States, it generally was associated with Congregational churches, although the first Unitarian congregation was the Anglican King’s Chapel in Boston which became Unitarian in 1785.⁷² In 1825 the American Unitarian Association was formed in Boston and in 1865 the first National Conference of Unitarian Churches was held. Among early prominent Unitarians in the United States were William Ellery Channing and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Unitarian congregations tended to be well educated and prosperous and American Unitarianism “came to exercise an influence disproportionate to the number of its adherents.”⁷³ Stimulated by a controversy at the time the First Unitarian Church of Oakland was being formed, Unitarianism became “a very liberal and rationalistic movement, accepting scientific methods and ideas and recognizing the truth of non-Christian religions”.⁷⁴

While a national organization for Unitarians existed, there was no hierarchical relationship as in Roman Catholic, Episcopal, or Lutheran churches, between an individual congregation and any larger organization. Individual congregations were free to establish practices and beliefs and to make decisions about such matters as church buildings, architecture, and artistic embellishment. Until the 1902 publication of *Plans for Churches*,⁷⁵ there were no formal denominational guidelines for Unitarian church buildings.

While there were no guidelines during the nineteenth century, still there were certain types and styles of churches characteristic of Unitarianism at different periods, and in every period, there were widely recognized buildings designed for Unitarian churches by major architects. An observer of the history of British Unitarian architecture has called it “of uniformly high quality”,⁷⁶ a statement that might be made of American Unitarian architecture as well, and an

indication both of the importance of church buildings to Unitarians and of the socio-economic level of Unitarian congregations.

In the early nineteenth century, the growth of Unitarianism "could directly parallel the spread of classical revivalism in architecture".⁷⁷ For example, the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore, designed by Maximilien Godefroy and built in 1818, was a Classical Revival Style building and "one of the most avant garde buildings in the country."⁷⁸ It was square in plan, with an open, domed centralized space. The shape of the space was related to New England Meeting houses, in contrast with the longitudinal spaces of Episcopal churches. Another, the Unitarian Church in Washington, D.C. was designed by Charles Bulfinch while he worked on the United States Capitol, and was built in 1821. This was rectangular in plan, with a Doric entry portico and a bell tower at one end.⁷⁹ In this period, Unitarian churches often resembled Baptist, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches in both plan and appearance.

In the 1840s, under the influence of the Cambridge Camden Society of the Anglican church, the Gothic Revival Style was adopted for American churches of many denominations including Unitarian. The Unitarian Church of Charleston, South Carolina of 1852 to 1854 was a Gothic remodeling by Francis D. Lee of a Georgian Style church originally built in 1774 to 1778. Although Gothic in detail, it retained its original broad, squarish plan,⁸⁰ a tendency of Unitarian Gothic churches. It was exactly this tendency that caused Richard Upjohn the leading American Gothic Revivalist to reject an offer to design a Unitarian church in Boston, believing that a proper Gothic church must have an axial relationship to a deep chancel.⁸¹ Later examples, such as the Church of the Unity in Springfield, Massachusetts, an early design by H.H. Richardson built 1866 to 1869, were closer in form and appearance to Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches.⁸² At least one Gothic Revival church of this period was well known to Rev. Charles Wendte of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, the Fourth Unitarian Church of Chicago, built ca. 1870 under his supervision in his first permanent position as a minister. This building has been described as a "magnificent Gothic structure".⁸³ Nearby in suburban Oak Park was Unity Church of 1872. This well-documented church was a wood-frame structure above a stone base which measured 40 by 80 feet.⁸⁴ In its general plan and exterior appearance, this church might have served Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist or Unitarian congregations throughout the United States. It incorporated a ground level parish hall and upstairs auditorium for 300 people. The interior, "While not up-to-date in any of its appointments, was yet a comfortable and homelike place of worship,"⁸⁵ with a raised platform at one end, a central aisle flanked by curving pews, and flat plastered wall and

ceiling surfaces. The board and batten siding, simple lancet windows, pier buttresses and central entry tower and steeple were familiar features of a great many churches throughout the country popularized by Richard Upjohn, Alexander Jackson Davis and A.J. Downing.

In the 1880s to 1890s, the design of Unitarian churches was given a great deal of attention in association with a period of intense theological debate, especially in the midwest. Among the leading figures on the radical side of this debate were William Channing Gannett and Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who were moving away from Christianity toward a religion of ethics. Gannett "wrote essays on the development of architectural forms that unify the spiritual and domestic"; his own church, the Unitarian Church in Hillside, Illinois, was designed "with a domestic scale and details to reflect the continuity of home and religious life".⁸⁶

Jones, who was a classmate of Charles Wendte at Harvard Divinity School and also Frank Lloyd Wright's uncle, directed the design and construction of three innovative buildings according to his architectural ideas. In place of the large medieval cathedral serving a wide area, embodied by the Gothic Revival, which he considered anachronistic, Jones advocated many small "home-like" churches where small groups of like-minded neighbors could decide how they would worship.⁸⁷ Frank Lloyd Wright thought Jenkins' All Souls Church, designed by Joseph Lyman Silsbee and, built in Chicago in 1886, looked like a Queen-Anne style house.⁸⁸ A second church for Jenkins with a domestic character was Unity Chapel in Helena, Wisconsin, also designed by Silsbee in 1886 (with the participation of Frank Lloyd Wright) and intended to be a prototype for inexpensive rural churches. According to Gannett, it would include an auditorium and a parlor which could be linked by folding doors to create a larger space.⁸⁹ Several years later, in 1901 Jones engaged Wright and Dwight Heard Perkins to design an urban institution, the Abraham Lincoln Center in Chicago, part of a national movement to establish institutional churches.⁹⁰ Completed in 1905, this was a seven-story multi-use building, "the first of its kind in the world", for an athletic club; religious center with auditorium, library, and reading room; charitable activities; rentable space for doctors, dentists, and artists; apartments; and amusements, with a theater and refectory.⁹¹ In 1906-1909, Wright designed and built one of his best-known buildings, Unity Temple in Oak Park,⁹² the culmination of this era of innovative design for Unitarian churches.

During this period of architectural experimentation in a few congregations, many other Unitarian groups also rejected the Gothic Revival, often for the Richardsonian Romanesque. A fore-runner of this wider development was the All-Soul's Unitarian Church of 1853-1855,

designed by Jacob Wrey Mould. The minister was Henry Whitney Bellows, a prominent figure later memorialized in a stained glass window at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland. All Soul's was a striking Romanesque style building with horizontal stripes of red brick and white stone.⁹³ In 1883-1886, the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh, designed by Frank Furness, was designed in the form of a Greek Cross in a style derived from Ruskinian Gothic.⁹⁴ Then in the late 1880s and 1890s, a number of new Unitarian churches were designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. According to Alan Gowans, "For churches, Richardsonian Romanesque...had much to offer...This kind of Picturesque style did much more than express the wealth of those who commissioned it; it provided them with an image of something they did not have and wanted very much --venerability... Furthermore, Richardsonian Romanesque could imply, as no other picturesque substyle could, something of the awe and decorum requisite in sanctuary types. And that surely was also part of its appeal, why it seemed the right choice for Trinity Episcopal in Boston as well as for Faith Presbyterian in Cairo, Illinois, First Presbyterian in Lynchburg, Virginia, or First Congregational in Malone, New York."⁹⁵ With the Richardsonian Romanesque, one could reject the Gothic and its symbolism of high church Episcopalians and Catholic Europe, and still achieve some of its effects. Examples of this style are the First Unitarian Church of Detroit designed by Donaldson and Meier and completed in 1890;⁹⁶ the First Unitarian Church of Oakland of 1891; The First Unitarian Church of San Jose, completed in 1892;⁹⁷ the Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Massachusetts, completed in 1892;⁹⁸ and the First Unitarian Church of Alameda, completed in 1894.⁹⁹

While architectural styles, especially the Gothic Revival as advocated for Episcopal churches, usually involved considerations of plan as well as ornament, in the service of most architects for most congregations, they were simply applied to a building whose plan had a different rationale. In the years after the Civil War, another development in church design took place which had to do only with the organization of space for particular functions. This development took place alongside the fashions for the Gothic Revival, Richardsonian Romanesque, and other styles, and sometimes was integrated with them, as in the case of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland.

By the 1860s, the waves of revivalism which had begun in the 1740s, and became increasingly emotional in the nineteenth century, began to influence the forms of large numbers of American churches. The typical setting for a nineteenth century revival was an outdoor camp meeting at which a series of preachers spoke to crowds of mixed denominations. By the 1860s, new churches of many denominations were designed as large open rectangular halls with a raised

platform at one end for the minister. The platform enabled the minister to move around as he spoke, and provided space for choirs and organs. Artistic embellishments such as stained glass were added in churches whose denominations had long rejected them, in an effort to create an appropriate atmosphere. "The congregation was increasingly a passive audience for whom worship was something done for them and to them by experts. The mood-setting beauties of the building and the music conditioned the congregation for worship but they did less and less as active participants. It is no accident that the part of the building occupied by the congregation was designed as an audience chamber much like that of a theater, and the pulpit platform and choir stalls resembled a stage".¹⁰⁰

At the same time, church buildings which adopted this form usually also belonged to denominations newly interested in providing space for Sunday Schools. A widespread accommodation of both these needs was the Akron plan, first developed in the late 1860s by Rev. Lewis Miller for the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Akron, Ohio. In an Akron plan church, the principal church space called an auditorium, was linked to another large space for the Sunday School by means of sliding, folding, or roll-up doors. The Sunday School space had a gallery around a "rotunda" above and below which small spaces existed which could also be linked to the rotunda by means of sliding, folding, or roll-up doors. Thus, when all the doors were open, the size of the main auditorium was nearly doubled, and when they were closed, separate activities could take place in the many separate rooms created.¹⁰¹

The Akron plan was modified and adopted for large numbers of Methodist Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Unitarian, and Christian Science churches in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among many examples in the Bay Area which were based on features of the Akron plan were the Brooklyn Presbyterian Church of 1887 in Oakland, designed by George A. Bordwell in the Gothic Revival style,¹⁰² with the church and Sunday School separated; the Fruitvale Congregational Church of 1908 designed by Hugo Storch in the Mission Revival Style, a conventional example in Oakland;¹⁰³ and the First Church of Christ Scientist of 1910 designed by Bernard Maybeck in a modification of the type.

Among Unitarian churches, many have been built with some version of the Akron plan in the sense that many have auditorium and Sunday School spaces which can be linked by means of movable doors. The earliest known Unitarian churches to utilize this device is the Unity Chapel in Helena Wisconsin of 1886, designed by Joseph Lyman Silsbee (with Frank Lloyd Wright), discussed above. The First Unitarian Church of San Francisco of 1889 and the First

Unitarian Church of Oakland of 1891 were both built with Sunday School spaces which could be linked to the auditorium. The First Unitarian Church of Alameda designed by Walter J. Mathews, is the earliest known example of a common version of a modified Akron-plan design.¹⁰⁴ In this type, the Sunday School and auditorium are parallel rectangular spaces which can be linked along their common side. Other examples of the type are the First Unitarian church of Berkeley of 1898, designed by A.C. Schweinfurth; All Souls of Kansas City, completed in 1906; and the Unitarian Church of Urbana, designed by Walter C. Root and completed in 1908.¹⁰⁵ Frank Lloyd Wright's design for Unity Temple of 1909 is not a pattern book plan, but the Sunday School wing relies on folding doors to link spaces.¹⁰⁶

This period of experimentation by Unitarians with church styles and types was ending in the first decade of the twentieth century. Again, a strong movement across many denominations was adopted by many Unitarian congregations. This was the second Gothic Revival, associated with the work of Ralph Adams Cram. This time, even the deep chancels and richly ornamented spaces associated with high church Episcopalians was adopted by main stream Protestant denominations, including Unitarians. Van Ogden Vost, a Unitarian, "helped domesticate the Gothic Revival among Protestants".¹⁰⁷ Examples of new Gothic Unitarian churches include the Gothic Unitarian Church in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, designed by Charles Brigham and completed in 1902;¹⁰⁸ the Unitarian Universalist Church in Buffalo designed by Edward A. Kent in 1904 with a centralized space;¹⁰⁹ and the First Unitarian Church of Chicago, "a text book example of English Perpendicular Gothic" designed by Denison B. Hall and completed in 1931.¹¹⁰ Along with this change was abandonment of the Akron plan and linked spaces for individual classrooms in separate Sunday School wings.

In the mid twentieth century, the tradition of respect for architecture was maintained by Unitarians in new churches. Among the most famous American churches of the period are the First Unitarian Church of Columbus, Indiana, designed by Eliel Saarinen and completed in 1939, and the Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York, designed by Louis Kahn and completed in 1962.

ENDNOTES

1. These dimensions and most of the description which follows of the church as it was built, is drawn from the *Building Circular and Appeal of the first Unitarian Church Oakland*, prepared by the First Unitarian Society of Oakland, November 1889.
2. Dr. Arnold Crompton. Interview with Veronica Martin, 8 March 1997.
3. Information on the neighborhood is taken from Sanborn Maps and City Directories at the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey.
4. Dr. Arnold Crompton (8 March 1997), First Unitarian Church of Oakland minister from 1945 to 1982 recalled a story told by the original architect, Walter J. Mathews, before his death in 1947: a neighbor boy named Curtis known as "the spider boy" because of childhood polio, traveled in a wheel chair; the architect though Curtis and others in wheel chairs "should be able to come in" and built a ramp. Apparently, this was not a unique feature in local churches. According to the *California Architect and Building News* (15 September 1887, p. 119), the Brooklyn Presbyterian Church in East Oakland was also provided with a means of entering the church "for those who wish to avoid ascending steps".
5. The description of the structural system and materials is based on Kenneth H. Cardwell, *First Unitarian Church Oakland, California: A Historic Structure Report*, Prepared for the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, May 1988, especially pp. 18-22. Cardwell's report contains a thorough, technical description of the building.
6. Hasselmann, Marvin A. "First Unitarian Church of Oakland". National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form (Form No. 10-300, revised October 1974). Prepared 9 September 1976. Signed by the Keeper of the National Register 16 June 1977, section 8, page 2.
7. St. Francis de Sales, for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco, under construction at the same time, chose to hide its roof structure with a smooth plaster ceiling in order to improve acoustics. See Corbett, Michael R. "St. Francis de Sales Church". Historic American Buildings Survey report (HABS No. CA-2345). On file at the Oakland Public Library History Room. October 1993, p.29.
8. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Dedication of the New Religious Home of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California. 6 September 1891*, p. 35.
9. Oakland Public Library. Oakland History Room. Index to articles in the Oakland Enquirer, 1889-1899. Illustration of proposed church, 19 October 1889, p. 10, col 3-5;

- also First Unitarian Society of Oakland. *Building Circular and Appeal of the First Unitarian Church, Oakland*. 1 November 1889.
10. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Dedication of the New Religious Home of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California*. 6 September 1891, p. 35.
 11. Wendte, Charles W. *The Wider Fellowship*. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1927, vol 2, p. 76.
 12. *Ibid.*, vol 1, p. 304 and *passim*.
 13. Wendte, Charles W. *The Worth and Dignity of Labor*, a discourse delivered at First Unitarian Church of Oakland, 11 September 1892, p.3.
 14. Crompton, Arnold. *Unitarianism on the Pacific Coast, The First Sixty Years*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957, p. 122.
 15. Wendte 1927, vol 2, p. 89.
 16. First Unitarian Society of Oakland. *Building Circular and Appeal of the First Unitarian Church, Oakland*. 1 November 1889.
 17. Oakland Public Library. Oakland History Room. Index to articles in the Oakland Enquirer, 1889-1899: miscellaneous contractors, 16 March 1891, p. 1, col. 2.
 18. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Dedication of the New Religious Home of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California*. 6 September 1891, p. 3.
 19. Wendte 1927, vol 2, p. 91; also Oakland Public Library. Oakland History Room. Index to articles in the *Oakland Enquirer*, 1889-1899: laying of cornerstone, 16 August 1890, p. 1, col 5-6 and p. 7, col 5.
 20. *Ibid.* vol 2, p. 89-90.
 21. *Ibid.*
 22. Oakland Public Library. Oakland History Room. Index to articles in the *Oakland Enquirer*, 1889-1899: council grants right to encroach on sidewalk, 18 March 1890, p. 3, col. 1; Grand Jury criticizes blocking sidewalks, 16 December 1890, p. 3, col. 3 and 17 December 1890, p. 3.
 23. Oakland Public Library. Oakland History Room. Index to articles in the *Oakland Enquirer*, 1889-1899: hold service in new church, 30 March 1891, p. 3, col. 3; and reception at new church, 1 April 1891, p.3, col. 7.
 24. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Dedication of the New Religious Home of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California*. 6 September 1891.
 25. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Seventh Annual Report and Directory of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California 1893-1894*. San Francisco, p. 32, 37.

26. Oakland Public Library. Oakland History Room. Index to articles in the Oakland Enquirer, 1889-1899: new organ installed in church, 12 December 1899, p. 1, col. 6.
27. Wendte 1927, vol. 2, p. 90.
28. Crompton 1957, p. 169.
29. Crompton 1997.
30. Ibid.
31. *Oakland Tribune*. "Dedicate New Organ". 18 December 1937.
32. Crompton 1997.
33. Ibid.
34. Shaw, Robert. "Walter Mathews To Be Honored on 90th Birthday". *Oakland Post-Enquirer*. 1 May 1940; Baker, Joseph E. *Past and Present of Alameda County*, vol 2. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914, p. 457-458; International News Service. "Walter J. Mathews". *Notables of the Southwest*. Press Reference Library, vol 1, 1913, p. 890. According to Shaw, Mathews spent ten years in Los Angeles, rather than two years as stated in Baker and International News Service.
35. Husted, F.M. *Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley City Directory 1889-1890*. San Francisco: 1890, p. 547-548.
36. Husted, F.M. *Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley City Directory 1891*. San Francisco: 1891, p. 567.
37. Husted, F.M. *Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley City Directory 1891*. San Francisco: 1892, p. 567.
38. Shaw 1940.
39. Gebhard, David and Robert Winter. *Los Angeles, An Architectural Guide*. Salt Lake City: Gibb Smith, 1994, p. 238; Woodbridge, Sally B. *California Architecture: Historic American Buildings Survey*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988, p. 147.
40. *California Architect and Building News*. "New Churches for Oakland" vol. 9:3 (15 March 1888), p. 38.
41. Information provided by Betty Marvin, Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey 17 March 1997, from Sanborn maps and city directories. By 1903 the building was occupied by the First Christian Church, by 1912 it was occupied by the Calvary Baptist Church, and by 1957, it was occupied by a Methodist church. A remodeled church in the block today (the True Vine Missionary Baptist Church at 1125 West Street) may be the much altered remnant of the First Universalist Church.
42. Crompton 1957, p. 69.
43. Ibid., p. 67-76.

44. Ibid., p. 67-76, 112-119; Wendte's title of Superintendent of Unitarian Church Extension appears in First Unitarian Society of Oakland. *Building Circular and Appeal of the First Unitarian Church, Oakland*. 1 November 1889.
45. First Unitarian Society of Oakland. *Building Circular and Appeal of the First Unitarian Church, Oakland*. 1 November 1889; Crompton 1957, p. 112.
46. Crompton 1957, p. 113-114.
47. Oakland Public Library. Oakland History Room. Index to articles in the *Oakland Enquirer*, 1889-1899: Ladies Auxiliary, 16 May 1890, p. 1, col. 3.
- 47a. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Dedication of the New Religious Home of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California*. 6 September 1891, p. 36.
48. *Guidon*. "The Oakland Church Dedication". vol 1:3 (October 1891, p.2).
49. *Guidon*. "The Oakland Church Dedication". vol 1:3 (October 1891, p.2-3).
50. *Guidon*. "The Oakland Church Dedication". vol 1:3 (October 1891, p.3).
51. Hasselmann, Marvin A. "History of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland". Typescript prepared 1977, attached to Grant Application to National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1990.
52. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Seventh Annual Report and Directory of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California 1893-1894*. San Francisco, p. 31.
53. Wendte 1927, p. 91; First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Seventh Annual Report and Directory of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California 1893-1894*. San Francisco, p. 15.
54. *Guidon*, "Starr King Fraternity, Oakland". vol 2:2 (September 1892), p. 4-5.
55. *Guidon*, "The Sunday School and Its Relation to the Church". vol 1:11 (June 1892), p.4.
56. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Seventh Annual Report and Directory of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California 1893-1894*. San Francisco, p. 15.
57. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Seventh Annual Report and Directory of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California 1893-1894*. San Francisco, p. 12-14.
58. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Seventh Annual Report and Directory of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California 1893-1894*. San Francisco, p. 15.
59. *Guidon*, "Starr King Fraternity, Oakland". vol 2:2 (September 1892), p. 5.
60. *Guidon*, "Starr King Fraternity, Oakland". vol 2:2 (September 1892), p. 4.
61. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Seventh Annual Report and Directory of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California 1893-1894*. San Francisco, p. 40.
62. *Guidon*, "Starr King Fraternity, Oakland". vol 2:2 (September 1892), p. 5.

63. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Dedication of the New Religious Home of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California. 6 September 1891*, p. 35.
64. Oakland Public Library. Oakland History Room. Index to articles in the *Oakland Enquirer*, 1889-1899: Social whist game, 15 October 1892, p. 6, col. 1.
65. First Unitarian Church of Oakland. *Seventh Annual Report and Directory of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California 1893-1894*. San Francisco, p. 12, 36, 43, 45, 47.
66. *Guidon*, "Notes from the Field: Oakland". vol 2:1 (August 1892), p. 9.
67. *Guidon*, "Notes from the Field: Oakland". vol 1:9 (April 1892), p. 8.
68. Hasselmann, Marvin A. "First Unitarian Church of Oakland". National Register of Historic Places Inventory -- Nomination Form (Form No. 10-300, revised October 1974). Prepared 9 September 1976. Signed by the Keeper of the National Register 16 June 1977.
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Historic Views

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PROJECT INFORMATION

In compliance with a Memorandum of Agreement among the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation of December 1994, the First Unitarian Church of Oakland is required to be documented in accordance with the standards and guidelines of the Historic American Buildings Survey prior to renovation of the church. This documentation, following instructions in a letter from Margaret Pepin-Donat of the National Park Service, San Francisco, on 13 February 1996 to James A. Goring of Frank/Goring Architects in Oakland, includes photographs and a written report in the format of "the Architectural Data Form". The final documentation package will be submitted to the Library of Congress, and a second copy will go to the State Historic Preservation Officer.

The renovation project is the first phase of a two-phase project, whose later components will begin as money becomes available. Because the first phase included partial demolition of the Parish House, (or east wing), the National Park Service instructions require documentation of the east wing and only as much of the building as a whole to provide a context for understanding the east wing.

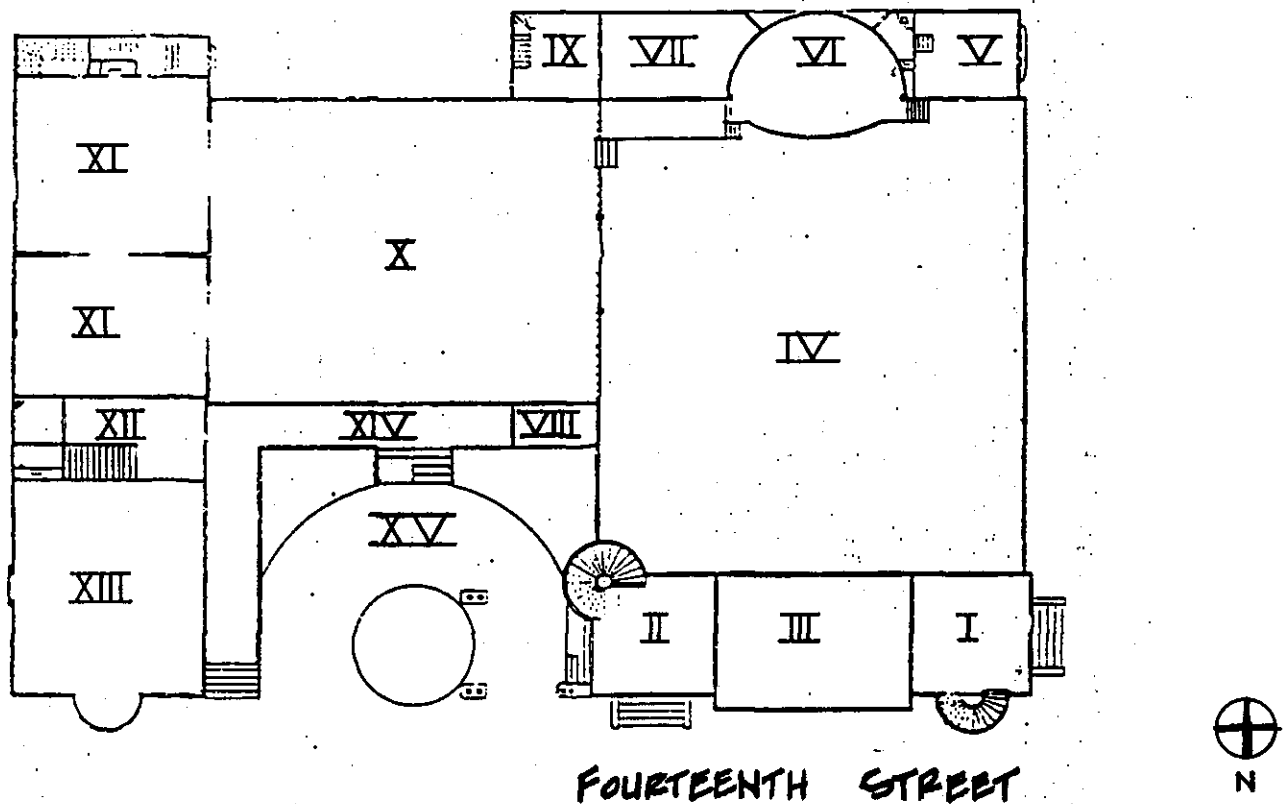
The components of this documentation package were prepared by Frank/Goring Architects; Siegel & Strain Architects of Emeryville, serving as historical consultants to Frank/Goring; and Michael R. Corbett, an architectural historian in Berkeley, serving as a subcontractor to Siegel & Strain. Andrew Van Dis took the photographs, Frank/Goring prepared the sketch site plan and sketch floor plans, and Michael Corbett prepared the written report. The draft report was completed in April 1997.

The renovation project involves demolition of portions of the rear of the east wing, construction of a new structure to replace those portions demolished, and seismic strengthening of those original portions remaining.

Because the purpose of this documentation was to focus on the east wing and those aspects of the whole building which help to understand the east wing, several important aspects of the history and architecture of the church have been omitted. Among these are the interior finishes and stained glass in the auditorium and Sunday School wing; the relationship of these features

to the emerging Arts and Crafts movement of the Bay Area; and the meaning of these design features to Rev. Charles Wendte and the congregation at the time the church was built.

Finally, this documentation was prepared without use of the church archives which are in storage. Scrapbooks of Rev. Wendte, minutes of meetings, records, and other information, referred to by Kenneth Cardwell in his historic structure report of 1987, would add to what had been said here.



EXPLANATION OF FLOOR PLAN.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>I.—Tower Vestibule, 14x14 feet.
 II.—East Vestibule, 14x14 feet.
 III.—Lobby or Reception Room, opening by folding doors into the Church. Over the Lobby and Vestibule is the Gallery. Seating capacity, 100.
 IV.—Auditorium, 55x65. Seats 500.
 V.—Minister's Ante Room.
 VI.—Rostrum and Pulpit, 18x25.
 VII.—Organ and Choir Seats.
 VIII.—Porch to School Room.
 IX.—Janitor's Room. Stairs to furnace in sub-story.</p> | <p>X.—Sunday School Room and Social Hall, 44x54. West end opens into Auditorium by sliding doors, increasing seating capacity 250 seats.
 XI.—Parlors, 27x45. Over them, in second story, Dining Room and Kitchen.
 XII.—Stairs to Second Story, Toilet Rooms and Lavatory.
 XIII.—Starr King Fraternity and Young People's Club, Library and Reading Room, 27x30. Over it the Pastor's Study.
 XIV.—Vestibule. Access to Social Hall.
 XV.—Driveway under Porte Cochere and around Quadrangle.</p> |
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ORIGINAL GROUND FLOOR PLAN WITH ROOM NAMES.
Annotated "Explanation of Floor Plan" from
Building Circular and Appeal of the First Unitarian Church, Oakland, 1889.