



Owen Southwell

This month's installment of our occasional series on Atlanta's forgotten architects features Atlanta's "Lagniappe from Louisiana"

HOW COULD AN ARCHITECT SO WELL RECOGNIZED BY HIS PEERS and celebrated by the architectural press be so easily forgotten here?

During the 12 years he spent in Atlanta (1919-1931), architect Owen James Trainer Southwell was at the top of his profession. While his reputation today is limited to his native Louisiana and Beaumont, Texas—where he designed his most impressive commission, the Phelan Mansion—the significance of Southwell's work in Atlanta suggests that he was an architect of importance, and the caliber of his clients proves that his services were in demand.

Southwell was born on September 20, 1892, in New Iberia, Louisiana, where his parents' families were involved in building and architectural businesses. His father, William B. Southwell, studied architecture in New York (1885-1888), after which he returned to New Iberia to practice. In 1901, the Southwell family moved to Pine Island Bayou, Texas, just north of Beaumont, where William helped develop a brick and tile plant that took advantage of the Spindletop oil boom. William's education and occupation gave his son a distinct advantage, as there were few formally trained architects in America at that time, especially in the South.

Owen Southwell won a scholarship to study architecture at Tulane University. After two years at Tulane, he transferred to the architecture program at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, headed by nationally recognized architect Henry Hornbostel, and graduated with a BA in architecture. Following a teaching appointment and a brief service in the Naval Reserve, Southwell joined the practice of his former teacher.

Southwell worked briefly in Pittsburgh and then transferred to Atlanta to manage Hornbostel's thriving Southern office. During that time (1919-1922), he helped design and supervise the initial buildings at Emory University and

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left to right Sardis Methodist Church was one of Owen Southwell's earliest ecclesiastical designs and has recently been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. The houses along St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans could have been the inspiration for Southwell's design for this Druid Hills home. The interiors of the DeGolian residence illustrate Southwell's use of both historical and creative design elements. The living room mantel refers to a specific historical precedent, while the stair balustrade and other iron details throughout the house and on the front porch showcase not only the architect's creativity but also the DeGolian family craftsmanship. His client, Felix DeGolian, owned the Golian Steel & Iron Company.

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 elizabethelsey.com
 PAGES 42-47: (*natural beauty*)
 DECORATION Phoebe Howard, Mrs. Howard,
 (404) 816-3830; phoebehoward.net

ARCHITECTURE Henry Sprott Long and Associates,
 (205) 323-4564
 PAGES 48-53: (*blackberry bliss*)
 Miller Union, 999 Brady Ave. NW, Atlanta 30318.
 (678) 733-8550; millerunion.com

"Owen Southwell" continued from page 24 Callanwolde for Charles Howard Candler. Southwell then decided to strike out on his own and maintained an Atlanta office until 1931. To take advantage of Florida's building boom, he also briefly opened an office in Tampa with partner Walter Felch.

Like many of his peers, Southwell designed in the various revival styles popular in the 1920s, yet he was more eclectic in his use of masonry and plaster ornamentation than most. He frequently used clinker brick and other less common masonry techniques to give his exteriors texture. Limestone was used for quoins, casings and crenellation along with other elaborate cornices and conductor heads. Plaster ceiling mouldings, fanciful cornices and pediments, and limestone mantels were common interior elements. While wrought iron railings and leaded-glass transoms and side lights were commonly used at this time, Southwell frequently created his own designs rather than follow historical precedent.

Southwell frequently designed two equally important façades on his residential projects. Several of his Atlanta projects are sited so that the front façades are seen on the approach to the house but are entered from the rear. This technique was used to dramatic effect at the Cator Woolford estate, "Jacqueland," at 1815 Ponce de Leon Avenue. Likewise, the Marcus Emmert residence, "Dellbrook," at 571 West Paces Ferry Road, is entered from the side, and the garden façade is as grand as the front. On these two projects, Southwell collaborated with Robert B. Cridland, a well-known landscape architect from Philadelphia who also practiced in Atlanta.

After practicing on his own for less than two years, Southwell had two of his designs featured in *Southern Architect and Building News* in 1923, and this important magazine published Southwell's work consistently throughout his time in Atlanta. Additionally, his work was frequently mentioned in *The Atlanta Constitution* and featured in *Home & Field*. While he is rarely credited for his contributions, Southwell's Atlanta designs have continued to be published nationally in titles such as *Southern Accents* and *Elle Decor*.

As the Great Depression worsened, Southwell consolidated his practice in New Iberia, where he continued to work until World War II, designing houses, churches, theaters and other commercial buildings. Ecclesiastical buildings became a niche for him in Louisiana, yet one of his earliest churches is the Sardis United Methodist Church (1927) on Powers Ferry Road in Atlanta.

Southwell enjoyed a successful practice until his retirement. He died in 1961, and left an impressive legacy that has continued to be recognized in his native state.