

Inventory of the Hugh Comstock Collection

Collection Summary:

<u>Collection Title:</u>	The Hugh Comstock Collection
<u>Collection Number:</u>	C65
<u>Creator:</u>	Hugh Comstock
<u>Extent:</u>	2 Boxes, 1 Folder
<u>Span Dates:</u>	
<u>Repository:</u>	Henry Meade Williams Local History Room
<u>Physical Location:</u>	Vault: CP, xPH
<u>Donor:</u>	
<u>Related Collections:</u>	

Biographical Description:

Hugh Comstock was born on a farm in Evanston, Illinois, in 1893, the youngest of seven children.

The family moved to Santa Rosa in 1907. He was educated at home by private tutors. In 1924 Hugh came to Carmel to visit his sister Catherine and her husband, George Seideneck, both artists and members of the struggling Carmel Art Association. Catherine and Hugh's mother, Nellie Comstock, was a generous donor to the association. While in Carmel, Hugh met Mayotta Browne, who successfully made and sold rag and felt dolls, called "Otsy-Totsys." Hugh and Mayotta married that year. Buyers from large cities came to place orders for the dolls, which soon filled their house to overflowing. She asked Hugh to build her a cottage to use as a showroom. Hugh was neither a builder nor an architect, but he loved to draw and tinker. He designed and built with Mayotta a whimsical little cottage, Gretel, on Torres near 6th, inspired by the watercolor illustrations of the British children's book illustrator Arthur Rackham. They mixed pine needles with the plaster and troweled it over burlap to give a textured appearance. Hansel followed in 1925 and the Tuck Box, Dolores south of Ocean, in 1926. The *Carmel Pine Cone* called Hugh "a builder of dreams" that year. With some happy exceptions, most of Carmel domestic architecture of the period

consisted of large, boxy board and batten houses without any pretension to style, and commercial stores had false Western fronts. All this changed with Hugh's intriguing little creations, and people clamored for him to build them cottages or stores. The little cottages seemed to grow from the ground they rested on. Hugh purposefully did not use a carpenter's level, so the lines were untrue and the chimneys crooked.

In the late 1920's, Hugh yielded to the wishes of those who wanted larger, more traditional homes for year-round living, but he remained firm in his concern for the environment and his love of natural native materials. He used chalk rock from Carmel Valley, natural wood, hand-carved timbers, terra cotta tile, redwood shakes and hand-forged fixtures. The interior walls of some of the houses were rough lumber and the workmen first painted them and then removed part of the paint to accentuate the knots and grain of the wood.

Hugh's own studio, built in 1927, corner of Santa Fe and 6th, was inspired by an English country house. The exterior walls are stuccoed and trimmed with wood, irregularly carved, at cornices, windows and doors. The roof is steeply pitched with irregularly-cut shakes. The narrow, tall chalk-rock chimney has a Gothic pot. The interior of the office is handsome and comfortable. The steep ceiling gives the room a feeling of both spaciousness and intimacy, which is typical of Comstock houses. Even in large 20' by 40' rooms, there is a feeling of coziness and comfort.

Due to the Depression and a desire for cheap building materials, Hugh became interested in adobe and studied Monterey's historic adobe buildings. The material itself was supremely economical--simply dig a hole. The problem was that if the roof of the building leaked, the adobe melted. Hugh learned that stabilized, waterproof bricks had been made by adding emulsified asphalt to the clay. He was, however, unable to obtain any, so he and his associates devised a formula and made bricks at their plant in Carmel Valley. His first adobe house was completed in 1936. He called these bricks "Bitudobe" and his invention led to the development of the Post-Adobe system, in which heavy grooved bearing beams are placed at intervals in a single layer of stabilized adobe and locked together with waterproof mortar. This system eliminates all leaks. Rather than patenting the process by which he would have made a great deal of money, he made his trade secrets public. In 1948 he published at his own expense *Post Adobe*, in which he described this method of construction, including the formula for "Bitudobe," complete floor plans for homes and photographs. This generous act was typical of the man.

His generosity was not limited to sharing his building expertise. He served as chairman of the board of the Carmel Sanitary District for over ten years and as president of the Carmel Unified School District. In this latter capacity he served as a consultant to the architects who built Carmel High School, which used the Post-Adobe system. His interest in the environment led to efforts to preserve the forest ambiance of Carmel by outlawing sidewalks, house numbers and mail delivery. In 1946 he became a member of the newly-formed Planning Commission whose job was to deal with a building boom which appeared to threaten the uniqueness of Carmel.

Comstock's contributions to domestic architecture have been described in *House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Sunset Magazine*, *House and Garden* and other national periodicals.

He died suddenly in Santa Barbara in 1950 after what appeared initially to be successful surgery. His friends and associates remembered him as "a sweet guy," "a straight shooter" and "an inexpressibly fine human spirit."

Wright, Connie. "Hugh Comstock : Builder of Dreams." Carmel Residents Association Newsletter, April 2002

Scope and Content:

This collection contains B&W photographs of various sizes, architectural specifications for various residential and commercial structures in Carmel, and Christmas cards sent to the Comstock's, Hugh Comstock's business license, and a manila envelope with transcripts of lectures that were given about Hugh Comstock.

Administrative Information:

- Access: Materials are open for research.
- Publication Rights: The Henry Meade Local History Room, Harrison Memorial Library does not hold copyright to these items. Permission to publish must be obtained from the copyright holder by the user.
- Preferred Citation: Hugh Comstock Collection, Henry Meade Williams Local History Room, Harrison Memorial Library, Carmel, CA

Inventory:

Photographs

- PH Folder #1: Hugh and Mayotta Comstock and family

Collected Papers

- CP Box #1: Architectural Specifications
Folder 1: Christmas cards to the Comstocks', Hugh Comstock's business license, copies of sketches.
Manila envelope addressed to Virginia Williams, containing lecture notes from talks on Hugh Comstock and his architectural style
Architectural Specifications/Alterations and Additions:
 - Specifications for Miss Esto Broughton, Carmel, CA
 - Specifications for Mr. and Mrs. B. I. Dennison, Block 151, Lots 3 & 4, Carmel, CA

- Alterations for Mrs. T. M. Crilley, Carmel Highlands, CA (2 copies)
- Alterations and Additions for Mr. and Mrs. Edward Kuster, Carmel Point, CA (3 copies)
- Specifications for Mr. and Mrs. Harry A. Kunz, Carmel, CA
- Alteration and Addition for Mr. and Mrs. Howard, Carmel, CA
- Specifications for Mrs. J.R. Nichols, Block B21, lots 6, 8, 9, Carmel Point, CA
- Specifications for Mr. and Mrs. P.H. Coolidge, Hatton Fields, Carmel, CA
- Specifications for Mrs. Louise Beach, Monterey Peninsula Country Club, Monterey Peninsula, CA
- Alterations and Additions for Mrs. Neil Bosworth, Carmel, CA (2 copies)
- Specifications for Miss Dorothy MacDonald, Lot 23 & south ½ of Lot 25, Block GG, Carmel, CA
- Specifications for a store and apartment building, Dolores and Seventh Streets, Carmel, CA
- Specifications for a Monterey Spanish Residence for Mrs. Chamberlin, Carmel, CA
- Addenda to the Specifications for Mrs. Chamberlin
- Specifications for the Castroville Branch of the Monterey County Trust and Savings Bank
- Specifications for the Carmel Branch of the Monterey County Trust and Savings Bank.
- CP Box #2: Architectural Specifications
 - Specifications for Mr. and Mrs. George Vye, Lot 22, in Block 62, Carmel, CA (3 copies)
 - Folder of Un-identified properties
 - Specifications for Mr. and Mrs. Anders Nielsen, near Santa Rosa, CA
 - Specifications for Mr. W. E. Haseltine, Los Ranchitos, CA
 - Specifications for Mrs. J. R. Nichols, on Lots 6, 8, 9 in Block B 21, Carmel Point, CA (2 copies)
 - Specifications for Mr. and Mrs. Leon White, Carmel, CA (4 copies)
 - Specifications for Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Weer, Carmel CA (2 copies)
 - Specifications for Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Westphal, Gonzales, CA (2 copies)
 - Alterations and Additions for Mrs. Helen H. Sheddon, Lot 22, Block 67, Carmel, CA (2 copies)
 - Alterations and Additions Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Hood, El Camino Real, Carmel, CA