

Work of Verna Cook Shipway, America's first successful female architects have been placed in the archives of Central Library

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The sketchbooks, private correspondences, journals and blueprints of one of America's first successful female architects have been placed in the archives of the Central University Library at the University of California, San Diego.

Verna Cook Shipway was a successful New York architect from 1920 to 1940. She gave up her career in 1940, reportedly because of eyestrain, and eventually she moved to California with her second husband, Warren Shipway. She died in La Jolla last year at age 87.

Shipway first studied architecture in Paris, as an offshoot of her interest in interior decorating. She was a student for two years at the Ecole Speciale d'Architecture and for one of those years, she was the only woman in a class of 126 students.

After she returned to the United States, she enrolled in the School of Architecture at Columbia University. In 1919, she married Edgar Salomonsky. They opened an office and worked together until 1929, when Salomonsky died.

In 1937, she was selected to design the "ideal" house for Better Homes and Gardens magazine, a magazine to which she frequently contributed. That year, she became the only woman member of the Architectural League, and in 1939 she was the only woman invited to enter a home in the Town of Tomorrow at the New York World's Fair.

She designed homes, and her hallmark became large bay windows, spiral staircases and small, affordable houses with the dignity and elegance of mansions. She was once quoted as saying "I have grown pretty sick of these cute little informal houses."

Mrs. Shipway also said her houses were designed with women in mind.

"There are no unnecessary halls to clean and no dark corners or stair balusters to dust," she said. "I'm entirely convinced that any house, properly planned and built, automatically performs a good share of its own housework. I myself know what a saving it is on one's disposition to work in an organized kitchen."

After she married Warren Shipway in 1945, she traveled in Europe and eventually moved to California, though the exact date of her move is uncertain.

According to Carlynn Schmidt, the UC San Diego student who has organized the collection, details of Shipway's life after her move west are obscure. She traveled to Mexico several times and lived for a while in Rancho Santa Fe, where one of the few houses which she designed after 1940 was built.

Schmidt has interviewed friends and relatives of Shipway's to piece together the story of the architect's life in California. She says persons with anecdotes and information about Shipway can contact her at the library.

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