



**THE BUILDING  
BIOGRAPHER  
TIM GREGORY**

- ❖ Building Histories
- ❖ Archival Consulting
- ❖ Cultural Resource Studies
- ❖ Historic Resources Surveys
- ❖ Local, State and National Landmarking

**1275 HILLCREST AVENUE**

**PASADENA**

**Style:** Spanish Colonial Revival

**Year of Completion:** 1924

**Original Building Permit:** #6547C, issued by the City of Pasadena on June 2, 1924 for a new 2-story, 12-room residence and garage. The house, to measure approximately 50 by 100 feet with a maximum height of 24 feet, would have a concrete foundation, wood-frame walls, a shakes-covered roof, two brick chimneys with two flues each, and wood, tile, and concrete floors. A total of 78 lighting fixtures from B. B. Bell & Company of Los Angeles and 156 electrical outlets were to be installed.

A copy of this permit is attached on page 27.

**Cost to Build:** \$40,500—a very large amount for a new house at the time.

**First Owner:** Frederick W. Griffith, a resident of Palmyra, New York, who with his wife Martha intended to use the house as his winter home.

Frederick (Fred) Winter Griffith was born on December 17, 1858 in Phelps, New York, the son of a farmer. He earned his A. B. degree with honors from Hamilton College in 1886. Mr. Griffith was president of the Garlock Packing Company, an international manufacturing firm which produced all manner of packing materials. He served in the New York State Assembly between 1900 and 1902 and in 1910 was appointed to the New York State Senate to fill out the term of a deceased Senator. Mr. Griffith was subsequently re-elected for one term in his own

400 E. California Blvd. #3 ❖ Pasadena, CA 91106-3763  
(626) 792-7465 ❖ [timgregory@sbcglobal.net](mailto:timgregory@sbcglobal.net)  
[www.buildingbiographer.com](http://www.buildingbiographer.com)

right. He also served as a trustee of his alma mater and of the Auburn Theological Seminary and was a board member of the Palmyra Printing Company. He was an active Mason.

Mrs. Griffith was born Martha Riggs on May 15, 1882. She was a graduate of Smith College in 1903. The following year she married Arthur D. Truax, a New York City lawyer. They had one child: Margaret E. Truax, born around 1905. Mr. Truax died suddenly in 1916. In 1918, his widow married Fred Griffith. Mr. Griffith was a widower, his first wife Mary having died in 1917. He had two sons from that previous marriage: Frederick (born 1884) and Henry W. (born 1897).

In 1925, Mr. and Mrs. Griffith built a house on the parcel that adjoined theirs to the north. They hired the architect Roland Coate to design a guest house in a compatible Spanish Colonial style. It was given the address 1265 Hillcrest Avenue.

Mr. Griffith was able to enjoy his new Pasadena winter home for only a relatively short time. He died at the age of 69 on July 11, 1928. Additional biographical materials on Mr. Griffith are attached on pages 5 and 6. By 1929, ownership of the Hillcrest Avenue property was recorded in the name of Mr. Griffith's estate. Title passed to his widow Martha R. Griffith in 1929. She rented the house to George E. Dudley, a broker, in that year and moved into the house next door at 1265 Hillcrest.

In 1933, Martha Griffith remarried. Now known as Mrs. John B. McDougal, she moved back into 1275 with her husband, a bank vice-president, and a live-in "houseman" and cook. Martha McDougal passed away in 1966 at the age of 83.

**Architect:** According to the building permit: Johnson, Kaufmann & Coate (JK&C), a short-lived but important partnership among architects Reginald D. Johnson, Gordon B. Kaufmann, and Roland E. Coate.

It is often difficult to decide who designed what during the three-year partnership of JK&C. However, since 1265 Hillcrest was designed by Roland Coate for Mr. and Mrs. Griffith just one year after 1275, it can be assumed that the latter was also designed by Coate after the JK&C partnership dissolved.

Additional information on Johnson, Kaufmann & Coate and on Roland Coate in particular is attached on pages 7 through 23.

**Builder:** John H. Simpson, Pasadena. Additional biographical material is attached on Pages 24 and 25.

**Other Building Permits:** The house and garage were re-roofed with red cedar shakes in January 1953 at a cost of \$2,000.

A permit was issued in November 1968 for alterations to four bathrooms and the kitchen. New electrical service was provided at this time.

The residence was re-roofed again with Timberline material in June 1992.

In September 1996, the residence was to be renovated, with 937 square feet demolished and 1,032 square feet added. Also, the existing 422-square-foot garage was to be demolished and replaced with a new 675-square foot three-car garage.

Three new HVAC units were installed in November 1996.

In January 1997, the electrical system was upgraded and a subpanel added. Also that month, the residence was re-roofed with Class A mission tile.

In February 1998, a permit was issued to install a pool spa and a gas line to a barbecue.

The existing basement was to be remodeled and converted into a game room and a three-quarter bathroom, according to a permit issued in November 2003. No square footage was to be added.

In July 2009, a 6-foot garden wall was to be constructed with two 18-inch-square pilasters at the driveway and a 6-foot wrought-iron gate.

(Note: Permits for very minor alterations, such as water heater replacement, are not included. Also not included are permits missing from the file or whose microfilmed or digital copies are indecipherable and not otherwise recorded or described in Assessor's records.)

**Assessor's Records:** Building records of the old Pasadena City Assessor were inaccessible at the time this report was being prepared. The Los Angeles County Assessor currently estimates the square footage of the house at 5,166 with five bedrooms and five bathrooms.

**Other Owners and Residents:** The ownership records of the old Pasadena City Assessor's office were inaccessible at the time this report was being prepared. However, the following ownerships could be determined by names appearing on building permits and recent appraisers' records:

By 1968—James A. Carmack, a stock broker, and his wife Betty J. Carmack

By 1996—The Leitzinger-Herald Trust, Janet Herald and Jeffrey Leitzinger, trustees. Mr. Leitzinger as an insurance company executive.

By 2011—Timothy J. and Kristin Smith

**Note:** The property was included in the guide to Los Angeles architecture by David Gebhard and Robert Winter. They described it as "Spanish Revival." A copy of the short designation is attached on page 26.

**Significance:** The City of Pasadena has determined that the Griffith house is a contributor to a potential Oak Knoll National Register Historic District. The City's record is attached on pages 28 and 29.

**Sources:**

Los Angeles County Assessor  
Los Angeles Public Library  
City of Pasadena, Planning and Development Department (Design & Historic  
Preservation Section)

Gebhard, David and Robert Winter. *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.  
Santa Monica, Angel City Press, 2018.

McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.  
New York, Knopf, 2013.

*Pasadena Community Book* (1955).

City Directories: 1924-

*Los Angeles Times*: October 19, 1958

*New York Times*: July 6, 1918; July 13, 1928

*Pasadena Star-News*: October 20, 1958

*Who's Who in New York*: n.d.

Internet Resources, including California Index, California Death Index,  
Gale Biography Master Index, Ancestry.com, and Historic *Los Angeles Times*  
Database.

Tim Gregory  
The Building Biographer  
400 East California Blvd., #3  
Pasadena, CA 91106-3763  
626-792-7465 (office)  
626-241-4471 (cell)  
[timgregory@sbcglobal.net](mailto:timgregory@sbcglobal.net)  
[www.buildingbiographer.com](http://www.buildingbiographer.com)

Copyright April 2021  
by Tim Gregory

## JOHNSON, KAUFMANN & COATE Architects

In January 1922, one of Southern California's most well-known and established architects, Reginald Johnson, joined forces with two relatively newly established architects named Gordon Kaufmann and Roland Coate, to create the firm of Johnson, Kaufmann & Coate. According to an article published in the January 7, 1922 issue of the *Pasadena Star-News*, the workload of Johnson's office had increased to such an extent that it was necessary to "increase the responsible membership of the firm." By that time, Kaufmann had already been associated with Johnson for six years and Coate for two years. Evidently their new partnership was also prompted by the wish of all three to design larger projects than they had been able to do individually. The firm retained its offices in Pasadena but also set up an office in Los Angeles.

The firm's first commission was for the design of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in downtown Los Angeles, now demolished. The fact that Reginald Johnson was the son of Episcopal Bishop Frederic F. Johnson of the Los Angeles Diocese probably did not hurt their chances. Two of their other important church commissions were Pasadena's All Saints Episcopal Church in 1923 and All Saints Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills in 1924. Coate was said to have been mainly responsible for these projects. Although Johnson, Kaufmann & Coate was to become known mostly for its high-class residential work, its design of the Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles won an honor award from the Southern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1924.

Among the firm's residential projects in Pasadena:

- 15 Oak Knoll Gardens Drive (1922)
- 1360 Hillcrest Avenue (1923)
- 601 South Orange Grove Blvd. (1923)
- 1579 Lombardy Road (1923)
- 1585 Lombardy Road (1923)
- 1506 East California Blvd. (1923)
- 600 Columbia Street (1924)
- 1275 Hillcrest Avenue (1924)
- 740 Holladay Road--library and observatory (1924)
- 1621 Lombardy Road (1924)

Other projects included:

- A. L. MacLeish house, Los Angeles (1922)
- Mrs. K. C. Strong house, Montecito (1922)
- Inspiration Consolidated Copper company town in Miami, Arizona (1923)
- La Collina estate of B. R. Meyer, Beverly Hills (1923)
- Mexican Housing Association units at 930 South Arroyo Parkway,  
Pasadena (1924--now demolished)
- 40 Chandler Place, San Marino (1924)
- 916 North Crescent Drive, Beverly Hills (1924)

Johnson, Kaufmann & Coate disbanded in 1925, only three years after their first association. Each man went on to open his own independent office.

A good source on the work of the firm is *Johnson, Kaufmann Coate: Partners in the California Style* by Lauren Weiss Bricker published in Santa Barbara by the Capra Press in 1992. It also contains biographical material on each of the three architects individually.

## JOHN H. SIMPSON

### Contractor

John H. Simpson, one of Pasadena's most prolific contractors, was born in Camden, New Jersey on February 14, 1885. After taking a business college course in Philadelphia, he relocated to Los Angeles in 1905 where he pursued architecture for a while. Upon moving to Pasadena in 1906, Simpson began a building career that would last over 47 years. He worked with many well-known Pasadena architects, including the Heineman brothers, Reginald Johnson, Cyril Bennett, Palmer Sabin, and Sylvanus Marston. Mr. Simpson built houses of all sizes, and even designed a few, including his own home on El Molino Avenue.

Simpson was active in civic affairs, having been a charter member of the Pasadena Kiwanis Club, a director of the Union National Bank, a member and past president of the Overland Club, the Hi-Twelve Club, and an active Mason and member of Scottish Rite. He was one of Pasadena's youngest City Directors when he was elected to the Board (now the City Council). Simpson was also a committed Republican, having served as a member of the party's finance committee.

At the time of his passing on December 9, 1952 at the age of 67, Simpson was credited with being the oldest building contractor in Pasadena in length of activity. His building projects ranged from costly homes in Pasadena and Beverly Hills to large commercial and military installations.

Tim Gregory  
The Building Biographer  
400 East California Blvd., #3  
Pasadena, CA 91106-3763  
626-792-7465  
[timgregory@sbcglobal.net](mailto:timgregory@sbcglobal.net)  
[www.buildingbiographer.com](http://www.buildingbiographer.com)

*Copyright*  
2017

## ROLAND E. COATE

### Architect



Roland Eli Coate was a regionally significant designer whose works appear throughout Southern California. Mr. Coate was born in Richmond, Indiana in 1890. After two years at Earlham College, in 1914 he graduated in architecture from Cornell University, an institution famous for its instruction in the Beaux Arts styles of design. After taking a scholarship-sponsored tour of Europe, Mr. Coate returned to Indiana. He first found employment outside Richmond, and then went to Washington, D.C. Soon after, he went to work for the renowned architectural firm of Trowbridge and Ackerman in New York City, where one of the projects he designed was a home for his father, J. M. Coate, in Richmond. Built in 1916, it is his earliest surviving work. When the United States became involved in World

War I, Mr. Coate joined the Army and served as a 1st Lieutenant with the American Expeditionary Forces.

Following the war, in 1919, Mr. Coate came to Southern California; a couple of years later, he joined the Los Angeles architectural firm which became known as Johnson, Kaufmann and Coate. (Reginald Johnson, often on the look-out for talented young architects, had sponsored Mr. Coate's certification to practice architecture in California.) While he was a junior partner with the firm, Mr. Coate helped design St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral in downtown Los Angeles, now demolished. (Mr. Johnson was the son of then Episcopal Bishop Frederic F. Johnson of the Los Angeles Diocese.) In 1922-23 the firm designed All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena; Mr. Coate drafted the plan for the main church building. At this time, Mr. Coate also gained experience designing large-scale estates in the Spanish Colonial style where site, landscape and architecture were interwoven. About 1925, Johnson, Kaufmann & Coate disbanded and Mr. Coate opened his own office in Los Angeles; that year he designed All Saints Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills. This church is a particularly fine example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, notable for its restrained use of historical design detail.

The Depression caused a downsizing of aspirations for most area architects, including Mr. Coate. He still remained active, however, devising creative ways to produce moderate-income housing with style. His efforts in this direction were recognized by the Better Homes in America Committee and *Sunset* magazine. He was also involved with several other architects in the design of the Avalon Gardens housing project. With the onset of the Second World War, Mr. Coate and his wife Gladys moved to Birmingham, Alabama; wishing to do something for the war effort, he associated with the engineering construction firm of Bechtel and McCone which was based there.

Around 1944, the Coate family returned to Southern California, and a few years later he opened his architectural office in Pasadena. (Mr. and Mrs. Coate lived at 1685 La Vista Place in the Linda Vista area of Pasadena.) Soon after his return, Mr. Coate designed the main church building for St. Philip the Apostle Catholic Church on South Hill Avenue in Pasadena--a rare

commission for a Protestant architect. The church, built in 1950, is also a handsome example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture.

Mr. Coate was active in his profession well into the 1950s. He became a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and published a number of articles voicing his opinions regarding the suitability, for modern living, of Spanish and early California designs.

After suffering a heart attack, he reopened his office in his home but soon moved it to a San Marino location in order to better complete a commission--his last. He died at the age of 68 on October 17, 1958, while on a weekend trip to Oceanside.

Roland Coate is remembered for having been able to design as competently in the English Tudor and American Colonial Revival styles as he did in the Spanish Colonial Revival modes in which he specialized. Thus he was flexible in following the dictates of a client's commission. Besides having been obviously influenced by Spanish Colonial architecture, he was also greatly interested in the color and architecture of native Mexico which were reflected in the sketches and paintings he did privately. His Monterey Colonial houses are especially graceful testimony to his talent for interpreting these influences and for executing this mode of design which is so compatible with the Southern California environment and yet adaptable to a particular client's taste or background. (In fact, Coate is credited with designing the first Monterey Colonial home in the area in 1925--the Stafford W. Bixby house on Garfield Avenue in South Pasadena which won a Certificate of Honor from the Southern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.) Coate was primarily a residential architect who was very much concerned with the ease and flow of his designs and a sense of unity and simplicity. He was also careful to plan areas for privacy; his homes reflect a feeling of serenity and seclusion--central hallways gave direct access to all public rooms, but the family rooms were often tucked away in separate wings and floors. Entrance courts and generous-sized patios, walled and planted with trees and shrubs, recalled, he thought, both the privacy and outdoor hospitality of the Spanish and Mexican periods in California.

Coate designed many beautiful homes in the greater Pasadena area and in West Los Angeles. Locally many prominent people enjoyed the houses he planned for them, including Pardee Erdman, Charles Davis, Henry Braun, Albert Doerr, John Mage, John Barber, Howard Wright, Edward Willrich, Leigh Battson and William Clayton. In West L.A. movie men such as Frank Capra and David O. Selznick were among his clientele as well as such movie stars as Gary Cooper, Robert Taylor and Barbara Stanwyck. Howard Hughes even bought a Coate house (at 211 South Muirfield Road), although it had not been designed for him. Most of these residences present a formal exterior to the street, but their interiors are typical of Mr. Coate, being much more informal and open to the outdoors. Today Roland Coate's designs are treasured by their owners. They testify to the vitality of an architecture correlated with the region's environment and heritage.

Among the Pasadena-area residences that Roland Coate designed:

2035 Lombardy Road (1925)  
2065 Oak Knoll Avenue, San Marino (1925)

40 Chandler Place (1925)  
1265 Hillcrest Avenue (1926)  
270 South Arroyo Boulevard (1926)  
1705 Oak Grove Avenue, San Marino (1926)  
1260 Shenandoah Road, San Marino (1926)  
1565 Lombardy Road (1927)  
1244 Wentworth Avenue (1927)  
2054 San Pasqual Street (1927)  
655 Prospect Crescent (1928)  
1230 South Orange Grove Blvd. (1929)  
1690 East Altadena Drive, Altadena (1929)  
494 Bradford Street (1929)  
660 South Allen Avenue (1931)  
691 Holladay Road (1934)  
1060 South San Rafael Avenue (1935)  
612 South San Rafael Avenue (1938)  
995 Hampton Road, Arcadia (1941)  
330 North San Rafael Avenue (1948)  
1001 Holly Vista (1950)  
2060 Lombardy Road (1952)  
15 Oak Knoll Gardens (no date)  
1115 Laguna Road (no date)

[Note: This biography is based on the essay “Roland E. Coate: Furthering an Architectural Inheritance” by Lauren Weiss Bricker, published in *Johnson, Kaufmann Coate: Partners in the California Style* (Santa Barbara, Capra Press, 1992) and on material gathered in 1976 by the Pasadena Junior League and found in the files of the Pasadena Planning Department.]

Tim Gregory  
The Building Biographer  
400 East California Blvd., #3  
Pasadena, CA 91106-3763  
626-792-7465  
[timgregory@sbcglobal.net](mailto:timgregory@sbcglobal.net)  
[www.buildingbiographer.com](http://www.buildingbiographer.com)

Copyright  
2000