



San Francisco's Theological Seminary Moves to San Anselmo

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Marin History Museum Volunteer

Many Marin residents may wonder why the San Francisco Theological Seminary is actually located in San Anselmo. The story began in 1871 when the Pacific Presbyterian Church opened a “theological seminary such as the present wants and future interests of this coast demand.” It was located in San Francisco’s Union Square and had 4 students administered by Dr. William Anderson Scott. Six years later, the Seminary moved to 121 Haight Street into a newly-built, three-story frame house with 17 live-in students and a 3,500 volume library. By the late 1880s, the seminary had outgrown its second home and began looking for a new location.

In an 1889 *Daily Alta California* article, it was reported that Alexander Montgomery, a Colusa pioneer and “capitalist” had generously donated \$250,000 to purchase land and build a seminary. The donation had seven distinct “conditions” for the use of the money that included specific sums to be used for the main building, a library, the endowment of a Chair of Apologetics and Mission, another for Greek and Hebrew Studies and a stipulation that \$50,000 had to be raised in matching funds before the larger grant would be released.

The Seminary had some initial trouble raising the matching funds until the Rev. Arthur Crosby of the First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael raised the sum with the stipulation that the seminary would be located in or near San Rafael. The Board of Directors agreed and the Ross Valley hilltop land was donated by Louisiana Foster, wife of timber merchant and industrialist

A.W. Foster of San Rafael. Ms. Foster was also the daughter to the seminary's founder W.A. Scott. Reverend Crosby became chairman of the building committee and the cornerstone was laid on April 30, 1891.

The two original buildings atop the hill, Montgomery and Scott Hall, were dedicated on September 21, 1892 and named after the seminary's benefactor and its first director. The buildings were designed in the Richardsonian-Romanesque Revival style by the architectural firm of Wright & Sanders of San Francisco. They were built of "Blue Stone" taken from the Wilkins Quarry on Clark St. in San Rafael and were finished with light colored sandstone. Originally, Scott Hall had a much higher tower with clocks on each side, seen in the photograph above, but it was damaged in the 1906 Earthquake and rebuilt on a smaller scale, minus the clocks. Twenty-one students enrolled that first year but the institution has grown through the years. Montgomery Chapel, seen in the foreground, was also designed by Wright & Sanders and completed in 1897 with another donation of \$40,000 from Alexander Montgomery. Geneva Hall, the largest building on campus, was completed in 1952 and modeled after a 13th-century Franciscan monastery in Assisi, Italy. By the late 1960s there were over 250 students earning their graduate and post graduate degrees. In 2019 the San Francisco Theological Seminary merged with the University of Redlands system beginning a new chapter in its existence.

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