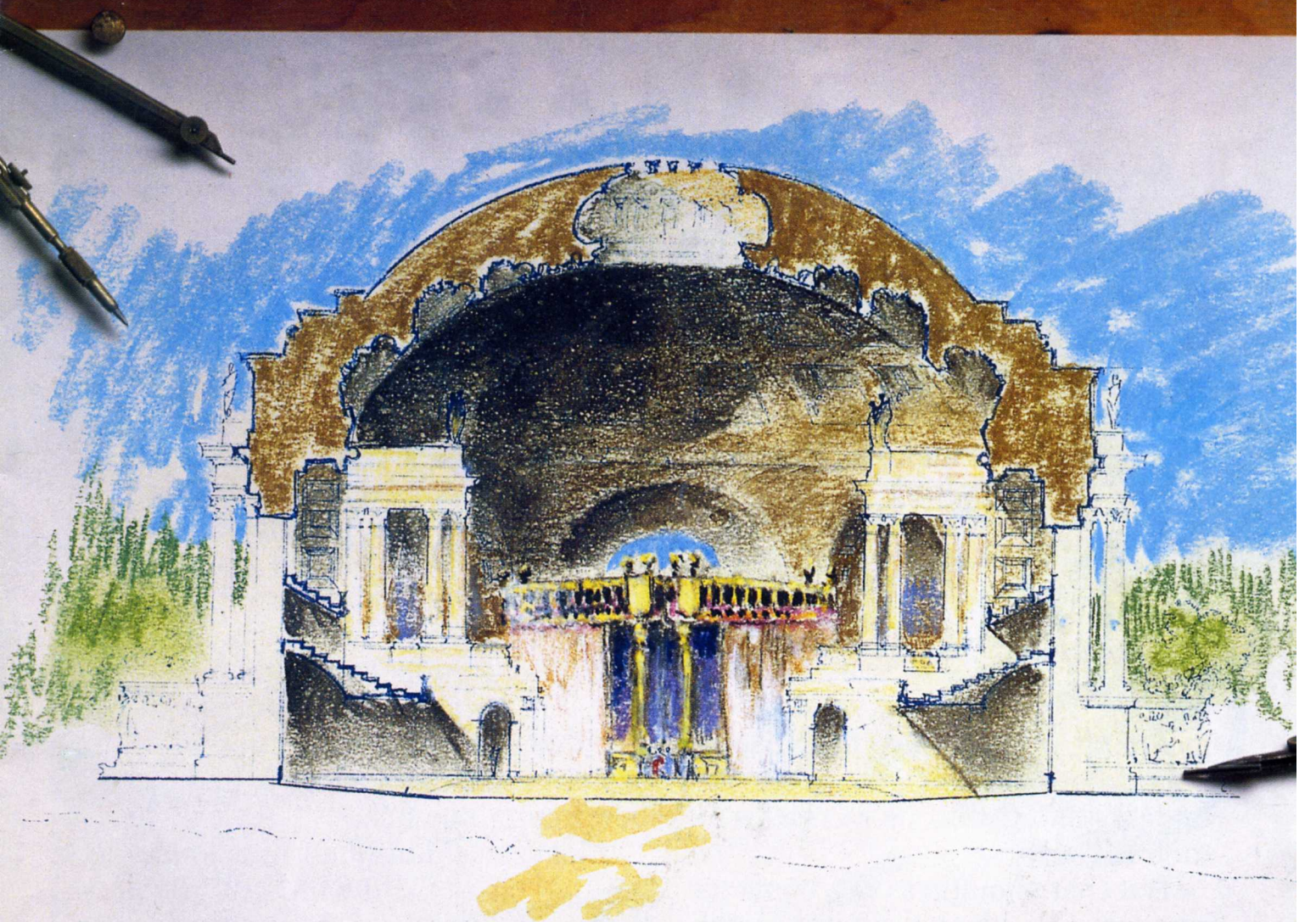
NOVEMBER 1993

California

MONTHLY



PHOEBE A HEARST MEMORIAL © WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST DONOR
SCALE 1/16"

Unfinished Business

Bernard Maybeck's design for Cal

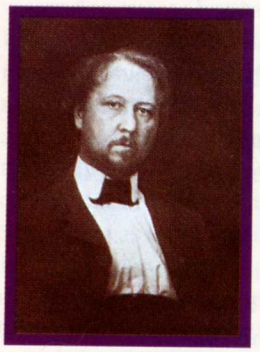
The way we (almost) were

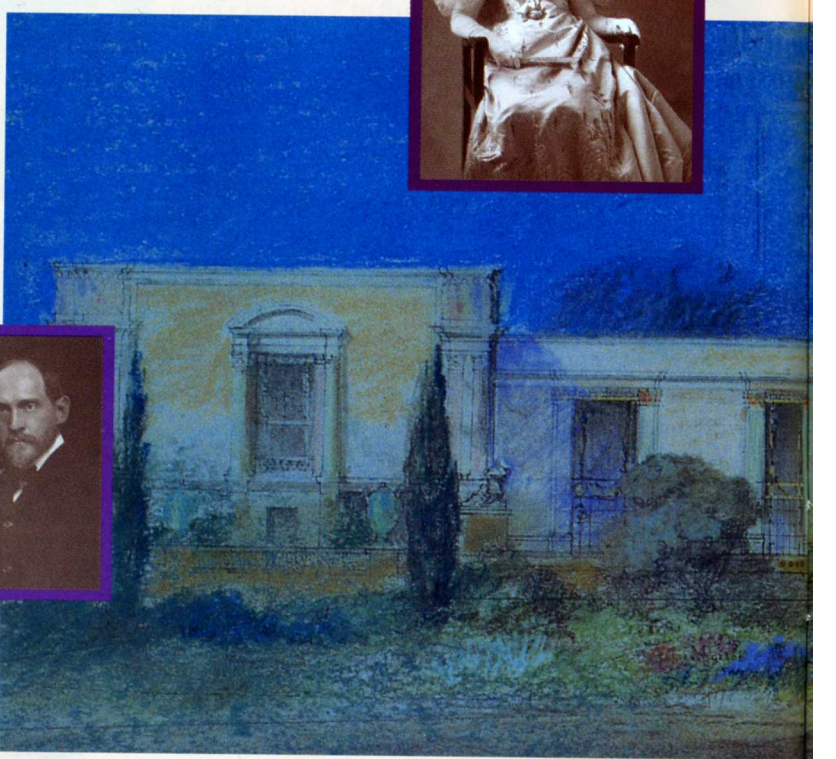
The Rise and Fall of the Hearst Memorial

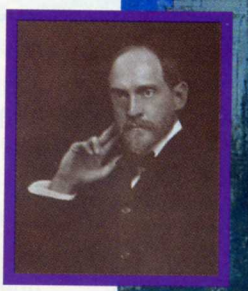
BY GRAY BRECHIN '71, M.A. '76

If William Randolph Hearst hadn't run out of money, a large part of the Berkeley campus might have looked more like the San Simeon of the North than the Athens of the West. And John Galen Howard's orderly phalanx of classical Beaux-Arts buildings might have faced an upstart counter-campus to the south designed by Bernard Maybeck and Julia Morgan. Evidence of this near-collision of conflicting visions lies in the Documents Collection at UC's College of Environmental Design: drawings for a grandiose complex of buildings to be sited south of the Campanile. That the vast project stalled can be blamed on Hearst's castle overlooking the California coast, for even the millionaire publisher could afford only one such extravagance. The drawings remain as a testament to Hearst's megalomania and of his devotion to his mother.

When Senator George Hearst died in 1891, he expressed his disapproval for his son's spendthrift ways by leaving his entire fortune to his widow. The ever-increasing output of such mines as Homestake and Anaconda made Phoebe Hearst one of the nation's richest women—and her son almost totally dependent on her largesse. Soon after her husband's death, Mrs. Hearst rented a house in Berkeley. Fellow bonanza queen Jane Stanford was then building her own university south of San Francisco. Not to be outdone, Phoebe adopted the existing State University at Berkeley, first creating a trickle of scholarships, then turning her growing largesse to architecture.







MASTER BUILDERS: (Clockwise from left) Bernard Maybeck, William Randolph Hearst, Phoebe Apperson Hearst, and John Galen Howard.

Phoebe Hearst had been duly impressed by the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, with its great plaster facades, formal axes, and uplifting monuments, and she wanted to give the University some of that orderly Beaux-Arts grandeur. But Bernard Maybeck, then a young architect teaching in the engineering department, persuaded her that there was no sense in donating buildings as long as its campus had no plan.

Convinced, Mrs. Hearst decided to finance a worldwide architectural compe-

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tition to develop a campus plan that "should redound to the glory of the state whose culture and civilization are to be nursed and developed at its University." Named a regent in 1897, she asked that Maybeck be released from teaching duties so that he could go to Europe to organize the competition.

The winning design by Frenchman Emile Bénard predictably envisioned the University as a mini-Paris of neo-Renaissance buildings organized on a majestic east-west axis. But when he arrived in 1899 to collect his $25,000 prize, Bénard immediately upset the regents by demanding more money for revisions and insulting Mrs. Hearst. He was quickly replaced by John Galen Howard of New York, who had, like Maybeck, trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

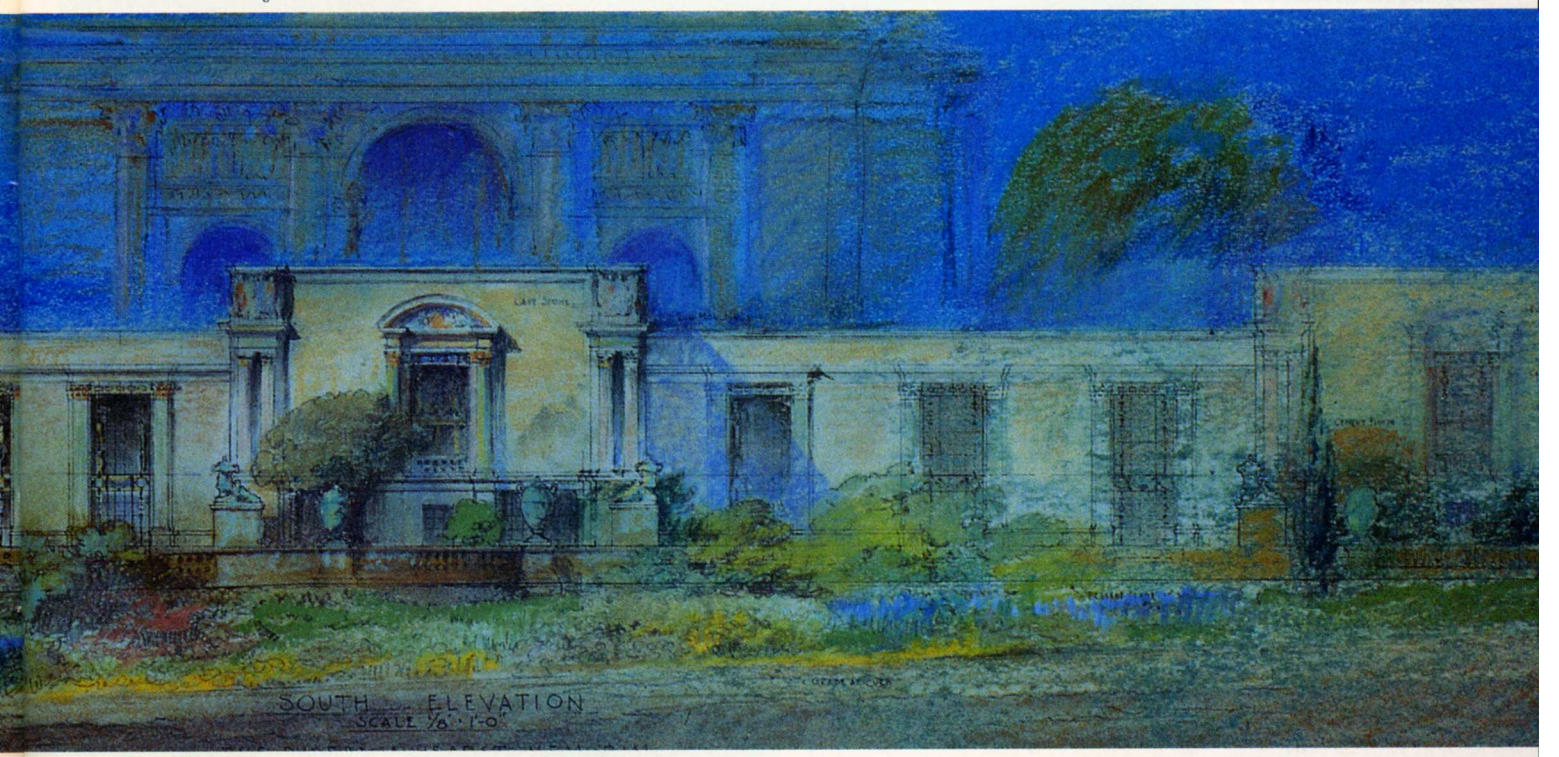
Before Howard agreed to move west, however, he detailed his conditions of acceptance to President Benjamin Ide Wheeler. Chief among them was that he be the first choice to design individual buildings. But Howard allowed a proviso that would come back to haunt him more than two decades later: the choice of himself as architect would be "overridden only by considerations of the most serious nature, such as...insistence on the part of private donors that some other architect be retained for buildings given by them."

For Bernard Maybeck, Howard's elevation was an ironic consequence of the competition he himself had helped launch, since it effectively froze him out of designed anything on campus after his Men's Faculty Club was completed in 1902. But Maybeck's revenge would come. And he continued to enjoy the favor of Phoebe Hearst. In 1899, she had had him design an extraordinary wooden reception hall connected to "Hearst Hall," her house at Piedmont and Channing. When Mrs. Hearst moved, she donated Hearst Hall to the University for use as a women's gymnasium. It was moved in five parts to a site on College Avenue north of Bancroft

Hearst Hall was only one of a torrent of gifts that began to issue from Regent Hearst. Her most visible benefactions were the Hearst Mining Building and the Hearst Greek Theatre. John Galen Howard designed both with the help of a young architect recently returned from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts: Julia Morgan, Class of 1894.

Under Howard's imperious control, the core of the Berkeley campus took shape as one of the greatest Beaux-Arts ensembles in the United States. Its orderly axes and classical facades of white granite gradually replaced the Victorian hodgepodge with a self-confident "City of Learning." To his Mining Building and Greek Theatre, he added Doe Library, Sather Gate, and California, Wheeler, Gilman, Haviland, LeConte, and Stephens halls, among others. The supervising architect's soaring Campanile allowed for no ambiguity about the purpose and direction of higher education.

Howard also played a major role in the design of the San Francisco Civic Center and the 1915 World's Fair, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. The hit of the fair, however, was Bernard Maybeck's



DREAM SEQUENCE: In Bernard Maybeck's sketch, a huge domed auditorium floats behind the women's gymnasium.

Palace of Fine Arts, with its enormous domed rotunda and multi-colored walls. The success of Maybeck's palace revived his career at age 53, but he was still barred from building anything on the campus in his home town.

Howard's autocratic idyll ended abruptly in 1919 when President Wheeler resigned and Phoebe Hearst died in the flu epidemic. With their departure, the supervising architect lost two of his strongest supporters. In addition, Howard had made enemies, among them Phoebe's son, William Randolph Hearst. Howard was therefore in trouble when Maybeck's old Hearst Hall—the women's gymnasium—went up in a spectacular nighttime blaze in 1922. Hearst immediately wired President Barrows that he wanted the Hall rebuilt as a memorial to Phoebe Hearst and that Maybeck should design the building. His mother, he added, would have wanted it that way.

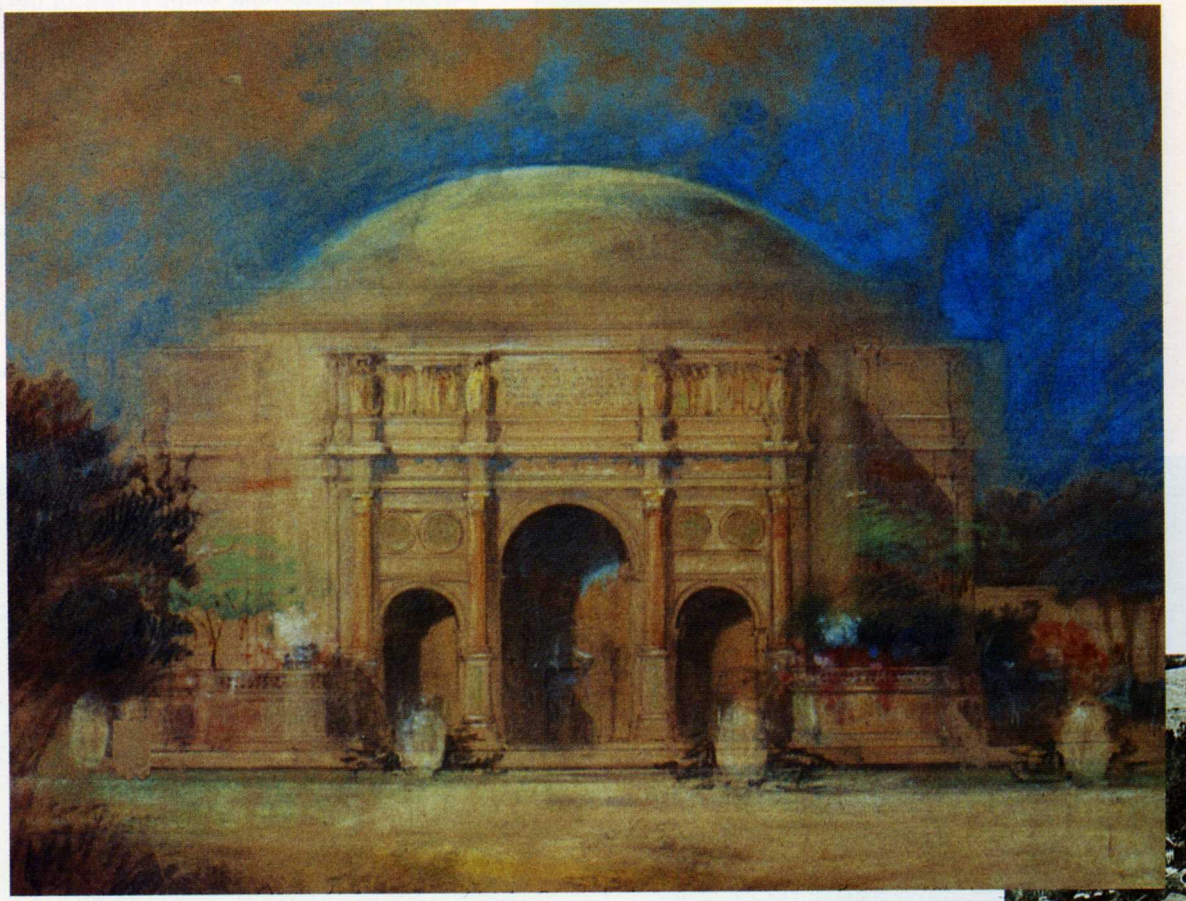
Bernard Maybeck was very pleased, Howard much less so. The exceptional clause in Howard's contract about a donor insisting on an architect other than himself had finally been activated. At the same time, Howard was on the losing side of an acrimonious battle to place a Memorial Stadium in the mouth of Strawberry Canyon. When William Campbell became UC president in 1923, Howard tendered his resignation as supervising architect and director of the school of architecture. Campbell persuaded Howard to stay on, but Maybeck's Hearst Memorial project rankled.

Meanwhile, Maybeck was having troubles of his own. The architect complained that he was uncertain about Hearst's intentions and even the site of the memorial. On paper, however, Maybeck had created a classical version in concrete of his original Hearst Hall. The building was to be multi-colored and set in a lovely garden with swimming pools, but would have few of the amenities usually associated with a gymnasium. Maybeck, who once said his sole interest was in designing monumental features, now wanted to invest the building's $300,000 budget on grandeur, while eliminating such essentials as bathrooms, showers, and dressing rooms.

In the fall of 1923, President Campbell wrote Maybeck that his plans for the gymnasium were inadequate. He gingerly explained to Hearst that the architect's ideas were totally impractical, and suggested that Julia Morgan be brought in to work out interior plans and services, as she would be sympathetic to women's needs. Hearst agreed, Morgan joined Maybeck, and the memorial project took on a life of its own. In February, she telegrammed her partner that Hearst wanted an auditorium "to be worked into the middle of the present scheme." By April, Hearst said he was satisfied but now wanted an estimate for expanding the auditorium by 50 percent.

Supervising architect Howard felt concerned—and with good reason. The rebuilding of Hearst Hall was rapidly evolving into a polychrome counter-campus south of Strawberry Creek. It was a sharp break from the conventional planning of the Chicago World's Fair and Howard's own campus plan. Besides, the idea of a domed auditorium, which Howard had planned to build between the Hearst Mining Building and Hearst Greek Theatre, had suddenly been appropriated by the new project.

Maybeck and Morgan had concocted two inseparably

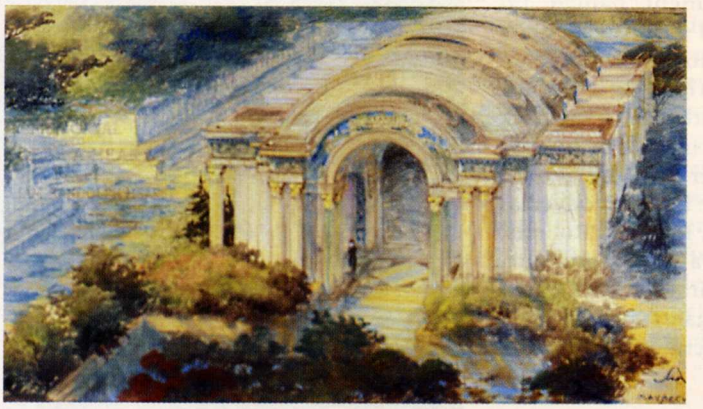


STATELY PLEASURE DOME: In addition to the 6,000-seat auditorium, Maybeck's proposed "counter-campus" included the women's gymnasium, a colonnaded sculpture garden, and music and museum buildings.

linked buildings surrounding an enormous area. A low, symmetrical gymnasium would serve as a podium for a 6,000-seat auditorium just to the north. The auditorium's dome recalled the one on Maybeck's Palace of Fine Arts, but its four facades consisted of replicas of the Arch of Constantine. At intermissions and finales, spectators could stroll through the gymnasium's enclosed courtyards and loggias. Its fountains, marble pools, and red walls with frescoes recalled an imperial Roman villa. Sculpted reliefs of Greek-garbed women around the main pool were direct steals from the Palace of Fine Arts.

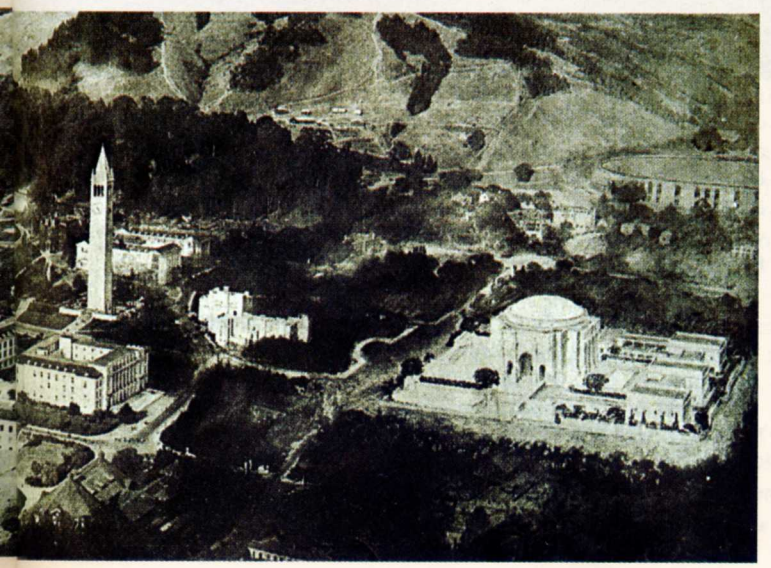
Ground was broken for the Hearst Women's Gymnasium in March, 1925. Howard wasn't present for the ceremonies; he and his wife were on an extended trip in Europe. Then, on June 9, the regents announced that Howard had been fired as supervising architect.

It was probably best that Howard left, for Hearst's next move would have undoubtedly given him apoplexy. The publisher announced that he wanted to add a music building and museum to house the collections his mother had given to the University. The museum also would house the school of architecture. With these additions, Maybeck and Morgan's proposed counter-campus had by now more than doubled in size. It also stole another major building: the museum Howard intended as a balance to Doe Library across the central axis.



FIRST IMPRESSION: In this early Maybeck sketch, the auditorium was square, with a barrel-vaulted top.

Unlike Howard's plans for a single monumental structure, the Hearst museum would have been broken into several smaller buildings enclosing a sequence of courtyards. An axis beginning at College Avenue continued straight on to a circle of Corinthian columns enclosing a statue of Phoebe Hearst as *alma mater* raised on a dais. Another axis, lined by columns bearing fragments of "ruined" temples, connected the museums with the auditorium along Strawberry Creek, to serve as an open-air sculpture garden. The museum buildings themselves were designed in Spanish Renaissance style similar to the buildings on the Enchanted Hill at San Simeon, to which Morgan was devoting more of her time and Hearst far more of his fortune.



William Randolph Hearst dedicated the gymnasium on April 8, 1927, the silver jubilee of the Hearst Greek Theatre. But the publisher was facing worries that progressively slowed the memorial project at Berkeley. Cynics claimed that he had only given the gymnasium for its publicity value in a state where his political power was waning.

But it was the Depression that finally killed Hearst's grandiose plans for his mother's memorial. By 1937, the mighty Hearst organization was $126 million in debt. Only wartime prosperity and circulation reversed the declining Hearst fortunes.

The publishers' death in 1951 didn't end his plans for a monument to his mother, however. His will specified that a memorial be built to display some of the remaining Hearst collections. Hearst's executors offered the castle at San Simeon to the University as a campus for the study of art and architecture, but the regents decided that it was too remote and far too expensive to maintain. (Donated to the state in 1957, the castle has been turning handsome profits ever since.) His wish was finally realized in 1991 when the regents renamed the Lowie Museum the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Museum of Anthropology. This year, Cal received a million-dollar grant from the Hearst Foundation.

What remains today of Maybeck and Morgan's vast memorial plan? Only the women's gymnasium was completed, and that incompletely. Its concrete walls were never colored and painted as the architects intended, nor was it given a sculpted frieze of figures in archaic Greek draperies. The live oaks in the planters around the pool died—killed, according to campus lore, by the tear-gas barrages of the late Sixties. Where Phoebe Hearst was to float enthroned as *alma mater*, students play softball on Hearst North Field.

Yet even unrealized, the Hearst Memorial left its mark on the Berkeley campus. Buildings housing music, art, architecture, and anthropology now occupy its site. The University Art Museum was built directly across Bancroft from Hearst Gymnasium. And looming over what might have been is the technocratic hulk of Wurster Hall, which elicits amazement from tourists told that it houses the College of Environmental Design. Located partly on the old Hearst Hall site, Wurster Hall is as fitting a tombstone as one could imagine for the *other* Hearst plan for the Berkeley campus.

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